Love and Affection, Exploitation and Resistance: The Lives of Male and Female Slaves in Antebellum South Carolina

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Abstract

This thesis will examine the lives of, and the relationships between, male and female slaves in antebellum South Carolina. It will suggest that the relationships between slave couples -- relationships that were characterised by love, affection and support -- constituted a vital part of the wider slave community's survival of, and resistance to, the oppression of slavery. The great majority of slaves strove to settle into a stable partnership through marrying someone of their own choosing. Furthermore, the resilience and numerical importance of cross-plantation marriages on all sizes of slaveholding will be used to support this proposition. The lives of male and female slaves, through, were characterised by considerable gender differences. It was male slaves who were expected to initiate courtship and marriage rituals, and also (at considerable risk to themselves) to visit their wives, girlfriends and families when they lived upon different slaveholdings. In their work lives, too, males and females were often segregated according to gender, and the 'triple burden' of working for owners, working for their families, and bearing and rearing children, impacted heavily upon female slaves. Despite these differences though, slave couples maintained a context of overall cooperation that was facilitated by the strength of their relationships.

In investigating the exploitation of slaves at the hands of their owners, this thesis will show that the sexual abuse of female slaves (especially of domestics by masters) made the lives of females harder than those of males. But, again we will see how the strength of the relationships between slave couples enabled them to survive this onslaught. All slaves were affected by forced separations, however, and a major finding of this thesis will be to show that, because of the nature and strength of slave cross-plantation marriages, the impact of local sales, gifts and estate divisions upon slave family and community life need not have been severe. This thesis therefore extends recent historiographical developments in the study of slavery through emphasising resistance on the part of slaves. It will be argued that slaves created psychological distance between their own lives and those of their owners, and that it was the strong relationships between slave couples that facilitated the development of this distance. Differences in slave and owner perceptions, then, will be highlighted in order to emphasise the distance between their respective lives.

This distance, or 'social space' will become apparent from a careful comparison of evidence obtained from slave source materials with that found within owners' records. Whilst owners defined certain slaves and certain aspects of slave community life in ways which served to rationalise slavery, the slave community had its own, autonomous cultural norms that slaves strove to live by. In light of the exploitation of slavery and the consequent strains that were imposed upon slave spouses, then, the strength of their relationships is all the more remarkable. Despite considerable gender differences in their lives, male and female slaves forged relationships characterised by strength and affection that enabled them psychologically to distance themselves from their owners and ultimately to resist the oppression of slavery.

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Abbreviations

S.C.D.A.H.	South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia
S.C.L.	South Caroliniana Library, the University of South Carolina, Columbia
S.H.C.	Southern Historical Collection, The Library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
W.R.P.L.	William R. Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina

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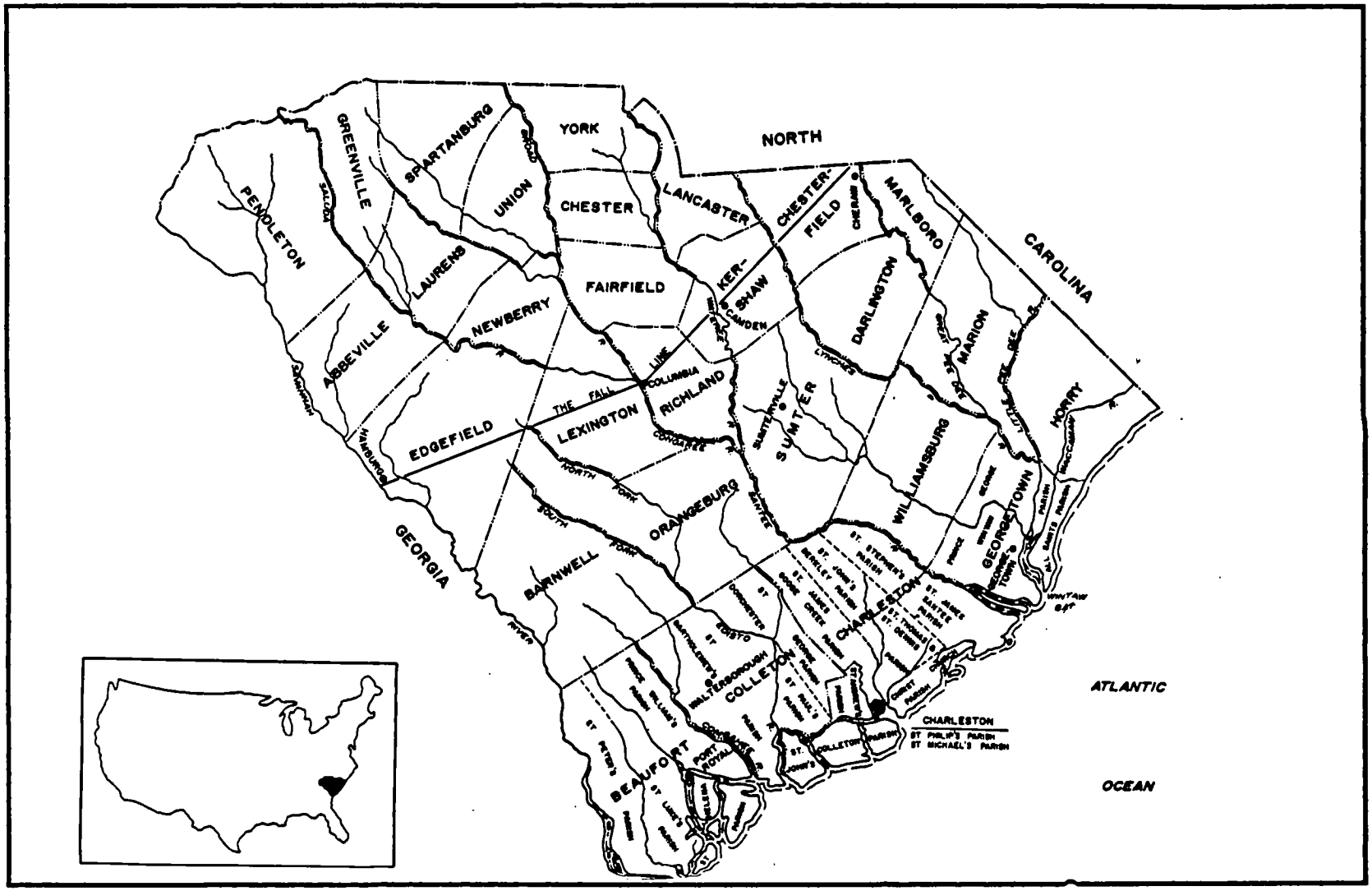

Frontispiece: Antebellum South Carolina

Source: William W. Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816-1836* (New York: Harper and Row 1965, 1968), 8.

Introduction

This thesis will explore intimate areas of the slave experience -- relationships between slave men and women, love and affection between spouses, the abuse of slave women by whites, and the overall sense of family among the slave community. These are difficult areas to explore, partly because the typicality of intimate sentiments is always hard to establish. In important part, too, the problem is one of sources. Southern white sources, as will be seen, rationalise white exploitation of blacks, but sources left by slaves are few, and their reliability has often been challenged. This thesis will rely heavily on the careful use of certain exceptionally rich slave sources, and will combine this with a critical analysis of white sources and perspectives. It will combine careful quantitative analysis of broad patterns that have emerged in the evidence from slave sources with a more textual, qualitative approach. This allows us to see these overall themes of gender co-operation, flexible family networks and overall resilience and resistance within the slave community.

This study will highlight the significance of bonding within the slave community *across* gender lines. Whilst slaves of the same gender did have close ties with each other, and whilst these ties were important, it will be argued that relationships between spouses were more important than same-gender networks. In various ways, then, this thesis fits into and also extends recent historiographical developments in the study of American antebellum slavery. It fits into recent historiographical developments by highlighting resistance on the part of slaves to the oppression of slavery. This resistance was achieved primarily through the existence of a 'social space' between the lives of slaves and owners. [1] However, this thesis also extends recent historiographical

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[1] On the concept of social space between the lives of slaves and slave owners, see Larry E. Hudson Jr., '"All That Cash": Work and Status in the Slave Quarters', in Larry E. Hudson Jr., (ed.), *Working Toward Freedom: Slave Society and Domestic Economy in the American South* (New York: University of Rochester Press 1994),

developments by emphasising the affection between male and female slaves as a means of creating social space. Bonding between slave spouses provided slaves with their primary means of surviving, and ultimately resisting, slavery.

Previous interpretations of female slavery have tended to focus upon the lives of slave women in relative isolation from their relationships with men. Instead, they have focused upon the relationships slave women had with each other, or on the relationships between slave women and their mistresses, as exemplified by the work of Deborah White, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Jacqueline Jones and Catherine Clinton. [2] Others, for example bell hooks, have assumed that relationships between slave males and females were characterised by gendered oppression. [3] Similarly, many other studies of slave family life have focused upon defining slave families as either matriarchal or patriarchal. 'Traditional' interpretations of slavery have tended to emphasise matriarchy within the slave community, whilst many revisionist historians of the 1970s and 1980s, including Herbert Gutman, and Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman, claimed that slave families were, in fact, male-dominated. [4] This has meant

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77-94. On Resistance see Stanley L. Engerman, 'Concluding Reflections', in Hudson, *Working Toward Freedom*, and Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery* (Penguin: London 1993), 137. See also the historiographical chapter in this thesis.

[2] See, for example, Deborah White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton 1985); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1988); Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York, Basic Books 1985); Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon 1982).

[3] See bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism* (London: Pluto Press 1982), 44. hooks uses the lower case for her name in order to make others question how we perceive names.

[4] See Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (New York: University Press of America 1974) and Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (Oxford:

that the nature of the relationships *between* slave spouses has been somewhat neglected. Available evidence relating to antebellum South Carolina slaves suggests, however, the fundamentally important role of meeting a member of the opposite sex and of marrying, since spousal support provided slaves with the vital autonomy that was necessary to forge a means of resistance to slavery.

Furthermore, it will be argued that this bonding between slave spouses occurred despite the influences of owners, and despite the existence of considerable gender differences in the lives of slave males and females. Gender differences were especially pronounced in the realm of work, where male and female slaves (in performing work for their owners and work for their families), were often employed at gender-specific tasks. The work lives of slave males and females were therefore not characterised by equality, but by different, complementary roles. [5]

Owners caused considerable disruption to slave family life by sexually abusing slave women and by forcibly separating slave families through sale or the division of estates. New quantitative evidence will be presented on sexual abuse, suggesting that it was masters, rather than overseers or other white men, who were the main abusers of slave women. Other new evidence will also be presented in order to show how slaves strove to overcome these types of exploitation through the strength of the relationships between slave couples and also through the system of cross-plantation family networks. These support networks meant that, for example, in cases of local sales, gifts of slaves or estate divisions, the impact of forced separations need not have been severe. From slave evidence, too, it will be shown that it was long-distance, rather than local sales, that were feared by members of the slave community.

Basil Blackwell 1976). See also the historiographical chapter for a fuller discussion of these terms and their influence upon the historiography of slavery.

[5] In stating that slave spouses acted out complementary roles, this thesis supports the propositions made by Deborah White in *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 158.

In light of the oppression of slavery and the consequent strains that were imposed upon slave spouses, then, their desire to live out shared lives through supportive roles is all the more remarkable. Through an investigation into the lives of, and relationships between male and female slaves, and by focusing on the perspective of the slave, the essentially loving and supportive nature of these vitally significant relationships becomes apparent. Despite gender differences in their lives, male and female slaves forged relationships characterised by strength and solidarity, relationships that enabled them to find both psychological distance from their owners, and also a means of both survival and resistance against the oppression of slavery.

Methodology

This thesis will utilise various types of primary source materials in order to explore the slave's perspective of life in antebellum South Carolina. It will also use these source materials in both quantitative and qualitative ways. Through such a technique we can cast new light upon the nature of slave family and community life, and also on the roles of males and females within it. This thesis will primarily use two types of slave source materials. It will make extensive use of the South Carolina Works Progress Administration (W.P.A. hereafter) slave narratives. It will also use a sample of volume-length slave autobiographies in order to gain more textual information on aspects of slave life not readily available from the comments made by the W.P.A. respondents.

This thesis will also use a variety of manuscript source materials, namely the letters, diaries and plantation journals left by slave owners. Through use of these source materials, we can assess the nature of the relationships between slaves and their owners and can also examine, at a broader level, what the nature of these relationships has meant for individual slaves, the slave community, and slave owners. A small number of petitions to the South Carolina State Assembly concerning issues of inter-racial sexual contact were also examined for use in Chapter Five. These manuscript

materials will then be used in conjunction with a systematic rather than anecdotal analysis of various slave-narrative materials. The focus will therefore be on male and female slaves and their relationships with each other, rather than white perceptions of slaves. Slave source materials have thus been emphasised more than white manuscript materials. Furthermore, since slave women have left the fewest surviving records, information left by slave women has also been strongly emphasised. The underlying theme to come out of this research has been the strength of the relationships between slave men and women.

This thesis will focus upon South Carolina in the nineteenth century for various reasons. First, particularly rich primary source collections exist for South Carolina. Furthermore, by focusing on one state in the nineteenth century, a thorough and systematic investigation into available primary source materials can be undertaken. South Carolina at this time was home to two major crops associated with slave labour -- rice and cotton. Some of the South's largest plantations and largest concentrations of blacks were found in the South Carolina low-country, where rice and sea-island cotton dominated. Indeed, Norrece T. Jones has stated that

> During the first decade of the eighteenth century, blacks gained numerical supremacy over whites in South Carolina, and this remained a prominent factor in the State's demography throughout the antebellum period. In 1850, for example, slaves comprised 57.7 percent of the total population, but in some large slave holding districts there were more than two slaves for every white....Slaves in Georgetown [a part of the low-country] were between 85 and 89 percent of the population from 1810 to 1860. [6]

Possible implications of regional differences within South Carolina will be taken into account, since the experience of slavery on a large, low-country plantation would have

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6 Norrece T. Jones, *Born a Child of Freedom, Yet a Slave: Mechanisms of Control and Strategies of Resistance in Antebellum South Carolina* (Hanover: University Press of New England 1990), 6.

been different from that on a small, up-country slaveholding. However, this thesis has found that, regardless of size or location of unit, the attitudes and aspirations of slaves remained broadly the same. Slaves strove to meet and to marry someone of their own choosing, despite the pressures of slavery, in keeping with their autonomous community ideals.

The W.P.A. slave narratives

The W.P.A. slave narratives for South Carolina are of vital importance for this thesis, since, in using these narratives, we can move beyond the stereotypical conceptions of slaves that are found in the manuscript materials of owners. The W.P.A. narratives allow us to investigate slavery from the perspective of the slave and hence we can gain more representative insights into the lives of the ordinary male and female slaves. The W.P.A. narratives used in this thesis have been compiled by George P. Rawick in his multi-volume The *American Slave: A Composite Autobiography.* [7] Rawick collated the transcriptions of thousands of interviews that W.P.A. workers had, in the 1930s, conducted with ex-slaves.

These narratives will be used in both a quantitative and qualitative fashion. They will be used quantitatively to assess trends relating to the lives of slaves and to investigate gender differences between the lives of male and female slaves. Particularly revealing passages from the narratives will then also been used where they document significant or memorable experiences. It is from these often vivid and graphic recollections that we can illustrate both the exploitation of slaves and also their resilience in the face of oppression. As C. Vann Woodward argued: 'Confusing and contradictory as they are, they [the W.P.A. slave narratives] represent the voices of the

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[7] George P. Rawick, *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, Vols. 2 and 3 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press 1972), and *Supplement Series 1*, Vol. 11 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press 1977), contain the South Carolina narratives that were used in this thesis.

normally voiceless, the inarticulate masses whose silence historians are forever lamenting.' [8] The W.P.A. narratives are of immense value, then, since slave sources as a whole are rare, especially accounts of the lives of ordinary slave females. Martia Graham Goodson has said that the W.P.A. interviews: 'are ideally suited for attempts to fill the void of Afro-American women's history because they contain some of the most illuminating testimony available concerning the lives of slave women.' [9] The W.P.A. narratives therefore constitute one of the few source materials in which we can gain insights into the everyday lives of ordinary slave women from the point of view of the slave herself.

The database

Measuring comments of the respondents can constitute a major problem when attempting to quantify the W.P.A. narratives. Eugene Genovese, in *Roll, Jordan, Roll,* admitted that he simply used sources qualitatively, and by-passed the problem of quantifying evidence. He stated:

> I have tried to weigh different kinds of testimony against each other and have felt safest when various kinds of sources -- slaveholders' diaries and letters, Southern periodicals, travellers' accounts, runaway slave accounts, the W.P.A. narratives and folklore materials -- seem to agree on what, how and where....My frequent use of "many", "most", "probably", "on balance" and "typically" reflects the difficulties of measurement. [10]

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[8] C. Vann Woodward, 'History from Slave Sources', in Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., (eds.), *The Slave's Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press 1985), 52.

[9] Martia Graham Goodson, 'The Slave Narrative Collection: A Tool for Reconstructing Afro-American Women's History', in Darlene Clark Hine, (ed.), *Black Women in American History: From Colonial Times through the Nineteenth Century,* Vol. 2 (New York: Carlson 1990), 488.

[10] Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage 1972, 1974), 675-676.

For Genovese, then, trying to 'balance' different types of source materials was one way in which he could assess the representativeness of the comments made by the W.P.A. respondents. However, for this thesis, a more rigourous quantitative method was employed through the construction of a database.

From Rawick's collection, 334 South Carolina respondents were entered into a database which summarised their comments on their own lives and on the lives of their parents. Certain respondents included in Rawick's collection, however, were excluded from the database for various reasons. For example, six respondents were excluded because they were white.[11] Four other respondents were excluded because they did not relate anything about slavery times. [12] Included in the database, however, were four free blacks, since they did relate information pertaining to slavery. [13] Finally, the

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[11] These were Caroline Bevis, Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 55-56; John Boyd, Rawick, Vol. 2, Part 1, 70-73; Charlie Jeff Harvey, Rawick, Vol. 2, Part 2, 247-251; Mary Ann Lipscomb, Rawick, Vol. 3, Part 1, 103-104; William P. Houseal, Rawick, Vol. 11, 205-207; Henry Gray Klugh, Rawick, Vol. 11, 233. One can tell that these respondents were white because of the events they described in their lives, and also because of the context in which they mentioned slaves, 'negroes' or 'darkies'. Also, their interviews were not recorded in dialect. If an ex-slave was recorded as not having a dialect then this was something that the interviewers felt compelled to mention.

[12] These were Will Bees, who only related a post-slavery anecdote, Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 11, 61-62; Lillie Knox, a friend of the respondent Hagar Brown, who was only 35 years old, and did not contribute anything that would prove significant to the sample, Rawick, Vol. 11, 234-236; George Washington Murray, who was not actually a respondent, but had an unfinished story written about him because he reached the National House of Representatives, Rawick, Vol. 11, 258-260; John Widgeon, who again did not respond, but had an obituary written about him because of his connections with the Maryland Academy of Sciences, Rawick, Vol. 11, 312-313.

[13] These were Ransom Beckett, Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 11, 59-60; Harriet Eddington, Rawick, Vol. 2, Part 2, 1; Wade D. Hampton, Rawick, Vol. 11, 182-185; and Martha Lowery, Rawick, Vol. 11, 239-243.

wife of one of the respondents was included in the database in her own right, since her comments on slavery were extremely relevant. [14] The final sample therefore consisted of 334 individuals, 190 of whom were male, and 144 of whom were female. Information that these respondents related on their own lives, their parents' lives, and on slave community life at large was then entered into the database. [15] This systematic analysis of the W.P.A. narratives has constituted a vital part of the thesis, through providing a quantitative context from which other primary source materials can be utilised. Furthermore, by cross-referencing the different comments of individual respondents, a detailed picture of the trends in the lives of individual slaves could be established. As Robert Fogel has stated:

> The most important contribution of the quantitative method is its ability to aid in the examination of the interaction among various variables....Quantification makes it possible to examine the effect of such variables as region, plantation size, and family size on the adequacy of diet or any other variable. [16]

There have been two other pieces of historical work that have utilised the W.P.A. narratives in a quantitative fashion. Firstly, Paul Escott, in *Slavery Remembered* , argued that 'the slave narratives provide a window on the thoughts and feelings of those in bondage.' He also maintained, that, despite slavery, slaves 'did not lose their mental independence.' [17] Secondly, Stephen Crawford's PhD study,

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[14] This was Adeline Brown, the wife of John C. Brown. See Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 127-130.

[15] For a description of the database criteria, see Appendix One.

[16] Robert W. Fogel, Ralph A. Galantine and Richard L. Manning, (eds.), *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery, Evidence and Methods* (New York: W.W. Norton 1988, 1992), 334-335.

[17] Paul D. Escott, *Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth Century Slave Narratives* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1979), 179-80.

"Quantified Memory", used these records and focused largely on slave childhood. He argued that only through quantification could 'the isolation of the real tendencies in the slave narrative sample' be established. He suggested that there was interaction between slaves and masters that was founded on the provision of incentives and disincentives, which contrasts with Escott's conclusion that masters and slaves lived in separate, antagonistic worlds. [18] This thesis will argue, however, in a similar way to Escott, that masters and slaves did live in separate, antagonistic worlds. Furthermore, the existence of these separate worlds provided slaves with a means of resistance against slavery.

It will also be argued that quantitative data works best when used in conjunction with other, more qualitative information. A large amount of quantitative information at the aggregate level does not fully capture, for example, the feelings expressed by the W.P.A. respondents about life under slavery. Take for example, the claim made by Fogel and Engerman that slaves in the American South received, on average, '0.7 whippings per year.'[19] This does not tell us anything about the severity of the whippings of individual slaves, and neither does it tell us anything about the fear of being whipped amongst slaves. Combining quantitative data, however, with other information gleaned from a textual reading of the W.P.A. narratives and of other source materials allows us to gain a richer, fuller picture of slave life.

Problems with the W.P.A. narratives

There have been many criticisms directed against the use of the W.P.A. slave narratives. These include the fact that, firstly, the ex-slaves might have been reserved

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[18] Stephen Crawford, "Quantified Memory: A Study of the W.P.A. and Fisk University Slave Narrative Collections" (PhD, University of Chicago 1980), 241-44. See also Stephen Crawford, 'The Slave Family: A View from the Slave Narratives', in Claudia Goldin and Hugh Rockoff, (eds.), *Strategic Factors in Nineteenth Century American Economic History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1992).

[19] Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, 145.

when speaking to white interviewers. [20] Secondly, the fact that over two-thirds of respondents were over eighty years old when they were interviewed -- they therefore might have had dimmed memories, or else only childhood memories of slavery. Thirdly, use of the narratives has been criticised because the interviews were conducted in the 1930s, during the Depression. Some ex-slaves might, then, have looked back favourably on the slavery period in comparison with the harshness of life in the 1930s, a time of racial segregation in the American South. Fourthly, some of the respondents knew their white interviewers, which might have encouraged reticence. As John Blassingame has argued:

> Since many of the former slaves still resided in the same areas as their masters' descendants and were dependent on whites to help them obtain their old age pensions, they were naturally guarded (and often misleading) in their responses to certain questions. Frequently the white interviewers were closely identified with the ancien regime; on occasion they were the grandsons of the blacks' former masters. [21]

Ben Leitner provides us with an example of this in his interview. He said to his interviewer, W.W. Dixon:

> I see you go by de road de other day, on your way to old man Wade Jackson's house. 'Member de old fellow dat paralysed, de one dat lives beyond Fellowship graveyard? I was settin' in dat graveyard when you and Marse Thomas pass in de automobile. I 'quire nex' day where you was a goin', then Marse Thomas say you goin' 'round doin' sumpin' bout old slaves and 'spect you'd like to see me. So here I is. Well, I's knowed you since you was knee-

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[20] Nearly all W.P.A. interviewers were white. Furthermore, there does not appear to have been any black interviewers in the South Carolina sample.

[21] John W. Blassingame, 'Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves', in Davis and Gates, *The Slave's Narrative* , 85.

high and Marse Thomas say maybe you help me to get a pension. If you can't, nobody can. [22]

A final methodological problem with the W.P.A. slave narratives is that they display a pronounced bias towards house servants or skilled slaves. [23] The majority of respondents who related their occupation during slavery to their interviewer said that they performed house of skilled work. Furthermore, this was true not only of the respondents themselves, but also of their parents. Paul Escott has claimed that this was probably a reflection of the fact that the interviewers were pursuing former slaves known to them or to other white people. [24] This bias does mean that, in terms of occupational patterns, the evidence obtained from the W.P.A. narratives is atypical, since field workers generally accounted for some three-quarters of the slave labour force. [25]

It is possible, however, to overcome these methodological problems through careful use of the narrative materials. Firstly, let us consider the claim that the respondents might have been reticent when talking to white interviewers (be it because of the race of their interviewers, because they had known them as slaves, or because it was the Depression of the 1930s). Evidence presented within this thesis actually contradicts the notion that the respondents were very reluctant to discuss certain issues

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22 Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 3, 100.

23 See Chapter Three for a discussion of the bias towards those who performed house and skilled work within the W.P.A. narratives.

24 Escott, *Slavery Remembered*, 13.

25 See Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, 39-40. Herbert Gutman and Richard Sutch, however, believe that Fogel and Engerman actually underestimated the number of field slaves. See Herbert Gutman and Richard Sutch, 'Sambo Makes Good, or Were Slaves Imbued with the Protestant Work Ethic?', in Paul A. David *et al*, *Reckoning with Slavery: A Critical Study in the Quantitative History of American Negro Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press 1976), 77-80.

with whites. Indeed, it does not appear to have been the case that the respondents merely said what they thought their interviewers wanted to hear. Furthermore, if the respondents were reluctant to discuss anything with whites, it would have been issues such as sexual abuse, or other personal and sexual matters. The South Carolina W.P.A. narratives, however, do contain comments on a range of sensitive issues, including sexual abuse and other personal matters. Such comments, though not necessarily totally candid, reveal much about areas of slave experience that would otherwise be almost completely hidden from view. This is not to deny, though, that respondents would have been more likely to speak of less personal issues with their interviewers. For example, Susan Brownmiller has noted that many female respondents were reluctant to discuss sexual issues with their interviewers. She states:

> When the female ex-slave was asked to tell of her experiences, not surprisingly, she did not dwell on sex...and a combination of propriety, modesty and acute shame on the part of narrator and recorder must have conspired to close the door on any specific revelations. [26]

In order to construct data on critical issues concerning sexual abuse, a wide sample of W.P.A. narratives, encompassing all of the Southern states, was used on two occasions in this thesis. In Chapter One, when investigating black-on-black sexual abuse, the entire collection of W.P.A. slave narratives (including some supplementary volumes), was examined using the *Index To The American Slave*. [27] All index entries for 'Overseers, Drivers and Foremen (Black)' were consulted, along with all entries for 'Sexual Practices, Slave', and 'Slave Breeding', in order to find out more about black-on-black abuse. In Chapter Five the same collection of narratives was consulted (via

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[26] Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin 1975), 160.

[27] Donald M. Jacobs, (ed.), *Index To The American Slave* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press 1981).

index entries for 'miscegenation') in order to compare the extent to which female slaves were at risk of sexual abuse by masters and overseers.

It is also possible to find out about issues such as sexual abuse through using other source materials in conjunction with the W.P.A. narratives. In particular, the full-length autobiographical narratives have proved valuable for this purpose. Gloria Shepherd, in her PhD thesis on the rape of black women during slavery, has argued that full-length personal narratives are actually more revealing than the W.P.A.narratives for the study of rape under slavery. [28] She has stated: 'It could be noted that the redundancy (of information on rape) is not so much in the lives of the slaves, but in their interviewers' abilities or desires to bring out the information.' [29] A 'fear factor' may, then, have prevented many black women from mentioning sexual issues to their white interviewers. This thesis will illustrate, though, that the minority who overcame this fear left behind extremely valuable information on issues such as these.

Let us now take the claim that since the respondents were very old, they had dimmed, or only childhood memories of slavery. It is true that since most of the respondents were children during slavery, they remembered slavery from a child's perspective. In my sample the average age of the respondents in 1865, when slavery was abolished, was only ten years. However, what has been of significance for much of this thesis are the comments that the respondents made on the lives of their parents, rather than their own lives. For example, whilst few respondents were themselves married during slavery, many made interesting and revealing comments on their parents' marriages. Similarly, many respondents who were too young to work during slavery made comments on the types of work performed by their parents. Since it is

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[28] Gloria Shepherd, "The Rape of Black Women during Slavery" (PhD: University of New York at Albany 1988), 5.

[29] Shepherd, "The Rape of Black Women", 63.

possible to build up a detailed picture of the lives of respondents' parents during slavery, the methodological problem of young respondents is diminished.

It has also been claimed that the memories of the respondents may have dimmed with age. The majority of the South Carolina interviews took place in 1937, when the average age of the respondents was 82 years. Donna Spindel, in a article that appears sceptical towards the use of W.P.A. slave narratives, suggests that 'the general thrust of the literature in psychology is that, long-term memory is suspect.' [30] Escott, however, has, in contrast, suggested that

> the brain records and preserves the events of an individual's life and...older people often dwell more in memory than the young. Recent studies have shown that aging does not impair the recollection of the elderly, despite society's common assumption that it does. [31]

Certainly within this study, the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents appeared to have remembered much about slavery times. What is probably of equal significance, though, is that even though the memories of the respondents may have dimmed with age, the narratives themselves constitute such a unique source, and contain such a rich amount of evidence, that, even with imperfect recall, they still hold immense historical value.

Finally, let us take on the claim that the bias towards houseservants and skilled workers within the W.P.A. narratives diminishes the value of these sources. First, as will be examined more fully in Chapter Three, it was found that, despite the over-representation of house servants within the W.P.A. narratives -- house servants who may have been more likely to relate fond anecdotes of their white owners --this study found significant mental and emotional distance between masters and slaves to be the

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[30] Donna J. Spindel, 'Assessing Memory: Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives Reconsidered' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* **27** (1996), 259.

[31] Escott, *Slavery Remembered*, 6-7.

norm. [32] Second, at key points, bias will be avoided by reporting results according to occupation.

Full-length slave narratives

Utilizing an approach that allows for the use of various types of source materials is likely to be most beneficial in a study of slave life, since no one source type can adequately explain what life was like for most male and female slaves. Within this thesis, then, a sample of full-length slave narratives has been used in conjunction with the W.P.A. narratives. The use of full-length autobiographical narratives add richness, depth and texture to the image of slavery obtained from use of the W.P.A. narratives. There are various full-length slave narratives that have substantial South Carolina content, and used within this thesis are the autobiographies of the ex-slaves Charles Ball, Tom Jones, Moses Roper, Jacob Stroyer, I.E. Lowery and Sam Aleckson. [33]

Some non-South Carolina narratives, however, were also used within this thesis. The majority of full-length narratives have been written by males, so in order to give voice to otherwise voiceless females, female narratives from the South as a whole

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[32] For a discussion of this distance between slaves and slave owners, see Escott, *Slavery Remembered*, 27, and Hudson, 'All That Cash', in Hudson, *Working Toward Freedom*, 77-94.

[33] See Charles Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains; or, The Life of an American Slave* (1858, and reprinted New York: Dover Publications 1970); Tom Jones, *Experience and Personal Narrative of Uncle Tom Jones, who was for Forty Years a Slave. Also the Surprising Adventures of Wild Tom, of the Island Retreat, a Fugitive Negro From South Carolina* (Boston: H. B. Skinner 1855); Moses Roper, *A Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper from American Slavery* (London: Harvey and Darton 1840); Jacob Stroyer, *My Life in the South* (1879 and reprinted Salem Massachusetts: Newcombe and Gauss 1898); Rev. I. E. Lowery, *Life on the Old Plantation in Ante-Bellum Days or, A Story Based on Facts* (Columbia, South Carolina: The State Company 1911); and Sam Aleckson, *Before the War and After the Union: An Autobiography* (Boston: Gold Mind Publishing 1929).

were utilised. Indeed, these narratives have proved vital in understanding the nature of female slavery, especially on issues such as sexual abuse. For example, in her narrative, Harriet Jacobs relates in great detail her emotional turmoil at being sexually abused by her master. [34] In doing this, the significance of her work is increased, as Jennifer Fleischner has claimed. She writes:

> *Incidents* [Jacobs' narrative] does far more than expose the impact of sexual exploitation upon its female victims, as it is conventionally understood to do; more deeply, it reveals the ways in which sexual exploitation impinged upon the entire Jacobs family, interfering drastically with their affective and sexual relations. [35]

Other female slave narratives used within this study include the autobiographies of Mattie Griffiths, Mattie J. Jackson, Lucy A. Delany, Kate Drumgoold and Annie L. Burton. [36]

Whilst the full-length slave narratives undoubtedly contain a great deal more personal detail than do the W.P.A. narratives, their representativeness has been questioned precisely because of their uniqueness. Full-length narratives also tend to display even more of a bias towards house, skilled or gifted slaves than W.P.A. narratives. Gilbert Osofsky has addressed this first criticism. He has stated:

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[34] See Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the life of a Slave Girl* (1861 and reprinted New York: Oxford University Press 1988), especially 44-45.

[35] Jennifer Fleischner, *Mastering Slavery: Memory, Family, and Identity in Women's Slave Narratives* (New York: New York University Press 1996), 7.

[36] See Mattie Griffiths (Browne, Martha Griffith), *Autobiography of a Female Slave* (1857 and reprinted Miami, Florida: First Mnemosyne 1969); Mattie J. Jackson, *The Story of Mattie J. Jackson*, (1866) and reprinted in Henry Louis Gates, (ed.), *Six Women's Slave Narratives* (New York: Oxford University Press 1988); Lucy A. Delany, *From the Darkness Cometh the Light or Struggles for Freedom*, (c.1891) in *Six Women's Slave Narratives*; Kate Drumgoold, *A Slave Girl's Story*, (1898), in *Six Women's Slave Narratives*; and Annie L. Burton, *Memories of Childhood's Slavery Days*, (1909) in *Six Women's Slave Narratives*.

> Because the best narratives reflect the imaginative minds of the most gifted and rebellious slaves, their value as reliable sources for the study of slavery has been questioned. To doubt the relevancy of autobiographies written by exceptional slaves, however, is is a specious argument in its inception. The great slave narrative, like all great autobiography, is the work of the especially perceptive viewer and writer. In describing his personal life, the sensitive and creative writer touches a deeper reality that transcends his individuality. [37]

It may also be suggested that, whilst these narratives are usually those of domestic or skilled slaves, whose circumstances might not have been typical of all slaves, the narrators themselves tended to see themselves as writing for, and about, the sentiments of the whole slave community. In particular, the narrative of Charles Ball contains much information upon the working lives of rank-and-file field slaves, despite the fact that Ball himself only worked in the field for a short-time. The full-length narratives also contain many references to the lives of other slaves -- slaves whose lives may have been more 'typical' than the lives of the narrators themselves.

Another common criticism of full-length slave narratives has revolved around the question of their authenticity. Osofsky writes:

> Because few slaves were literate enough to write their names, much less their autobiographies, and were thus forced to rely on amanuenses, usually abolitionists, scholars have rightly wondered where the slave's experience began and that of the antislavery recorder left off. Some have maintained that the typical slave narrative is so doctored that all are suspect as sources. [38]

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[37] Gilbert Osofsky, 'The Significance of Slave Narratives', in Gilbert Osofsky, (ed.), *Puttin' On Ole Massa: The Slave Narratives of Henry Bibb, William Wells Brown and Solomon Northup* (New York: Harper and Row 1969), 10.

[38] Osofsky, 'The Significance of Slave Narratives', 12.

Again though, it is possible to overcome this methodological problem. Osofsky states that the depictions of slave life in most narratives are descriptions of plantation activities and other daily routines that 'are striking in the consistency of themes that appear among individuals who lived on widely separated plantations, in different states, and in different decades.' [39]

Others have questioned the authenticity of the narratives because of the style in which they were written. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has said of Jacobs' *Incidents* that 'Critics assumed that Lydia Maria Child, Jacobs's editor, had written *Incidents*, for how could a slave woman have written in the flowery style of middle-class domestic fiction?'[40] The surviving correspondence of Jacobs, however, collated by Jean Fagan Yellin, has proved these critics wrong. [41] Fox-Genovese has also pointed out that

> In self-consciously writing for a white, northern, middle-class audience, Jacobs did not differentiate herself from the most celebrated male authors of slave narratives. Frederick Douglass, for example...assumed that the most effective way to reach his readers was to remind them that he was a man like themselves....[Similarly] A poignant account of the violation of a woman's virtue stood a much better chance of appealing to northern sensibilities than a pronunciamento for woman's individual rights, if only because it reaffirmed woman's essentially domestic nature. [42]

Writing in this vein appears, then, to have been a conscious decision on the part of the slave narrators, since they desired that their autobiographies would appeal to

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[39] Osofsky, 'The Significance of Slave Narratives', 14.

[40] Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 374.

[41] See Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 374, Fleischner, *Mastering Slavery*, 18, and Jean Fagan Yellin, 'Texts and Contents of Harriet Jacobs' Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself', in Davis and Gates, *The Slave's Narrative*.

[42] Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 375.

nineteenth-century potential abolitionists. This mode of writing, then, does not necessarily undermine authenticity.

Manuscript source materials

Various manuscript source materials have been used in conjunction with slave narrative materials in order to gain a fuller picture of life under slavery. Whilst the use of slave source materials is vital in any assessment of slavery as seen from the perspective of the slave (rendering such sources of central importance for this thesis), manuscript source materials are also necessary in assessing slavery from the perspective of owners. Furthermore, comparing these two vastly different perspectives will allow us to see how the opposing world views of slaves and owners led to the emergence of psychological distance, or social space, between the lives of slaves and owners, distance that was vital for the existence of an autonomous slave community life.

Three main sets of manuscript source materials were used in this thesis: the letters, diaries and plantation journals of *male* antebellum South Carolina owners; the letters, diaries and plantation journals of *female* antebellum South Carolina mistresses and owners; and finally a small number of antebellum petitions to the South Carolina State Assembly relating to issues of sexual contact between blacks and whites. Manuscript source material concerning male and female slave owners were consulted at three locations. The majority of these manuscripts were extensively consulted at the South Caroliniana Library at the University of South Carolina. However, important South Carolina manuscripts were also also consulted at two locations in North Carolina (the Perkins Library of Duke University and the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill). The petitions to the South Carolina State assembly concerning slave manumissions were located at the South Carolina Department of Archives and History in Columbia.

Slave owners' records

Whilst the letters, diaries and plantation journals of owners may be of limited value in exploring the community life of male and female slaves, they are still of immense value in terms of explaining the attitudes of slaveowners towards their slaves and, at a broader level, the ideological framework within which the institution of slavery operated. These records, however, pose another set of methodological problems. Whilst offering unique insights into the minds of individual owners, especially in the case of personal diaries, all such records represent survivals only. It must be remembered that some significant records would have been destroyed by time, or by descendants, especially those containing information of an intimate nature. Through careful reading of a wide selection of owners' records, however, some extremely valuable information relating to owners and their slaves can emerge.

For example, it will be shown in this thesis, from an examination of owners' records, that slave owners defined a minority of their slaves as 'key slaves' and singled them out for benevolent treatment.[43] Furthermore, it is these slaves that crop up most frequently in the letters and diaries of owners, allowing us to see how owners rationalised slavery. The majority of references to their slaves within owners' letters and diaries therefore focus on the alleged 'close relationship' between owners and slaves. By using only the records of owners to examine slave life, then, a somewhat distorted picture of slavery arises. Using slave sources in conjunction with owners' records, however, allows us to build up a picture of slave life that also includes the perspective of rank-and-file 'non-key' slaves, who tended to be ignored in the records of their owners. Close relationships between slaves and their owners, then, whilst

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[43] On the concept of key slaves, see 'Introduction' to Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders and Slaves in the Old South*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, Second Edition, 1996), and Tadman, 'The Persistent Myth of Paternalism' in *Sage Race Relations Abstracts*, (forthcoming 1997). See also Chapter Four of this thesis.

existing theoretically in the minds of owners, only existed in reality between a minority of slaves and their owners.

The plantation journals of owners (and sometimes overseers), unlike letters and diaries, generally focus on lists of slaves and provisions. Because of this, they tend not to display a bias towards the mentioning of key slaves. However, the information included on individual slaves is often limited. For this study, plantation journals were used most frequently in Chapters Three and Four, in assessing the gender differences in the work lives of slaves. Furthermore, since these sources include frequent references to fieldwork, they can be used to overcome bias in other sources towards skilled or domestic work. Finally, lists complied for or by overseers are also useful, especially those that list plantation rules. These lists can shed light on the day-to-day running of plantation life, as well as on the attitudes of owners and overseers towards slaves. It will be seen how slave owners, in imposing rules and regulations upon the their slaves, generally attempted to disguise their actions under the cloak of paternalism, aiming to convince their slaves that the imposition of rules was for their benefit , as well as for the benefit of owners themselves.

The letters and diaries of mistresses and female owners are particularly revealing in an examination of the relationships between female slaves and their mistresses. Two important diaries written by South Carolina women are those of Keziah Brevard and Ada Bacot. [44] The letters of Elizabeth Franklin Perry to her husband, Benjamin, have also revealed fascinating insights into relationships between mistresses and their husbands, between white women, and (most importantly for this

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44 See John Hammond Moore, (ed.), *A Plantation Mistress on the Eve of the Civil War: The Diary of Keziah Goodwyn Hopkins Brevard, 1860-1861* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press 1993) and Jean V. Berlin, (ed.), *A Confederate Nurse: The Diary of Ada W. Bacot, 1860-1863* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press 1994).

thesis) between mistresses and slaves. [45] Within this study, mistresses' letters and diaries will mainly been used within Chapter Five, in exploring the impact upon mistresses of sexual contact between female slaves and their masters.

State archive petitions

Various petitions to the South Carolina State Assembly in the antebellum period have been consulted, since they can shed much light upon the nature and consequences of sexual contact between blacks and whites. As was the case with the letters and diaries of mistresses, these petitions will generally be used within Chapter Five. Many of these petitions relate to the manumission of female slaves by white owners. Hence the typicality of manumissions related to issues of sexual contact will be explored. Also of interest, however, is the fact that, whilst the majority of these petitions were made by whites, some of were made by blacks. The petitions therefore represent a unique and valuable source material for investigating issues of inter-racial sexual contact, especially when used in conjunction with other (slave and white) records.

Chapter summaries

The chapters in Part One of this thesis will emphasise the autonomy of the slave community through an investigation into the cultural life of slaves. Particular attention will be paid to the nature of the relationships between slave couples, and in doing so, slave courtship and marriage rituals, the nature of slave married life, and slave family structure will be examined. It will be argued that relationships between most slave spouses were characterised by great affection and love, and, furthermore, it will be argued that this allowed slaves to develop social space between their lives and the lives of their owners. Slaves strove to live according to their own cultural norms.

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[45] See the Benjamin Franklin Perry Papers, S.C.L.

Chapter One will investigate slave courtship and marriage rituals and the nature of slave married life, since little is known about these aspects of the community life of slaves. It will also emphasise the autonomous nature of slave cultural life through the ways in which slaves courted, married, and supported members of the opposite sex. Indeed, it will be argued that it was the affection between slave spouses, that ultimately enabled slaves to survive slavery. Perceptions of slave courtship and marriage will also be examined from the profoundly different perspectives of slaves and their owners. Whilst owners' sources reveal something of the whites' rationalisation and selective vision of slavery and slave life, a combination of black and white sources will point to the contrasting world views of slaves and slave owners, and to the vast social space between these two worlds. Courtship rituals can also reveal some of the gender differences that operated within slave communities, exemplified by the fact that, as with white society at this time, it was males who were expected to take the lead in courtship and marriage rituals. Finally, this chapter will investigate antagonism between male and female slaves, namely the sexual and physical abuse of women. It will be argued that instances of black-on-black abuse within the slave community were rare. Indeed, slave sources (unlike white sources) emphasize positive relations and affection between slave spouses.

Chapter Two will quantitatively investigate the structure of slave families within the slave community, in order to take further the claim that a strong sense of family was the norm among slaves. This chapter will emphasise both the importance and the extent of cross-plantation marriages (where husband and wife lived on different slaveholdings). The use of slave source materials, especially the W.P.A. slave narratives, can allow us to estimate the numerical importance of these marriages, and it will also be argued that these marriages, like same-residence unions, were usually vigorously supported by the slaves concerned. Cross-plantation unions therefore point to the resilience of the slave community. Whilst some slaves lived in cross-plantation unions because of practical necessity (for example because they lived on small

slaveholdings with no suitable marriage partners), the very existence of cross-plantation marriages among slaves who lived on larger units suggests a desire on the part of slaves for autonomy from their owners. Cross-plantation marriages can also highlight gender differences in the lives of slave males and females, exemplified by the fact that it was males, rather than females, who visited their spouses on other units. In doing this, they frequently risked the wrath of their owners and the patrollers. This suggests, not only the strength of the relationships between slave couples, but also that males saw themselves as initiators, protectors and providers.

The Chapters in Part Two of this thesis will move away from an emphasis on the ways in which slaves gained cultural autonomy from their owners, and instead will focus more on slave/owner interaction, namely in the realm of work performed by slaves. Part Two will examine the gender differences in the work lives of slaves (including both work for owners and work for families), and it will assess the implications of these gender differences for relationships between male and female slaves. It will also examine the social structure of slave community and the ways in which work for owners and work for families related to social status. As with Part One of this thesis, the desire for autonomy on the part of the slave community will be emphasised, a desire that manifested itself within the social status that slaves awarded each other.

Chapter Three will examine both the types of occupations held by slaves, and the gender differences in occupational patterns. In establishing the work patterns of slaves, the South Carolina W.P.A. narratives were found to be skewed towards those respondents who mentioned that they, or their parents performed house work. Additional source materials, especially slave owners' records, will therefore be used to overcome this bias. It will also be shown that owners tended to segregate males and females, especially those who worked in the field. This meant that opportunities for male-female bonding in the realm of work were somewhat restricted, so that the

opportunities for bonding within the cultural life of the slave community, as detailed in Part One of this thesis, were extremely valuable to slaves. This chapter will then examine the work that slaves performed for their families. The impact of gender upon the types of work performed for families was especially pronounced, which may be attributable to the fact that female slaves had to bear and rear children in addition to working for their owners and their own families. Both male and female slaves, however, worked hard to provide for their families under slavery. Working for families therefore contributed to the autonomy of the slave community.

Chapter Four will examine social status within the slave community as defined by both owners and slaves. Slaves associated high status with those who performed important roles within the slave community. In contrast, the ways in which owners assigned social status can tell us much about the ways in which they rationalised slavery. In particular, I shall argue, as Michael Tadman has, that owners rationalised slavery through favouring a minority of 'key slaves'. [46] Differences in slave and slave-owner definitions, then, can tell us much about the gulf between the worlds of slaves and owners. Similarly, the impact of gender upon status reveals much about gender differences within the slave community. It will be argued that the slave community was relatively egalitarian in its treatment of females when it came to ascribing status, since females could gain considerable social status with age and experience. Female slaves, however, were victims of gender oppression in that they had to perform work for their owners, they had to work at home, and they also had the heavy burdens of child-bearing and much of the responsibility of child-rearing. This impacted upon both their work and their status.

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[46] See the 'Introduction' to Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*. Also Tadman, 'The Persistent Myth of Paternalism'.

The chapters in Part Three of this thesis will examine the exploitation inflicted on slaves by their owners. Exploitation could take different forms, including sexual abuse, the forced separation from loved ones, and physical punishment. This thesis will examine sexual abuse and the forced separations of slaves.What is of crucial significance, however, is that exploitation enabled slaves psychologically to distance themselves from their owners. Slave family networks, especially the relationships between male and female spouses, also provided vital emotional support for slaves in the face of exploitation, support that was necessary for survival under slavery. Exploitation therefore served as an impetus for cultural autonomy from, and resistance to, owners. Furthermore, whilst exploitation was a universal characteristic of slavery, affecting both males and females, the types of exploitation inflicted upon slaves was often gender-specific, affecting male and female slaves in different ways.

Chapter Five will examine sexual contact and sexual abuse between blacks and whites. It will consider both the extent and nature of sexual contact between black men and white women, and the extent and nature of sexual contact between white men and slave women. Whilst sexual liaisons between black men and white women appear to be exceptional, those between white men and slave women were much more widespread. Indeed, it will be argued that the sexual abuse of slave women by white men constituted one of the major differences in the lives of slave men and women. This Chapter will also, however, highlight a significant parallel in the lives of male and female slaves -- the way in which both were stereotyped by whites in the aim of rationalising sexual contact in white minds. It will also be argued that it was slave owners, rather than overseers or other white men, who were the main abusers of slave women. The implications of this upon owner's wives will also be explored. Finally, any possible relationship between sexual contact and manumissions will be examined for the purpose of assessing whether sexual contact with owners was a significant route to freedom. It will be argued, however, that slave women strove to survive their

oppression by gaining the love and support of a spouse, rather by seeking intimate contact with owners.

Chapter Six will examine the forced separations of slaves. Such separations were caused in a number of ways -- through long-distance sale, through local sales, through family members being transferred as gifts, and through (non-sale) divisions of slaveholdings between the heirs of an estate. A crucial finding will be presented here -- that the impact of local sales and forced separations, because the system of cross-plantation marriages and cross-plantation family networks, need not have caused severe family disruption, especially when compared to long-distance (inter-state) sales. Through cross-plantation family ties, then, slaves managed to resist many of the potential threats to family and to marriage viability. This chapter will also analyse the impact of forced separations upon slaves of different genders. It will be suggested that gender did have an impact upon the patterns of sales, especially for young slaves, with males more likely to be sold alone than were females. At the broader level, too, the impact of sales and separations would have again contributed to the psychological distance between the lives of owners and slaves. All slaves had to live under the threat, if not the reality, of being separated from their loved ones. This then makes the strength and resilience of the relationships between slave couples all the more impressive.

Conclusions

All of the chapters in this thesis will emphasise the autonomous nature of slave community life and the distance between the lives of slaves and owners. This provided slaves with the opportunity to resist the oppression of slavery. More specifically, it was the strength of the relationships between slave couples -- loving relationships that were sought by the majority of the slave community -- that provided slaves with a vital opportunity for cultural autonomy, through the support that spouses gave to each other in the face of adversity. Despite the existence of gender differences in their lives, male

and female slaves would go to great lengths in their desire to love, support and protect their spouses, their families, and their communities.

Historiography

Introduction

American slavery has attracted immense scholarly interest, and this thesis will draw upon several of the main historiographical strands. In particular, four relatively recent historiographical strands are of significance to this work. The first of these revolves around the concept of gender. Gender as a conceptual tool for historical analysis has been largely neglected until relatively recently. Consequently, female slaves have usually either been ignored, or else characterised as 'Jezebels' or 'Mammys' -- stereotypes that have recently been broken down by Deborah Gray White and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese.[1] Indeed, much of the significant work on female slavery has only been written from the 1980s onwards, following an increasing awareness of the importance of gender in historical analyses.

A second, and closely related, historiographical strand in the study of American slavery that is of relevance to this thesis, has been an increasing examination of slavery from the perspective of the slave rather than the slave owner. Stanley Engerman has noted that 'attention has been shifted from the masters to the study of the slaves, and to their actions and reactions within the slave system. This is referred to as regarding the "slave as actor".'[2] This strand came to the fore in the 1970s, when a number of texts that focused upon the cultural life of the slave community were published. [3] It has also

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[1] See White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, and Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, for a full discussion of the stereotypes of female slaves.

[2] Stanley L. Engerman, 'Concluding Reflections', in Hudson, *Working Toward Freedom*, 235.

[3] See, for example, Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family*; John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press 1972), and Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press 1977).

been argued that cultural autonomy provided slaves with the opportunity psychologically to distance themselves from their owners. [4] The 1970s and 1980s, then, saw a move towards the writing of 'history from below'. This enabled the development of 'women's history from below', and finally 'black women's history from below'. As Anne Firor Scott wrote in 1983:

> The recent developments in women's history have been paralleled by a new wave of slavery studies. As the history of slavery comes to be written with more attention to the slave's point of view we might expect women to emerge as historical actors in their own right. [5]

The third historiographical stand that is of importance to this thesis encompasses what Engerman refers to as 'the positive accomplishments of slaves under slavery'. He states:

> attention is now given to what are regarded as the positive accomplishments of slave life and slave culture, rather than the previous emphasis on the negative impacts upon the slaves of master behaviour and of the slave system. Descriptions of the slave family, their religion, their community life, even their economic behaviour, now detail a richness of slave accomplishments within the slave regime, as the slaves used the space they were provided with to obtain, as best as possible, their desires and demands. [6]

Finally, a fourth historiographical strand of relevance to this work has been the emergence of smaller, more detailed case studies of American slavery. Concentrating on one particular area can allow historians to add depth and texture to their work,

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[4] See, for example, Hudson, 'All That Cash', in Hudson, *Working Toward Freedom.* Also Norrece T. Jones, *Born a Child of Freedom.*

[5] Ann Firor Scott, 'Historians Construct the Southern Woman', in Joanne V. Hawks and Sheila L. Skemp, (eds.), *Sex, Race and the Role of Women in the South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi 1983), 104-105.

[6] Engerman, 'Concluding Reflections', in Hudson, *Working Toward Freedom,* 235.

primarily through the utilization of numerous source materials. Orville Vernon Burton, for example, in his study of family and community in Edgefield, South Carolina, refers to the concept of uncovering the 'total history' of Edgefield. [7] Similarly, Charles Joyner, attempted to reconstruct the life of one slave community in All Saints Parish, Georgetown District, in the South Carolina low country. He has written that 'Historians describe *the* slave community without having probed in depth any *particular* slave community.'[8] William Dusinberre has also recently conducted an investigation into slavery in the rice swamps of the South Carolina and Georgia low country. [9]

This thesis therefore both fits into and extends these recent analyses of American slavery. It is a small-scale study of slavery in antebellum South Carolina that focuses on the lives of slaves, rather than upon slavery *per se*. It also emphasises the positive accomplishments of slaves under slavery. It will also utilise gender as a conceptual tool by investigating differences in the lives of slave males and females, rather than examining female slavery in relative isolation. Such a methodological framework enables us more systematically to examine the lives of male and female slaves. Instead of focusing upon the relationships that female slaves had with each other, or with their mistresses, it will highlight the strength of the relationships between slaves of different genders, especially slave spouses. Indeed, it will be argued that previous emphasis upon the bonding between females has led historians to neglect the primary importance of spousal support as a means of surviving, and ultimately resisting, the oppression of slavery.

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[7] See Orville Vernon Burton, *In My Father's House are Many Mansions: Family and Community in Edgefield, South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1985).

[8] Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press 1984), xvi.

[9] William Dusinberre, *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1996).

First, however, an overview of the broad historiographical framework of American slavery will be sketched. An early trend in the historiography of American slavery encompassed what are now referred to as the 'traditional' interpretations of American slavery. These interpretations emphasised emasculation of male slaves and matriarchal domination by female slaves. A second major historiographical trend has been referred to as the 'counter-myth of patriarchy'. This emphasised, largely in reaction to the 'traditional' interpretations of slavery, the norm of male-headed nuclear families among slaves. A third historiographical trend has involved the writing and re-writing of female slavery. Many historians of the 1980s addressed the specific nature of female slavery and explored the character of gendered oppression under slavery.

Finally, the relationships between slaves and their owners have been subjected to considerable debate by all historians, regardless of the time in which they wrote. Traditional interpretations of slavery have stressed submission on the part of slaves to the desires of their owners. More recently, however, accounts of the relationship between slaves and owners have taken two broad forms. Some have emphasised interaction between slaves and their owners, especially certain forms of 'give-and-take'. Others have highlighted psychological distance between the lives of slaves and owners, distance that was created through the autonomous nature of slave community life. We shall begin by examining the traditional interpretations of slavery.

Traditional interpretations of slavery: emasculation and matriarchy

'Traditional' interpretations of slavery generally espoused an 'emasculation thesis' -- a view popularised in the 1930s, when E. Franklin Frazier highlighted the: 'dominating role of the Negro mother in the slave family.' [10] Frazier therefore held a

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[10] E. Franklin Frazier, 'The Negro Slave Family' *Journal of Negro History* **15** (1930), 232.

somewhat pessimistic view of slave families. He believed that, since male slaves were deprived of the opportunity to act out the dominant role within their families, they became emasculated, and slave families were consequently deprived of a 'beneficial' patriarchal structure. Frazier wrote:

> Even where the Negro father was recognized and played a conspicuous part with the family, he often had the status of a mere visitor when he was on another plantation. When he was on the same plantation his authority was always limited, and in a crisis the mother stood out as the more secure symbol of parental authority and affection. [11]

This historiographical paradigm of the emasculated male and matriarchal female remained popular for a considerable amount of time. For example, Kenneth Stampp, in 1956, attributed the alleged 'failure' of the slave family to the fact that slave women were compelled primarily to be full-time workers for their masters. He stated:

> She [the slave woman] spent a small fraction of her time in the house, she often did no cooking or clothes making, and she was not usually nurse to her husband or children during illness....The husband was not the director of an agricultural enterprise; he was not the head of the family, the holder of property, the provider or the protector. [12]

Similarly, Stanley Elkins argued, in 1959, that since no father image existed for slave children except for that of their master, real slave fathers were without authority. Furthermore, because slave children derived their status from their mothers, slaves were forced into a state of utter dependency on their masters. Elkins wrote: 'That most ancient and intimate of institutional arrangements, marriage and the family, had long

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[11] Frazier, 'The Negro Slave Family', 258-9.

[12] Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South* (New York: Knopf 1956), 343.

since been destroyed by the law.' [13] He therefore implied that slaves were incapable of having any autonomous culture.

What has been of crucial significance with regard to the historiography of the slave family, however, has been the fact that views such as those expressed by Frazier, Stampp and Elkins have been used to support the proposition that the emasculation of black males during slavery has left legacies of matriarchy and emasculation in contemporary African-American families. Furthermore, it has been this allegedly matriarchal structure of African-American families that has been held responsible for many of the economic and social problems that African-American communities have faced. These propositions were best exemplified by the 1965 'Moynihan Report'.[14] Moynihan believed that a 'tangle of pathology' had been caused by the absence of male authority in African-American families. He thus suggested that the contemporary social and economic problems facing African-American families could be solved through the re-introduction of male authority into family life. [15] The Moynihan Report therefore placed the blame for the economic and social problems of American blacks onto the historical experience of slavery. [16] Partly in reaction against the Moynihan Report, then, historians became keen to dispel the 'myth of matriarchy' within the slave community and they also turned in the 1970s towards emphasising the positive accomplishments of the slave community.

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[13] Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1959), 53-55.

[14] See Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington D.C.: Office of Policy Planning and Research, U.S. Department of Labor 1965).

[15] Quoted in Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (London: The Women's Press 1982), 13.

[16] Davis, *Women, Race and Class*, 17.

The 'counter-myth of patriarchy'

The 1970s saw an increasing emphasis upon the 'norm of patriarchy' within slave community life. It became widely accepted among historians that the two-parent nuclear family was the predominant family form under slavery and that the dominant role within these families was played by men. For example Fogel and Engerman, claimed in 1974 that stable nuclear families increased not only the personal well-being, but also the productivity of slaves. Slave owners therefore strove to promote stable, nuclear families among slaves, by offering incentives and rewards for desirable behaviour. Fogel and Engerman stressed that 'The dominant role in slave society was played by men, not women.'[17]

Similarly, Eugene Genovese, in his 1972 work *Roll, Jordan, Roll.*, also emphasised male dominance within the slave family. He claimed that 'The slaves themselves had come to value a two-parent, male centred household.' [18] Herbert Gutman also found that slaves tended to live in two-parent, nuclear households. Unlike Fogel and Engerman though, who suggested that slave owners actively encouraged such family formations, Gutman believed that the two-parent nuclear household predominated among slave families *despite* the influence of slave owners. He argued that the resilience of the slave family was both an illustration of the strength of an autonomous slave culture, and also a means of resisting the oppressive nature of slavery. [19] These historiographical changes in the study of the slave family were summed up well by Deborah White when she stated:

> Clearly, then, the pendulum has swung away from the idea that women ruled slave households, and that their dominance during the slave era formed the foundation of the modern day matriarchal black family. But how far should that

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[17] Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, 141.

[18] Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 491-492.

[19] See Gutman, *The Black Family*. See later section of historiography for fuller discussion of Gutman's arguments in this context.

pendulum swing?...too much emphasis has been placed on what men could not do rather than what women could do and did. [20]

During the 1980s, then, historians of female slavery considered whether the demolition of the 'myth of matriarchy' had led to the construction of a 'counter-myth of patriarchy'. In a similar vein to Deborah White, Ann Patton Malone wrote:

> overzealousness in revising earlier misconceptions concerning the composition of the slave family and community has led some recent historians or their popularizers to exaggerate the stability of the slave family, to overemphasize the supposed patriarchal features, and to overestimate the incidence of two-parent family households. [21]

Female slavery: equality or gender exploitation?

Possibly as a reaction against this alleged 'counter-myth of patriarchy', historians of female slavery have been keen to stress the independence of female slaves from males. [22] Much was also accomplished (especially by Deborah White and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese) in breaking down the stereotypes of female slaves. Both White and Fox-Genovese have shown how stereotypes such as Jezebel and Mammy existed so that whites could rationalise slavery. White has stated: 'Many Southerners were able to embrace both images of black women [Jezebel and Mammy] simultaneously and to switch from one to the other depending on the context of their

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20 White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 249.

21 Ann Patton Malone, *Sweet Chariot: Slave Family and Household Structure in Nineteenth-Century Louisiana* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1992), 257-8.

22 This does not necessarily suggest, as previous historians have implied, that males were emasculated by the experience of slavery.

thought.'[23] Jezebel and Mammy therefore reflected the dominant white views of gender roles among slaves, rather than those gender roles themselves. [24]

Other historians of female slavery have attempted to assess the quality of life for female slaves. Jacqueline Jones has extensively examined the work of female slaves. She has claimed that most slave women worked in the field for most of their lives, and that they also formed an integral part of the labour force of the cotton economy of the Old South. [25] Deborah White has also examined the work of female slaves, and has argued that working with each other facilitated bonding between female slaves. [26] She has also emphasised a 'special bond' between female slaves and their children, but she denies that this meant that slave families could be best defined as matriarchal (where females dominated males). Rather, White argues that slave families should be described as matrifocal, where the mother-child bond remained supreme over all other relationships. [27]

Important recent work has claimed, then, that slave men did not play a dominant role within slave families, and has suggested that relationships between the sexes under slavery can be characterised by equality. Slave women were free from the constraints of patriarchy that were typical of white familial relationships during the antebellum period. As early as 1971, Angela Davis, in a pioneering piece of work, highlighted the fact that the work of female slaves represented a departure from contemporary nineteenth-century ideals of womanhood. She stated:

> To extract the greatest possible surplus from the labor of slaves, the black woman had to be released from the chains of the myth of femininity....The

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23 White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 46.

24 See Chapter Five for a fuller discussion of stereotypes.

25 Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 115.

26 White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 121.

27 White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 256.

> slave system could not confer upon the black man the appearance of a privileged position vis-a-vis the black woman. [28]

Davis therefore characterised the nature of male-female relations under slavery as 'deformed equality.' [29] Jacqueline Jones has also noted that the lives of male and female slaves were equal in the sense that neither wielded economic power over the other. [30] Similarly, John Blassingame has argued the case for the American slave family being America's first truly democratic family, with men and women sharing authority and responsibility. [31]

It is Deborah White, however, who has presented one of the most convincing cases for equality being the norm between slave men and women. She has noted that, since marriage did not bring traditional benefits to female slaves (for example protection against whippings or sexual exploitation, property to share, or the provision by husbands of food, clothing and shelter), slave women retained a large degree of autonomy after marriage.[32] She therefore argues that slave families were 'unusually egalitarian' and that this equality was founded upon the complementary roles that were played by slave men and slave women. White states:

> Slave families were unusually egalitarian. Equality could not have been based on sameness because, while slave men and women often did the same kinds of work and provided similar services, many jobs and responsibilities still belonged by definition to one sex or the other. This suggests that equality within the slave family was founded on complementary roles, roles that were different yet so critical to slave survival that they were of equal necessity. [33]

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28 Angela Davis, 'Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves' *The Black Scholar* **3**, 4 (1971),7.

29 Davis, 'Reflections', 15.

30 Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love*, 238.

31 Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 178.

32 White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 153.

33 White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 158.

Others, however, most notably bell hooks, have dismissed the claim that the slave family was characterised by equality between the sexes. Hooks has argued that sex roles within slave communities actually mirrored the sex roles of patriarchal white America. She states that enslaved black women conformed to existing patterns that granted men higher status than women. [34] Furthermore, the fact that slave women were victims of domestic and sexual exploitation is illustrative, according to hooks, of the fact that the lives of female slaves were harder than the lives of male slaves. Equality between slave males and females therefore did not exist. [35]

However, whilst it will be argued in this thesis that the lives of female slaves *were* harder than the lives of male slaves, it will also be suggested that hooks tends towards oversimplification in her analysis of the impact of gender upon slave life. Relationships between slave men and women were typically characterised by affection and support, not exploitation. In studying gender and the female slave experience, it is therefore more useful to examine the similarities and differences in the lives of slave males and females, rather than to investigate the lives of females in isolation from those of males. Whilst the lives of male and female slaves were different, and whilst the impact of gender did mean that the lives of slave women were harder in most respects than the lives of slave men, the complimentary roles played by males and females enabled them to support each other in the face of the oppression of slavery.

Female slaves and their mistresses

Another historiographical focus in the study of female slavery has been the relationship between female slaves and their white mistresses. It has been debated whether the shared gender of black and white women fostered sisterhood (bonding

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[34] bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman?*, 44.

[35] hooks, *Ain't I a Woman?*, 22.

between women across racial lines), or, in contrast, whether white women's racism meant that any common female consciousness was rare. Essentialist historical interpretations of gender, then, have emphasised both the shared characteristics and the bonding between all women -- regardless of their race and or class. An example of this viewpoint has come from Anne Firor Scott. She has argued that many women of the planter class had strong doubts about the morality of slavery. Furthermore, such moral doubts were 'complicated by strong personal attachments between white and black women.'[36] Scott therefore concludes that many Southern women were private abolitionists. [37]

Similarly, Catherine Clinton has argued that mistresses were 'trapped' by the slave regime and saw themselves as victims in the Southern system of patriarchy. She stated:

> During the 1830s, the question of slavery began building to the division that eventually wrenched the country apart in a bloody civil war....None felt more stress and contradiction than the plantation mistress, particularly in her capacity as spiritual guardian of the culture and "conscience" of the plantation. [38]

Furthermore, Clinton has also argued that mistresses would plead with their husbands for the humane treatment of their slaves. Therefore, female slaves often appealed directly to their mistresses. [39]

In contrast, it has also been suggested, that, whilst close personal attachments between certain mistresses and certain female slaves did exist, such cases are not

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[36] Anne Firor Scott, 'Women's Perspective on the Patriarchy in the 1850s' *Journal of American History* **61** (1974), 84-85.

[37] Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1970), 51.

[38] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 183.

[39] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 187.

representative of the nature of the relationships between mistresses and their female slaves as a whole. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese believes that the essentialist interpretation of gender therefore fails when it is applied to relationships between mistresses and female slaves. She claims that racism on the part of mistresses assumed priority over any opportunity for female bonding between white and black women. Fox-Genovese argues that mistresses remained primarily the delegates of their husbands -- the implementers of his responsibilities. [40] Black and white women were therefore divided by their race, rather than bound by their gender. This thesis will generally support the arguments of Fox-Genovese in this area. In particular, it will be argued that the sexual abuse of female slaves by their masters diminished the opportunities for mistresses to bond with their female slaves along gendered lines. [41]

Slaves and slave owners: the concepts of 'social space' and 'resistance'

The relationships between slaves and their owners has also generated considerable historical research. In the 1950s, Stanley Elkins argued that slavery was so brutal, and the owner's power so complete, that it led slaves totally to submit to the wills of their owners. Kenneth Stampp, in contrast, argued that slaves resisted when they could. Even so, for Stampp, the master's arbitrary power was such that slave life was chaotic, and a resilient slave culture was not possible. [42] The 1970s and 1980s saw very active research on the extent of interaction between the lives of slaves and owners. Those such as Genovese and Fogel and Engerman, have suggested that there was close interaction between the lives of slaves and owners. Genovese argued for a pre-capitalist, paternalist slave South. He stated:

> A paternalism accepted by both masters and slaves -- but with radically different interpretations -- afforded a fragile bridge across the intolerable contradictions

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[40] Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household,* 135.

[41] See Chapter Five for an investigation into the sexual abuse of female slaves.

[42] See Elkins, *Slavery* and Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution.*

> inherent in a society based on racism, slavery, and class exploitation ....Paternalism's insistence upon mutual obligations -- duties, responsibilities, and ultimately even rights -- implicitly recognised the slaves' humanity. Wherever paternalism exists, it undermines solidarity among the oppressed by linking them as individuals to their oppressors....The slaves of the Old South displayed impressive solidarity and collective resistance to their masters, but in a web of paternalistic relationships their action tended to become defensive and to aim at protecting the individuals against aggression and abuse; it could not readily pass into an effective weapon for liberation. [43]

Fogel and Engerman, whilst insisting that the slave South was essentially capitalist (rather than pre-capitalist), also highlighted interaction between the lives of slaves and owners. They believed that this interaction was not based upon the form of paternalism described by Genovese, but on the systems of rewards and incentives founded by owners. Owners, according to Fogel and Engerman:

> wanted devoted, hard-working, responsible slaves who identified their fortunes with the fortunes of their masters. Planters sought to imbue slaves with a "Protestant" work ethic and to transform that ethic from a state of mind into a high level of production.[44]

Other historians, however, especially those who have emphasised the importance of examining slavery from the perspective of the slave, have highlighted psychological distance between the lives of slaves and owners. This was facilitated by the strength of autonomous slave cultural practices. Both Lawrence Levine and John Blassingame, for example, have both shown how the existence of slave religious practices, folk-tales, songs, dances and superstitions are illustrative of an autonomous

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[43] Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 5.

[44] Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, 147.

culture that enabled slaves psychologically to distance themselves from their owners.[45] An increasing emphasis upon the positive accomplishments of slaves under slavery has therefore led to much more attention being paid to this distance between the lives of slaves and owners. Herbert Gutman, for example, believed that Genovese over-emphasized the influence of slave owners upon slave culture. [46] Instead, he argued that the nature of slave culture and behaviour

> casts doubt on analyses that exaggerate the role resident planters played in shaping the slave family and the full range of social and cultural behaviour associated with it. Failure to study the development of an adaptive Afro-American slave culture prior to the spread of paternalist ideology impairs the detailed description and explanation of slave belief and behaviour in *Roll, Jordan, Roll.* [47]

Similarly, Michael Tadman has argued that 'The evidence of the massive interregional traffic [in slaves] suggests...deep distrust of masters and...a profound separation between the values of slaves and masters.' [48] Norrece Jones, too, has likened the nature of the relationship between slaves and slave owners to that of a war, a war in which slaves strove to live their lives according to the norms of their culture and community. He states that 'What shielded them [slaves] significantly from the psychic and physical assaults so much a part of the daily reality was the culture they forged and imparted.' [49]

More recently, Larry Hudson has highlighted the importance of slave economic activities in generating community autonomy. He argues that such activities

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[45] See Blassingame, *The Slave Community,* and Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness.*

[46] See Gutman, *The Black Family,* 309-320 for a full discussion of *Roll, Jordan, Roll.*

[47] Gutman, *The Black Family,* 311.

[48] Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves,* 211.

[49] Norrece T. Jones, *Born a Child of Freedom,* 211.

> facilitated the development of a "social space" between the public world of the master and the relatively private and autonomous world of the slave quarters, wherein the slaves planted and nourished the seeds of a dynamic African-American culture. [50]

This thesis will similarly emphasise social space between the lives of slaves and owners. It was through the creation of this space that slaves were able to survive, and ultimately to resist the oppression of slavery.

There have also been historiographical developments in the definition of slave resistance. In keeping with recent historiographical developments, this thesis will employ a broad definition of slave resistance -- including as resistance actions that did not directly threaten the system of slavery. This is especially significant when investigating the lives of female slaves, since they were more likely to engage in indirect resistance than males. This can be attributed to their childcare commitments. As David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine have noted:

> Black women were exploited as slaves in regard to both their productive and their reproductive capacities. Their resistance to slavery was rooted in a deep sense of the oppressive weight of this double burden which they were forced to carry and endure. If slave women did not figure prominently in the organisation of collective resistance such as revolt, it was not because they lacked the will but because, as mothers of children and nurturers of their families, they engaged in less confrontational or nonviolent forms of resistance that emphasised the need for creative struggle to survive dehumanization and abuse. In this they set an example for their children and menfolk. [51]

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[50] Hudson, 'All That Cash', in Hudson, *Working Toward Freedom*, 80.

[51] David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine, (eds.), 'Preface' to *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1996), ix-x.

Historiographically, then, the definition of slave resistance has been widened. Stanley Engerman states:

> Many have broadened the concept of resistance to include actions that did not directly threaten the system. Was any independent action of a slave for his or her own reasons to be seen as an act of resistance, since the slaves themselves selected their behaviour rather than having it imposed by the master directly or influenced by him? Slaves utilised the [social] space provided them in manners of their own choosing.' [52]

Conclusions

Peter Kolchin, in his summary of the historiography of American slavery, has stated:

> Although...scholars do not agree with one another in all particulars, the great majority of them have abandoned the victimization model in favor of an emphasis on the slaves' resiliency and autonomy....I believe that some of these arguments for slave autonomy have been overstated and eventually will be modified on the basis of future evidence. [53]

Emphasising resilience and autonomy, however, does not mean that the exploitation of slaves by owners (for example through sale, separation, physical punishment or sexual abuse) was not significant. Rather, it is the fact that slaves *strove* for this autonomy under adversity that is of crucial importance. This thesis will therefore highlight the desire for autonomy *within the context* of the restraints imposed by owners. It will be shown how the relationships between slave spouses facilitated the desire for, as well as the development of, both a social space between the lives of slaves and owners and a means of resistance against the oppression of slavery. Such an interpretation will both consolidate and extend the recent historiographical trends in the study of American slavery.

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[52] Stanley L. Engerman, 'Concluding Reflections', in Hudson, *Working Toward Freedom*, 239.

[53] Kolchin, *American Slavery* , 137-138.

Chapter One

The Social Lives of Slaves: Patterns of Courtship and Marriage Within the Antebellum Slave Community

> It seems to me that no one can have such fondness of love, and such intensity of desire for *home* and home affections, as the poor slave. Despised and trampled upon by a cruel race of unfeeling men, the bondman must die in the prime of his wretched life, if he finds no refuge in a dear home, where love and sympathy shall meet him from hearts made sacred to him by his own irrepressible affection and tenderness for them. [1]

Introduction

This chapter will examine the courtship and marriage rituals of slaves, as well as the nature of their married lives. Little is known about these aspects of slave community life, since traditional white accounts of the social lives of slaves (accounts that were largely written by white slave owners), as will be seen, tend to misinterpret both the nature and the significance of slave courtship and marriage rituals. However, by examining courtship, marriage, and family from the perspective of the slave, we can see both the extent of the love and affection that held slave spouses together, and we can also begin to understand how the nature of this affection enabled members of the slave community to survive, and even to resist the oppression of slavery.

This chapter will utilise evidence from two major sets of slave records that allow us to examine courtship and marriage from the perspective of the slave. It will firstly examine comments made on courtship and marriage by the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents. These comments offer us a glimpse into the lives of slaves after 'sundown', an area of slave life that has received only limited attention in the source

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[1] Tom Jones, *Experience and Personal Narrative*, 23.

materials left by white slave owners. [2] Overwhelmingly, in these records, family was taken very seriously by slaves and family memories were treasured. Had relationships within marriage been bitter and distrustful, one would have expected some reflection of this in the narratives. It is significant that negative comments were rare, and that in the majority of cases spouses were recalled with deep affection. The tone of the narratives suggests, then, that marriage and married life was an anchor and a positive reference point for slaves. Indeed, it will be argued that it was the affection between slave spouses, that ultimately enabled slaves to survive slavery. This was the case for all types of slaves, regardless of their status within the slave community, or their status as defined by whites. [3] Slaves were able to live according to the norms and values set by their own communities, despite the constraints imposed by slave owners.

In order to trace the lives of individual slaves in some detail, a second set of black records will be used, these being the book-length autobiographies of South Carolina slaves.[4] A common theme running throughout these extended narratives was that of love and affection between slave spouses (and also within slave families as a whole), despite hardships such as sales and separations, or the anguish of running away. These narratives show us that, not only did romantic love exist in slave society, but also that such romantic love served as a means of resistance against oppression and that slaves of all generations were not demoralised by slavery.

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[2] For a discussion of the lives of slaves after 'sundown', and the use of the W.P.A.narratives in studying this, see George P. Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press 1972).

[3] See Chapter Four for a more detailed discussion of the differences in slave and slave owner perceptions of social status.

[4] See the introduction to this thesis for a discussion of the sample of full-length narratives used in this work. Also, for a discussion of the merits and problems of using full-length slave narratives, see the 'Introduction', to John W. Blassingame, *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press 1977), xvii-lxv.

This chapter will fall into several main parts. First, I shall examine perceptions of slave courtship and marriage from the profoundly different perspectives of slaves and their owners. Slaveholder sources reveal something of the whites' rationalisation and selective vision of slavery and slave life, and a combination of black and white sources will point to the contrasting world views of slaves and slave owners, and to the vast social space between these two worlds. [5] Black sources, especially detailed life histories in the book-length narratives, will be used to explore love between slave spouses. Male and female roles in courtship and marriage will also be investigated from various documentary sources. Finally, this chapter will investigate antagonism between male and female slaves, namely the sexual and physical abuse of women. Instances of such abuse can again be revealing in any assessment of the nature of gender relations between male and female slaves. It will be argued that instances of black-on-black abuse within the slave community were rare. Indeed, slave sources (unlike white sources) emphasize positive relations between slave spouses, not promiscuity and lack of sensitivity.

Perceptions of slave courtship and marriage: white rationalisation and black experience

White slave owners viewed slave courtship and marriage rituals very differently from slaves themselves, and this has meant that such rituals, and also their meaning and significance, have been largely misinterpreted by historians. Furthermore, it is only through an investigation into the world view of slave owners, and through a comparison with that of the slaves, that we can comprehend the vast differences between their respective systems of values. Through an examination of slave courtship and marriage rituals, we can also see how slave owners and slaves carved out

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[5] On the concept of social space between masters and slaves, see Hudson, 'All That Cash', in Hudson, *Working Toward Freedom*, 77-94.

compromises over the extent of slaves' autonomous community activities. Such compromises often involved role-playing by slaves in order to preserve the paternalist self-image of their owners.

Slave owners could, through a variety of ways, influence the courtship and marriage patterns of their slaves. Their attempts at such influence also unwittingly reveal how slave owners frequently belittled the concept of slave romantic love. [6] Slaves and slave owners were therefore engaged in a battle over the extent of autonomy within the slave community in these realms of life. Whilst slaves strove to meet and marry a partner of their own choosing, owners sought to impose their own restrictions upon courtship and marriage decisions. Owners could prevent their slaves from socialising by limiting the amount of free time they enjoyed. Secondly, owners could impose constraints upon the geographical mobility of their slaves, for example by limiting the amount of time that they could spend off their place of residence. Thirdly, owners could impose systems of rewards and punishments in order to try to influence the marital choices of their slaves. [7]

The control of courtship and marriage patterns should be seen as part of the process by which owners developed and maintained a benevolent self-image. However, evidence from slave source materials suggest that owners believed their influence upon slave courtship and marriage patterns to be greater than it actually was. In this realm of life slaves may have engaged in a certain amount of role playing -- acting according to their owners' expectations. In doing this, slaves could carve out compromises with their owners over the extent of autonomy that they were allowed

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[6] Slave owners also revealed their lack of regard for the concept of slave romantic love through slave sales, separations and the sexual abuse of female slaves. All of these issues will be dealt with in later chapters.

[7] On the systems of punishments and rewards designed to influence the marital decisions of slaves, see Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, 86-85.

in their community lives. Reaching such compromises thus meant that slave owners could maintain their paternalistic world view, whilst slaves could gain the social space from their owners that was necessary for undertaking their own autonomous community activities. [8]

The meanings that slaves and owners ascribed to slave courtship and marriage rituals, then, are of significance. Take, for example, the fact that male slaves were often allowed to leave their own place of residence in order to visit slave women. This gave slaves an opportunity to develop autonomous cultural patterns, as well as an opportunity to marry off their place of residence. However, the fact that they were able to do this was largely conditional on the decisions made by their individual owners. Owners strove to make decisions that enabled them to control their slaves whilst also reinforcing their self-image as benevolent paternalists.

The comments made by the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents reveal much about these compromises that were carved out between slaves and owners. For example, George Fleming noted that sometimes on a Saturday night, 'frolics' took place on other plantations. He explained how the rules set by whites were different for 'frolics' than for events where whites attended too, such as corn-shuckings. [9] He stated:

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[8] For a discussion of the meanings and compromises reached between masters and slaves, see Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll* , 5-7. Genovese accepts the ideology of paternalism, but believes that 'the slaves found an opportunity to translate paternalism itself into a doctrine different from that understood by their masters and to forge it into a weapon of resistance to assertions that slavery was a natural condition for blacks.'

[9] Corn-shucking - the husking of corn - took place at harvest time and was, for most of America, a community effort. See Roger D. Abrahams, *Singing the Master: The Emergence of African-American Culture in the Plantation South* (New York: Penguin Books 1992), xxi.

> Didn't need no passes when a bunch of slaves went to other plantations to dem big gatherings. 'Rangements was already made so de patrollers wouldn't bother nobody. Dat policy didn't hold fer de frolics, though. Sho had to have a pass frum de marse if you went.[10]

In the case of corn-shuckings, then, Fleming's owner would allow his slaves to leave their place of residence without a pass. In doing this, he reinforced his own benevolent self-image. However, in the case of frolics, which were largely autonomous slave community events, Fleming's owner imposed tighter constraints. This often had the consequence of forcing social events such as frolics into secrecy, taking place behind the backs of owners, as the following comment from the W.P.A. respondent Madison Griffin illustrates. He said: 'De niggers went to de cornshuckings and was give pumpkin custards to eat and liquor. Wasn't allowed to dance, but sometimes we had secret dances, shut up in de house so de master culdn't hear us.' [11]

The significance ascribed to social events by slaves and owners was also different. When we investigate slave community events from white source materials we gain a different impression of the event from when we investigate such events from the perspective of the slave. In the following extract, the white writer emphasises the 'happiness' of the slaves at a corn-shucking, and in doing so reflected the white notion of planter benevolence:

> When the overseer has a quantity of corn to husk, he allows his negroes to invite those on the neighbouring plantations to come and help them in the evening, when all things are ready , they light their torches of pitch pine, their [sic] being an abundance of it about here, and march while singing one of their corn songs to the spot. Their captain mounts the heap of corn, and all sing a call

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[10] Rawick*The American Slave*, Vol. 11, 129.

[11] Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol. 2, Part 2, 213.

song for the others to come, which is immediately answered from the other plantations, in a song that "they are coming", you can hear them distinctly more than a mile , they sing as they march all the way, and when they arrive at the spot, they all join in one grand chorus - and make the forest sing with their music, they then appoint captains to succeed each other from the different companies - who mount the heap in turn and play their monkey pranks while they take the lead in singing as those around them shuck and toss their corn into the air - seemingly the happiest beings that live, I was never more amused than while watching their movements and listening to their songs, some of them have very fine voices. We waited until twelve o'clock and then left them to enjoy their supper, prepared for them by their overseer. I do not think the slaves here have as hard a time as white folks of the North, who work for a living. I think the abolitionist, were he to come South with a disposition to interfere with slavery, his sympathy would soon be for the master instead of the negro, for he is truly the most of a slave, I would not have the care of them for all they are worth, I shall be able to tell you much about slavery, tho it exists here it is only in name, on my return, and many things which have come under my observation since I left you, I promise myself much pleasure in talking over with you, should we all live to see each other once more. [12]

Owners, as this extract suggests, believed that the methods of control that they imposed on the courtship rituals and social lives of their slaves were benevolent. The following comment from the slave mistress Maria Bryan Harford reflects the same white perspective, but the persistence of the slave Jenny's suitor suggests a different slave perspective. Despite their belief that they were acting in the 'best interests' of their slaves, owners were actually exposing their lack of regard for slave romantic love by

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[12] Letter to John and Charles Marshall from 'grandmother', 19 April 1852, Marshall Family Papers, W.R.P.L.

assuming that they were the ones best qualified to make decisions on Jenny's courtship affairs. According to Maria Harford, Jenny's master:

> ...dislikes her more than anything in the world, he says if anyone was to make him a present of a plantation full of slaves, poor as he is, he would not accept the gift if the condition was that Jenny should always be around him....her head is nearly turned with flatteries, she has as many compliments to tell me of as Sophia used to. [She has] a great many suitors, among the bond and the free men of color. Captain Allen has a servant....he set his eyes admiringly at Jenny, from the first glance, and was in the kitchen night and day. The gate is always locked at nine o'clock....[He] refused to go home and when they told him we required everybody to depart after that time he jumped up and ran into Jenny's bedroom....She came in the house and told Mr. Harford of the shock she had been compelled to sustain. Mr. H[arford] knew his character and did not desire him to be intimate with the servant, told him to go off and never set foot in the [place] again. He, it appears, is sorrowful, but not despairing, sends her messages,begs her...[to ask Mr. Harford] to take off the injunction, makes her presents, the other Sunday he sent her five dollars. [13]

Owners possessed the authority, then, to break up courting slaves as well as married slave couples. This could be achieved most obviously through sales or separations. [14] However, other methods of control, namely systems of rewards and punishments, were also utilised by owners in their battle with slaves over autonomous courtship and marriage rituals. The case of the slave Mary-Ann, illustrates this well. She was sent from the home of Morcedai Cohen to the plantation of Michael Lazarus in order to prevent her from courting a man of whom her owners disapproved. Cohen said:

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[13] Letter to Julia A. B. Cumming from Maria Bryan Harford, c. 20 March 1833, Hammond-Bryan-Cumming Family Papers, S.C.L.

[14] See Chapter Six for a fuller discussion of sales and separations.

> I have taken the liberty...of sending up a negro woman named Mary-Ann, the most valuable wench I have, being an excellent seamstress, house servant. In fact I never owned one more so. The reason of my sending her up to you is merely to make an example of her. I will therefore thank you to put her in your plantation and let her stay there until you further hear from me. Before I conclude this hasty letter, I must add that there is a mutual affection existing between her and a very rascally fellow - who I have forbidden from coming near her. I hope that this measure will prove effectual and that she will not be troublesome to you. I will thank you not to let her know any other...and keep her at ...hard labor. [15]

He later stated:

> I am sorry to understand my negro girl Mary-Ann has been indisposed, [I] hope she has not been troublesome to you. You will receive by this opportunity a suit of coarse white plains, which I beg you to make her wear and keep her at as hard labour as you possibly can. Mrs. Cohen misses her services much. I can assure you that it gives us pain to use such unpleasant means to a wench who's fine disposition and the many good qualities united together, rendered the most valuable servant we ever had. [16]

Similarly, in the following case, physical violence was used to prevent a male slave from courting. Squire's owner, H. H. Townes, stated: 'Squire has not got...well yet, but much better. He is able to cut wood for me. He is as fat as an old bear. All the

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[15] Letter to Michael Lazarus from Morcedai Cohen, 2 October 1809, Lewis Malone Ayer Papers, S.C.L.

[16] Letter to Michael Lazarus from Morcedai Cohen, 10 November 1809, Lewis Malone Ayer Papers, S.C.L.

trouble I have with him, is to keep him from having a wife. I expect to have to whip him severely yet about his love affairs.' [17]

Owners therefore had rules and regulations that they tried to impose upon their slaves concerning their courtship and marriage rituals. Sometimes, too, owners simply denied their slaves the right to marry whom they chose. For example, Harriet Jacobs revealed in her autobiographical narrative how she fell in love with a free black man. Upon hearing this news, Jacobs' master, Dr. Flint, who also sexually abused Jacobs, said to her:

> '"So you want to be married, do you?...and to a free nigger."
>
> "Yes sir."
>
> "Well, I'll soon convince you whether I am your master, or the nigger fellow you honor so highly. If you *must* have a husband, you may take up with one of my slaves."
>
> What a situation I should be in, as the wife of one of *his* slaves, even if my heart had been interested!
>
> I replied, "Don't you suppose, sir, that a slave can have some preference about marrying? Do you suppose that all men are alike to her?"
>
> "Do you love this nigger?" said he, abruptly.
>
> "Yes, sir."
>
> "How dare you tell me so!" he exclaimed, in great wrath. [18]

Jacobs was subsequently not allowed to marry the man she loved.

Owners also sometimes used physical violence to prevent their slaves from visiting their loved ones, as will be seen in Chapter Two. Ironically though, whilst such measures allowed owners to reaffirm their paternalistic world view, through the

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[17] Letter to Mrs. Rachael Townes from H. H. Townes [son], 19 December 1833, Townes Family Papers, S.C.L.

[18] Jacobs, *Incidents*, 61.

belief that they were acting in the 'best interests' of their slaves, such actions would have caused resentment from the slave community, through the knowledge that owners did not truly respect the notion of slave romantic love. Thus the psychological distance and social space that existed between the lives of slave and owner would have been increased by these types of actions on the part of owners. Slaves and owners therefore engaged in battles over the extent of autonomy within slave social lives and their associated courtship rituals. Furthermore, the same may also be said of slave marriage rituals. Owners frequently demanded that their slaves ask their permission before they married, and owners also often attended slave weddings themselves. These acts both affirmed owners' beliefs in their own paternalism, and also imposed an element of control over the social events of their slaves.

The South Carolina W.P.A. respondent Andy Marion eloquently illustrated the frustrations felt by slaves in their struggle to court and marry within the confines imposed by owners when he said:

> A nigger had a hell of a time gittin' a wife durin' slavery. If you didn't see one on de place to suit you and chances was you didn't suit them, why what could you do? Couldn't spring up, grab a mule and ride to de next plantation widout a written pass. S'pose you gits your marster's consent to go? Look here, de gal's marster got to consent, de gal got to consent, de gal's daddy got to consent, de gal's mammy got to consent. It was a hell of a way. [19]

However, the fact that slaves did marry, and furthermore, lived in cross-plantation marriages, illustrates both slave community resilience and also the strength of slave romantic love.

Many of the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents emphasised the fact that permission was needed from masters before slaves could get married. For example

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[19] Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol. 3, Part 3, 17-168.

Sam Mitchell stated: 'If Maussa say "No, you can't marry dat girl", den dat settle it, you can't marry um.' He also said that slaves were married by a white preacher in the master's house. [20] Washington Dozier said: 'Aw colored peoples hadder do to marry den was to go to dey massa en ge' uh permit en consider demselves man en wife.' [21] Other respondents emphasised the control that owners tried to enforce over weddings themselves, whether this was through being married by a white preacher, or by locating the wedding itself within the master's house. George Fleming said that slaves were married by a white preacher in their master's backyard. [22] Susan Hamlin poignantly said:

> One t'ing, no minister nebber say in readin' de matrimony "let no man put asounder" 'cause a couple would be married tonight ab' tomorrow one would be taken away en be sold. All slaves wus married in dere master house, in de livin' room where slaves an' dere missus an' mossa wus to witness de ceremony. [23]

Similarly, Lucinda Miller told her interviewer that slaves had to be married by white preachers on the plantation in which she lived. [24] Albert Means, married during slavery, emphasised the fact that his master provided all the food and gifts at his wedding.[25] The control of marriage rituals was a part of the process by which owners maintained a benevolent self-image.

Furthermore, even if slaves were allowed to marry an individual of their own choosing, the attitudes of owners towards such marriages reveals both the deeply-held stereotypes and the patronizing attitudes that owners held towards their slaves. Owners

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20 Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol. 2, Part 1, 124; Vol. 3, Part 3, 201.
21 Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol. 2, Part 1 331.
22 Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol. 11, 136.
23 Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol. 2, Part 2, 234.
24 Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol. 3, Part 3, 192.
25 Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol. 3, Part 3, 183-184.

and slaves interpreted courtship and marriage in different ways. For the slave community, spousal love and support was of vital importance for cultural autonomy. Thus whilst slave marriages could be fun, they were also immensely significant and serious institutions for the slave community. Slave marriages were seen differently by owners, however, who could not afford to take too seriously the concept of slave romantic love.

The following description of a slave wedding by the white woman Anne Simons Deas, gives us an example of how owners and slaves interpreted slave wedding rituals in different ways. It will be seen later in this chapter how the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents frequently mentioned in their interviews the community parties that were held at slave weddings *after* the departure of whites. However, the white owners themselves assumed that it was their own participation in the wedding ceremony that was of significance. This tells us something about role playing by slaves; the slaves made their owners *feel* that they were important. It also tells us something about the paternalist world view of owners, through their belief in their own importance. Deas wrote:

> The bride was Tena, the assistant washer-woman, and as she is the niece of Maum Myra's deceased husband, Maum Myra took possession of the wedding festivities. She spent the whole day making and icing a cake, the materials being furnished by cousin Rachel. The wedding dress was an old party dress of Kathleen's which Maum Myra "did-up" beautifully for the occasion. The ceremony was performed at Maum Myra's house, and all the juniors of the family were invited....As soon as we had arrived, the bride and her four bridesmaids, all in white and looking very bashful, came out of the bedroom and were stationed by Maum Myra in a straight line across the floor, facing us. Across half the floor I should have said, for the bridegroom -- Mauney -- and his groomsmen came in from outside, and completed the line, the bride and groom standing side by side in the middle, and the others on each hand. Then

> the minister, who proved to be Sambo, popped up from somewhere, and took his station in front of the couple....He produced a prayer book, and read the Episcopal marriage service. He read correctly, but literally, giving us rubrics and all -- "Then the minister shall say" etc. etc. But first he lined out a hymn, and everyone in the room sang vigorously. When the service was over, he duly congratulated the bride, and we, perceiving from Maum Myra's fidgetiness that it was our turn, stepped forth and expressed out good wishes. Then we retired gracefully, leaving them to partake of the wedding supper. [26]

The above description therefore exposes some of the limitations of using white source materials for the study of slave community life. It is likely that the wedding described above would have been perceived very differently from the point of view of the slave. It would have been regarded as a significant community event. We therefore cannot find anything about, for example, the wedding supper that took place after the departure of the owners (from the wedding described by Deas). White commentators sometimes dwelt on the celebrations of slave marriages in the 'Big House'. [27] It seems likely that such marriage celebrations would have been those of 'key slaves', privileged slaves referred to frequently in the manuscript materials left by owners. [28] For the mass of field slaves, weddings would most likely have been very different affairs, with

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[26] Anne Simons Deas, "Two Years of Plantation Life", 85-87, S.C.L. [A fictionalised account, written in the 1890s, of life on Cedar Grove Plantation. Her cousin Alston Deas, in an introduction to the volume, states that Cedar Grove probably represented the Comingtee plantation of her uncle, Mr. Keating Ball.]

[27] On slave weddings, see also Sudie Duncan Sides, 'Slave Weddings and Religion: Plantation Life in the Southern States before the American Civil War' *History Today* **24** (1974), 85-86; and Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 479.

[28] For a definition and discussion on the concept of key slaves, see Tadman, 'Introduction' to *Speculators and Slaves* , and also Tadman, 'The Persistent Myth of Paternalism' *Sage Race Relations Abstracts* (forthcoming 1997).

more involvement from the black community and less involvement on the part of owners.

We can see something of the differences in the types of slave weddings from the narrative of I. E. Lowery, an ex-slave who was far from being a militant critic of the slavery system. In his narrative, Lowery states that, for most slaves, there was neither a religious wedding ceremony nor a marriage supper. He says, though, that 'There were a few isolated cases where the slaves were allowed to marry in due form and were given a wedding supper. These were the more prominent or favorite slaves, such as butlers, coachmen, nurses, chambermaids or cooks.' [29] As a 'favoured' slave himself though, it is likely that Lowery was sheltered from the weddings of rank-and-file slaves and their associated community events. [30] Also, it is likely that, in writing his conservative narrative, he wrote what he thought whites would want to hear.

Thus it is only when we examine the source materials of rank-and-file slaves that we can gain a glimpse into the culturally autonomous nature of slave weddings. Some of the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents, for example, commented that they were married by coloured preachers, rather than by their owner or by a white preacher.[31] It is unlikely that such weddings would be mentioned in the manuscript materials of their owners -- these types of source materials would instead be concerned with the weddings of their favoured slaves. However, it is important to acknowledge the significance of the community affairs of rank-and-file slaves, since it was through such events that slaves struggled to forge an autonomous cultural life.

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[29] Lowery, *Life on the Old Plantation*, 61.

[30] See Lowery, *Life on the Old Plantation*, 15. Lowery was a domestic slave who lived in the 'Big House' with his master and mistress.

[31] George Wood said that slaves were married by a 'jack-legged' coloured preacher. See Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 4, 250. Gordon Bluford, a female who was married during slavery times, was also married by a coloured preacher. See Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 63.

In particular, the W.P.A. respondents frequently mentioned the festivities they took part in *after* a more formal wedding ceremony. Again, we would not find out about such events from white manuscript materials. For example, Gus Feaster said:

> Twan't no dressing up fer marring in slavery times; just say, "gwine to be a marriage tonight" and you see 'bout 40 or 50 folks dar to see it. If it be in wa'melon time, *dey had a big feast atter de wedding.* Old man preacher Tony would marry you fer nothing. De keep de wedding cake fer three weeks befo' it was eat. [italics added] [32]

Similarly, Morgan Scurry said that slave marriages were attended by whites, but that afterwards, slaves had their own feasts. [33] Margaret Hughes also said:

> Well, we had a big time when any of de slaves got married. Da massa and de missus let them get married in de big house, *and then we had a big dance at one of de slave house.* De white folks furnish all kinds of good things to eat, and de colored peoples furnish de music for de dance. [Italics added] [34]

With slave marriages then, owners convinced themselves that they made an important contribution, and in doing so they reinforced their own paternalist world view. In contrast, slaves strove to maintain an autonomous culture through the independent wedding celebrations that occurred *after* the departure of whites. Owners' attitudes were selective. They reinforced their benevolent self-image by selective 'benevolence' to key slaves, while their belittling of slave romantic love was part of the rationalisation of white dominance.

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[32] Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol. 2, Part 2, 47.

[33] Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol. 3, Part 4, 90.

[34] Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol. 2, Part 2, 329.

Affection between spouses

We have seen how slave males and females, through their community activities, acted out their courtship and marriage rituals. We can now examine both the extent and nature of the affection between slave spouses. It will be argued that slaves strove to choose their own marriage partners, and also to live with their chosen spouses in nuclear family units. Even if slaves fell in love with someone who belonged to another owner, or someone of whom their owners disapproved, the autonomy of the slave community, coupled with the social space that existed between the lives of masters and slaves, meant that slaves still desired to marry the partner of their choice.

In order to examine affection between slave spouses, a sample of full-length slave narratives has been consulted. Indeed, it is within such narratives that we can see some of the most eloquent expressions of spousal affection. This is because of the fact that many of the authors of such narratives were forcibly separated from their spouses and families. A common theme apparent throughout these full-length narratives is love between slave spouses despite adversity. [35] Furthermore, this affection was something that was mentioned within these full-length narratives for slaves of all phases of the antebellum period. This is of significance since it suggests a persistent pattern of commitment between slave spouses, and considerable inter-generational morale within the slave community.

Typical of the full-length slave narratives are the following comments that were made by the authors after having been separated from their spouses and children. The slave Charles Ball for example, who was sold to a slave trader and taken from his home in Maryland to South Carolina and Georgia, frequently mentioned the anguish he felt at

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[35] For example, John Blassingame has noted that: 'Affection was apparently the most important factor which kept partners together. This emerges most clearly in the lamentations and resentments which pervade the autobiographies over the separation of family members.'See Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 171.

being parted from his wife and children, as well as from his wider familial network. On one occasion, Ball stated:

> I slept but little this night, which I passed in thinking of my wife and little children, whom I could not hope ever to see again. I also thought of my grandfather, and of the long nights I had passed with him, listening to his narratives of the scenes through which he had passed in Africa. I at length fell asleep, but was distressed by painful dreams. My wife and children appeared to be weeping and lamenting my calamity; and beseeching and imploring my master on their knees, not to carry me away from them. My little boy came and begged me not to go and leave him, and endeavoured, as I thought, with his little hands to break the fetters that bound me. I awoke in agony and cursed my existence. I could not pray, for the measure of my woes seemed to be full, and I felt as if there was no mercy in heaven, nor compassion on earth, for a man who was born a slave. [36]

Another common theme that emerges from full-length slave narratives is the expression of joy at being re-united with slave spouses, often following the running away of the author. In Ball's case, he focuses on the joy of his wife at being re-united with him. He stated:

> My wife, who at first was overcome by astonishment at seeing me again in her cabin, and was incapable of giving credit to the fidelity of her own vision, after I had been in the house a few minutes, seemed to awake from a dream; and gathering all three of her children in her arms, thrust them into my lap, as I sat in the corner, clapped her hands, laughed, and cried by turns; and in her ecstasy forgot to give me any supper until I at length told her I was hungry. [37]

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[36] Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 31-32.

[37] Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 387.

We can see from the comments of Ball that, despite being separated from his wife and children, he never lost his love for them; indeed, it was the desire to see them again that enticed him to run away. The importance of both the desire for a spouse and spousal ties therefore should not be underestimated. In the narrative of Tom Jones for example, Jones is explicit in his desire for spousal companionship as a means of resistance to the oppression of slavery. Upon reaching adulthood, he stated:

> About this time, I began to feel very lonely. I wanted a friend to whom I could tell my story of sorrows, of unsatisfied longing, of new and fondly cherished plans. I wanted a companion with whom I could love with all my warm affections, who should love me in return with a true and fervent heart, of whom I might think when toiling for a selfish, unfeeling master; who should dwell fondly on my memory when we were separated during the severe labors of the day, and with whom I might enjoy the blessed happiness of social endearments after the work of each day was over. My heart yearned to have a home, if it was only the wretched home of the unprotected slave, to have a wife to love me and to love....And so I sought to love and to win a true heart in return. I did this, too, with a full knowledge of thy desperate agony that the slave husband and father is exposed to. Had I not seen this in the anguish of my own parents? Yea, I saw it in every public auction, where men and women and children were brought upon the block, examined, and bought. I saw it on such occasions, in the hopeless agony depicted on the countenance of husband and wife, there separated to meet no more in this cruel world....And yet I sought to become a husband and father, because I felt that I could live no longer unloved and unloving. [38]

Tom Jones illustrates well the desire for the love of a spouse felt by slaves as a means of gaining meaning, companionship, being able to survive, and ultimately as a

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[38] Tom Jones, *Experience and Personal Narrative*, 22-23.

means of resisting the oppression of slavery. Furthermore, slaves desired to meet a member of the opposite sex and to marry *despite* the hardships that their marriage might face. This illustrates the immense importance of being loved, and being able to love, on the part of slaves. Unfortunately for Tom Jones, his marriage ended in heartache when his wife's mistress moved from North Carolina to Alabama, taking Jones's wife with her. Jones eloquently described their separation:

> Our sobs and tears were our only adieu. Our hearts were too full of anguish for any other expression of our hopeless woe. I have never seen that dear family since, nor have I heard from them since I parted from them there. God only know the bitterness of my agony, experienced in the separation of my wife and children from me. [39]

Love and affection between slaves of the opposite sex is also a frequent theme in female slave full-length narratives. For example, Martha Griffith Brown, in her autobiography, spoke eloquently of the love she felt for a slave, Henry. She stated:

> Slaves as we were, I've often thought as we wandered beneath the golden light of the stars, that, for the first time being, we were as happy as mortals could be. Young first love knit the air as a charmed silver mist around us; and hand in hand, we trod the wave-washed shore, always with our eyes turned toward the North, the bourne whither all our thoughts inclined. [40]

As with the narratives of male slaves, Griffiths was suggesting that through gaining the love of another slave, happiness could be found despite the oppression of slavery. Harriet Jacobs, however, who was, from an early age, sexually abused by her master, Dr. Flint, wrote in more pessimistic tones about falling in love. Jacobs had fallen in love with a free black man in her neighbourhood, but was banned from seeing him by Dr. Flint. Possibly as a result of the cruelty inflicted upon her by her master, Jacobs

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[39] Tom Jones, *Experience and Personal Narrative*, 24.

[40] Griffiths, *Autobiography of a Female Slave*, 313.

stated, somewhat cynically: 'Why does the slave ever love? Why allow the tendrils of the heart to twine around objects which may at any moment be wrenched away by the hand of violence?' [41]

The comments made by Jacobs, however, do appear to be atypical. From the evidence gleaned from both the W.P.A. and full-length slave narratives, it appears that the majority of slaves saw marriage and then settling into a stable nuclear partnership as the norm. Slaves strove for the love of a spouse despite all the problems and heartache that this could bring. It is therefore true that for most slaves, there were numerous perils associated with falling in love, namely being separated from their loved ones through enforced separations, sales or death. Male slaves also had sometimes to witness the physical or sexual abuse of their loved ones by white slave owners. However, the fact that the majority of slaves still desired both to fall in love and to overcome the hardships of slavery with the support of a spouse, must be recognised as one of the most positive accomplishments of slaves under the brutal system of slavery.[42]

Gender differences in courtship and marriage rituals

Significant gender differences are apparent in the courtship and marriage patterns of slaves. Male slaves played a dominant role in courtship and marriage rituals by trying to win the affections of females. Furthermore, we can see from the comments

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41 Jacobs, *Incidents*, 58.

42 Historians have recently placed increased emphasis on the positive accomplishments of slave life and culture. This signals a move away from the previous emphasis upon the negative impacts upon the slaves of the master's behaviour. For further analysis of this concept see Engerman, 'Concluding Reflections', in Hudson, *Working Toward Freedom*, 233-241, especially 235. Deborah White has also emphasised this point. She notes that despite the fact that slave men had a lot to lose from romantic liaisons, they also had a lot to gain, and thus still strove to find a wife. See White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 145-146.

made by some of the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents that courting females was also something that male slaves greatly enjoyed. For example, when Frank Adamson was asked if he did any courting under slavery, he replied: 'Did me ever do any courtin? You knows I did. Every he thing from a he king down to a bunty rooster gits 'cited 'bout she things. I's lay wake many nights 'bout sich things. It's de nature of a he, to take after de she. '[43]

It was also male slaves who travelled to visit females (as will be shown in the next chapter). It was therefore males who faced the risk of being caught by patrollers and whipped for being off their place of residence. Even so, female slaves, although generally not at risk of being caught and whipped by the patrollers for being off their place of residence, still worried about their husbands and fathers who were doing the visiting. Julia Woodberry claimed:

> Cose dey [slave men and women] wouldn' live together cause dey wives would be here, dere en yonder. It been like dis, sometimes de white folks would sell de wife of one of dey niggers way from dey husband en den another time, dey would sell de husband away from dey wife. Yes, mam, white folks had dese guard, call patroller, all bout de country to catch en whip dem niggers dat been prowl bout widout dat strip [of paper] from dey Massa. [44]

The South Carolina W.P.A. male respondents in general appear to have either been more keen - or else more willing - to talk to their interviewers about courtship than the female respondents. A theme frequently mentioned was that of impressing slave females at social events. This tells us something about the autonomy of the slave community, that slaves were capable of pleasure and enjoyment in their social lives. The ex-slave George Fleming recalled:

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[43] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 16.

[44] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 4, 238.

> Lawd dey sho did kick up de dust at dem frolics. De music was mostly made by fiddles, and sometimes dey had quill blowers. De quills was made frum cane, same as de spindles was but dey was cut longer and was different sizes....Gals wouldn't look at nobody else when I start blowing de quills.Dar was also heaps and lots of other big affairs 'sides de frolics. De cornshuckings - Lawd-a-mercy, you ain't seen nothing. Niggers frum all over de place shucking corn and somebody setting on one of de big piles calling de cornshucking song, jes' like dey do in de square dance. Dat kept 'em happy - everybody jine in de chorus. A jug of liquor sot at de bottom of de pile; everybody try to be first to get to de liquor. Lawd, dey holler and take on something awful when dey get to de bottom. White folks have big supper ready; liquor; brandy and everything. Dem was de times; pick up somebody and kivver 'em wid de shucks. Had cotton pickings too. Dat work not so fast but we had good times. [45]

Gus Feaster described how young male slaves attempted to impress slave girls. He stated:

> When boys and gals gits up some size dey feels deyselves. At dat age we went bird thrashing in de moonlight. Den we sing dis vulgar song, "I'll give you half-dollar if you come out tonight; I'll give you half-dollar if you come out tonight". Den de gals charmed us wid honeysuckle and rose petals hid in dere bosoms. [46]

George Fleming has continued this theme:

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[45] Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol. 11, 128. This comment also shows how the white slave owners set limits to the autonomy of the slave community's social events through their own involvement (in the above case, by preparing the supper). This allowed the slave owners to reaffirm their belief in their own benevolent paternalism, as has been seen earlier in this chapter.

[46] Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol. 2, Part 2, 51-52.

> De older boys and gals had big frolics, 'specially in de fall of de year. Sometimes dey be on our plantation, and agin dey be on neighbouring ones....One game dey played was "please and displease". When de gal say, "What it take to please you?" de boy say, "A kiss frum dat purty gal over dar". Yes, dey played "hack-back", too. Dat's when day faced each other and trotted back and forth. [47]

Similarly, Gable Lockier said:

> Cotton pickin en corn shuckin days won' no work times. Dey was big frolics. De first one shuck red corn had to tell who his best girl was en all dem things...Pick cotton till bout 5:30 in de evenin en dem knock off for de eats en de dancin. Go to all de slaves weddings too. Dey would mostly get married bout on a Sunday evenin. [48]

Several historians, including John Blassingame and Lawrence Levine, have pointed to the pattern that we have just seen -- that of males initiating courtship. [49] Blassingame pointed to the African influences upon slave courtship rituals:

> Traditionally, Africans resorted to metaphor, indirection, story-telling, poems, songs, riddles, and symbolic language in their courtship and betrothal rituals....The combination of African and American elements led to the evolution of unique courtship practices in the slave quarters....The courtship ritual consisted of riddles, poetic boasting, sexual innuendos, figurative speech, circumlocution, and was a test of wit. [50]

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[47] Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol. 11, 127-128.

[48] Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol. 3, Part 3, 115.

[49] See Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 159-160; Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 95-111. Similarly, Jacqueline Jones has claimed that it was male slaves who formally initiated the courting process. See Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love*, 33. See also White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 143-145; and Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 468-471.

[50] Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 157-158.

In a similar vein, Lawrence W. Levine, in his study of African-American folk thought, describes the ways in which slave folk tales deal with everyday human relationships, including courtship, marriage and the relationships between slave males and females. Frequently in such courtship tales, women are regarded as possessions to be fought over. Levine relates one such tale:

> Rabbit and Wolf vie for the favors of a woman who is pictured as either equally torn between her two suitors or leaning toward Wolf. Rabbit alters the contest by professing surprise that she could be interested in Wolf , since he is merely Rabbit's riding horse. Hearing of this, Wolf confronts Rabbit, who denies ever saying it and promises to go to the woman and personally refute the libel as soon as he is well enough. Wolf insists he go at once, and the characteristic combination of Rabbit's deceit and Wolf's seemingly endless trust and gullibility allows Rabbit to convince his adversary that he is too sick to go with him unless he can ride on Wolf's back with a saddle and bridle for support....Approaching the woman's house Rabbit tightens the reins, digs a pair of spurs into Wolf, and trots him around crying "Look here, girl! what I told you? Didn't I say I had Brother Wolf for my riding-horse?. [51]

Levine argues that within such tales (which can tell us much about slave community life through their allegories), mastery for the slave is achieved through possessing the two paramount symbols of power -- food and women. [52] He also notes how slave folk tales often referred to the 'moral inconsistency and overweening pride of women', whilst slave fathers normally emerged as 'the chief protector and avenger of his children'. [53] This in itself reveals much about the nature of gender relations under slavery, and runs counter to the assertion that slave males were emasculated by the experience of slavery. Levine notes:

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[51] Levine, *Black Culture*, 111.

[52] Levine, *Black Culture*, 111.

[53] Levine, *Black Culture*, 95.

> They [slave folk tales] were utilized to inculcate a vision of the good and moral life by stressing the ideals of friendship. cooperation, meaningful activity, and family love. Their denigration of the aggressive women and their tendency to celebrate the father as the family's chief protector and provider must be taken into account in any reformulation of our understanding of familial patterns and male-female relations among Afro-Americans. [54]

Black sources, whether folk tales or slave narratives, open up a black social world that is invisible in white sources. The narratives, as we have seen, consistently emphasise the importance of marriage and family, and it is rare to find ex-slaves denigrating family life. Folk tales might hint at 'macho' adventures, but the slave narratives suggest that more settled family attitudes were the norm in the long-run.

Antagonism between male and female slaves

The pattern of positive relationships between spouses in reinforced when we look at the problem of sexual and physical abuse. Slave women could, theoretically, face abuse from slave men. Evidence from the narratives suggests, however, that the threat of abuse came overwhelmingly from white, not black, men. Sexual abuse will be examined first. However, any evidence of sexual abuse that slave women received at the hands of slave men is notoriously difficult to discover. Often, generalizations about male-female relationships under slavery have been made by historians on the basis of preconceived notions about the nature of the relationship between the sexes in general. For example, bell hooks, who believes that 'sexism looms as large as racism as an oppressive force in the lives of black women', [55] claims that the rape of black women by black men under slavery serves as an indication of the fact that the primary instinct of black males under slavery was towards self-preservation, rather than the protection

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[54] Levine, *Black Culture*, 97.

[55] hooks, *Ain't I a Woman?*, 15

of slave women. She claims, furthermore, that male slaves in the antebellum South imitated the behaviour of white males by sexually abusing slave women. [56]

hooks, however, does not attempt to provide any documentary evidence with which to back up her assertions, although she has since attempted to justify her lack of both evidence and footnoting. [57] Similarly, Susan Brownmiller has argued that: 'It is consistent with the nature of oppression that within an oppressed group, men abuse women.' [58] She notes that a variety of males, from plantation masters, through lower-class whites, down to the black driver on a plantation, were all in a position to abuse slave women, since all played enforcer roles within the system of slavery.[59] However, Brownmiller displays only two pieces of evidence to back up her claims . One was from a Maryland advertisement for a runaway male slave who had raped a female slave.[60] The other was from the journal of Fanny Kemble. Brownmiller states that when Kemble questioned her husband's slaves about the paternity of their offspring, the name of a black driver was frequently mentioned. [61] Despite Brownmiller's lack of systematic evidence on the rape of slave women by slave men though, she does raise an important point when she mentions that the male slave rapist in question was a driver. It may be suggested that elite male slaves, who were in positions of power and authority over other slaves, would have been the most likely sexually to abuse slave women.

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[56] hooks, *Ain't I a Woman?*, 35.

[57] See 'A Class Sister Act,' *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 13 October 1995, 20. hooks claimed here that she had written scholarly, meticulously referenced work in her thesis. In her books however, she was aiming to write for the largest possible audience.

[58] Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 157.

[59] Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 158.

[60] Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 163.

[61] Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 167.

In the South Carolina W.P.A. narratives, only one case of a slave man attempting to rape a slave women was mentioned. In this case, the slave man was a driver. Benjamin Horry reported that a black driver on his place of residence tried to abuse female slaves. Horry stated:

> If one them driver want you (want big frame gal like you Lillie!) [his daughter] they give you task you can't do. You getting this beating not for your task - for your flesh!....[This overseer said to the female slaves] 'Go to that barn!' You go.' You could yeddy him slap cross dat creek! ...I stand dere and my Daddy have to stand dere and see!....White obersheer a little different for one reason! White obersheer want to hold his job. [62]

Horry brought the subject up again later, when he said:

> My mother won't do all he [the black driver] say. When he say, 'You go barn and stay till I come', she ain't do 'em. So he have it in for my mother and lay task on 'em she ain't able for do. Then for punishment my mother is take to the barn and strapped down on thing called the pony. Hands spread like this and strapped to the floor and all two both she feet been tie like this. And she been give twenty five to fifty lashes till the blood flow. And my father and me stand right there and look and ain't able to lift a hand!. [63]

Horry seems to be suggesting that because his mother would not submit to the driver's sexual desires, she was whipped. Adding to the horror of this event is the fact that the woman's own son [Horry], and husband had to witness the event. The sense of helplessness expressed by Horry over this occurrence therefore goes against the claim of hooks that the first instinct of males under slavery was towards self preservation. Within this case though, there may be some support for hooks' claim that slave men, in this case a black driver, imitated the behaviour of white men under slavery. Since white

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62 Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 305-306.

63 Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 310-311.

men sexually abused slave women, some slave men, especially those in powerful positions, may have desired to do the same. [64] However, it is the *extent* to which slave men as a whole sexually abused slave women, compared to the extent of sexual abuse slave women suffered at the hands of white men, that is of significance here.

For this investigation the entire collection of W.P.A. slave narratives (including some supplementary volumes), was examined using the *Index To The American Slave.* [65] The sample therefore comprised some several thousand narratives. All index entries for 'Overseers, Drivers and Foremen (Black)' were consulted, along with all entries for 'Sexual Practices, Slave', and 'Slave Breeding'. Apart from the South Carolina case just cited, only two other cases of a slave woman being sexually abused by a male slave were found in the narratives as a whole. In the first case, the man in question was a black overseer, which again lends support to the proposition that slave men in positions of authority were more likely than other male slaves sexually to abuse slave women. The respondent, Anna Baker of Mississippi, said that her grandmother had run away during slavery: 'It was on 'count o' de nigger overseers....Dey kep' a-tryin' to mess 'roun' wid her an' she wouldn' have nothin' to do wid 'em.' [66]

In the second case, Mary Gaffney of Texas said that she hated the man that her master forced her to marry:

> When I was married it was just a home wedding, fact is, I just hated the man I married but it was what Maser said do....I would not let that negro touch me

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[64] hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, 35. By stating that some slave men imitated the behaviour of white men, I am not denying the fact that the abuse of slave women by slave men pales in comparison to the abuse of slave women by white men.

[65] See Donald M. Jacobs, *Index To The American Slave.*

[66] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 7, Part 2, 13.

and he told Maser and Maser gave me a real good whipping, so that night I let that negro have his way. [67]

In this case though, we do not know whether the slave man in question would have sexually abused Gaffney had his master not said that they were married. Furthermore, the fact that only three cases of sexual abuse by slave men were mentioned in the massive collection of W.P.A. narratives, means that it is probable that the risk of being sexually abused by a slave man was small, especially when compared to the risk of being sexually abused by a white man.

The fact that only three instance of black-on-black sexual abuse was mentioned in the South Carolina W.P.A. narratives, coupled with the fact that no instances of black-on-black sexual abuse were mentioned in the sample of full-length slave narratives, suggests that the level of black-on-black sexual abuse was extremely small, especially when compared with the sexual abuse of slave women by white men. We can also do a somewhat crude comparison of the relative importance of black rape and white rape in the South Carolina W.P.A. narratives. There were 29 respondents who had knowledge of either the sexual abuse of slave women at the hands of white men, or else of sexual liaisons between slave women and white men. [68] This represents 8.7 per cent of all respondents, compared to the 0.3 per cent of respondents, namely Horry, who knew of black-on-black sexual abuse.

Even allowing for the fact that some of the sexual encounters between slave women and white men may have taken the form of a sexual relationship rather than sexual abuse, when compared with the fact that only one incident of black-on-black sexual abuse was related by the respondents, it does mean that we can say with relative certainty that the rape of slave women by white men was far more common than the

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[67] Rawick, *The American Slave: Supplement Series 2*, Vol. 5, Part 4, 1453.

[68] See Chapter Five for a full discussion of the extent of sexual abuse of slave women by white men in the W.P.A. narratives.

rape of slave women by black men. Thus we can again see how the norm within the slave community was towards slave men supporting slave women. Despite the fact that slave men possessed the capacity sexually to abuse slave women, they did not assert their gender dominance in this realm of life. The dread in slave narratives was of white, not black, sexual abuse of slave women. Furthermore, the evidence given in Chapter Two, whereby slave men tried to protect their wives against physical or sexual abuse at the hands of white men, reinforces this claim.

Another form of exploitation that female slaves could face at the hands of male slaves was that of domestic violence. This was another area of life where male slaves could attempt to assert their gender dominance. Significantly, no instances of domestic abuse emerged from a reading of the South Carolina W.P.A. narratives. Whilst it is true that this would be an issue that ex-slaves might have been reluctant to discuss with their white interviewers, the fact that it was not mentioned, coupled with the fact that a great many references were made on the love and affection between slave couples, supports the claim that love and support between slave couples was the norm.

Marital disharmony between slave couples was, however, referred to in the manuscript source materials left by white slave owners, and it was also referred to once in the sample of full-length slave narratives used in this thesis. In his narrative, Charles Ball mentions a female slave, Lydia, who did not enjoy the benefits of a supportive slave marriage. Ball stated:

> Her husband, a native of a country far in the interior of Africa, said he had been a priest in his own nation, and had never been taught to do any kind of labor, being supported by the contributions of the public; and he now maintained, as far as he could, the same kind of lazy dignity that he had enjoyed at

home....This man was very irritable, and often beat and otherwise maltreated his wife, on the slightest provocation. [69]

In this case then, Ball seems to be suggesting that it was because Lydia's husband had a very unusual African background that she was beaten. This implicitly suggests that the norm among American-born slaves was towards spousal support.

Marital disharmony was also referred to in the manuscript materials left by white slave owners. This is probably because marital disharmony among slaves, especially on the scale related below, would have impacted upon owners. This case of alleged domestic abuse by a slave husband was detailed in one of the many letters of Elizabeth Franklin Perry to her husband Benjamin. The nature of the case means that quoting from the letter in some depth has been necessary in order to put the incident into context. Perry stated:

> I am very sorry to tell you that Jim and Maria are getting along very badly. Yesterday afternoon Maria's mother Winnie came to me crying and said she had heard Jim had been abusing Maria, had beat her, broke her head, cut her face...she said her master would take Maria back at any time. I told her I did not believe all that, but I was going to the farm, I would see about it. So when I went I found Jim's abuse of her had been exaggerated. Maria was alone in the house, everything about her filthy, the floor not even swept, the beds, pails etc... all dirty, she showed me a scar on her neck, where Jim had struck her, I talked to her and gave her some good advice about doing better.
>
> I then went to Charles's house and there saw Jim, and told him Maria's mother had been to me. He said he had struck Maria about three blows, that it was not half she deserved, that she was the worst creature that ever was...that he felt when he married her that he was doing wrong...that she behaved so audaciously just after she was married...that she is obstinate... and lazy and

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[69] Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 197.

dirty, that she wont clean the house, wash his clothes or mend them, or even wash hers, that their meals she would give them in dirty plates, that they had eaten peas in days before, the peas all sticking to them, that often he had to neglect his work in the field to clean the home and wash the dishes, that he was sorry when you [the writer's husband, Benjamin Franklin Perry] bought Maria...[he] was in hope that when he got her to the farm away from her family she might do better, that she was worse than James, if you watched James he would work, but Maria you could not make work, and the more you coaxed and tried to please her the worse she was. she would not hoe or do anything. Charles corroborated all he said.

I told Jim as Winnie said, Mr. Couble [Maria's former owner] would take Maria back, to ask Mr. Couble to come and speak to me, for though I would not act in your absence I would like to know if he would. So Mr. Couble came this morning and to my great sorrow said Winnie had no authority for saying what she did, that nothing would induce him to take Maria back, not if he were given five negroes along with her, and described her character precisely as Jim had done, says Mrs. Couble would not have her on any account...that she is lazy, obstinate ....that he would not have her in the yard, that he told you what she was when you bought her, that she would do nothing, not even spin, if he did tell you this I think it was astonishing you should think of buying her...I want her sold to the first drover [slave trader] who passes. Jim says though he loves and respects you and would rather belong to you than anyone else, rather than be with Maria he would like you to sell him. He says Maria can work if she chooses, but ...you are not strict enough with your servants, you can't make them work, and Mr. Couble says you are not a good manager of servants,

and I have always said that. Now I have done with Maria, hoping you will sell her as soon as possible. I have never liked her. [70]

The above case raises many issues aside from the alleged domestic abuse of Maria by her husband, Jim. It also shows a slave mother trying to help her daughter, and turning to her daughter's mistress for help. In this case, however, help was not forthcoming. The case also shows how the violence towards Maria was seen as justifiable because of the fact that she was not adept in her role as home-maker. Since the bulk of domestic work fell on slave women, not conforming to expected gender conventions could have dire consequences, as illustrated by Elizabeth Franklin Perry's lack of sympathy for the plight of Maria. [71] Because she failed to perform her perceived 'duties' in her own home, Maria was the victim of a sexual discrimination not unique to slavery. However, she was also a victim of racial discrimination in this case. It was the racism of her mistress that prevented her from expressing any support for Maria.

It was generally assumed by the wider society of the nineteenth century South, that, since males, including slave males, were the heads of households, they had the ultimate control over their wives, including the right to beat them. Therefore, one way in which slave owners attempted to deny the humanity of their slaves was by removing or controlling this 'right' from their male slaves. For example, the 'Rules for government of plantation' on John B. Miller's plantation near Sumter, South Carolina, stated: 'no man must whip his wife without my permission.' The irony displayed here though, is that despite the fact that the slave owner in question believed he was denying his male slaves the autonomous 'right' to beat their wives, and thus denying them an

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[70] Letter to Benjamin Franklin Perry from Elizabeth Perry, 11 May 1846, Benjamin Franklin Perry Papers, S.C.L.

[71] See Chapter Four for an analysis of the gender exploitation of female slaves in the realm of work.

area of cultural autonomy from whites, as this thesis demonstrates, it was not through violence but through affection, that slave couples managed to maintain both their humanity, and an autonomous community life.

Whilst the fact that slave men had the capability of sexually or physically abusing slave women meant that in at least this respect, the lives of slave women and slave men had the potential to be very different, the norm within the slave community was actually towards slave couples providing support for each other in the face of the oppression of slavery. The slave narratives suggest that, despite being protectors of and the providers for their families, the norm was that male slaves did not attempt to assert their gender dominance through the realms of physical or sexual abuse of slave women. The relationships between male and female slaves therefore, can be best characterized as broadly egalitarian and supportive. [72]

Conclusions

An examination of slave courtship and marriage rituals can be immensely illuminating in any investigation into slave community life. We can find out much about the nature of slavery from a comparison of the black and white source materials pertaining to slave courtship and marriage. While owners saw themselves as benevolent and paternalistic (a self-image they sought to reinforce through their intervention in slave courtship and marriage rituals), the mass of slaves saw their masters very differently. These slaves strove to act out their courtship and marriage rituals despite the constant interference of white slave owners, whose various rules, regulations, incentives and punishments inhibited the autonomous community life of slaves. A gulf

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[72] Deborah White has argued that this equality was founded upon the complimentary roles that were played by slave men and slave women. See White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 158.

therefore existed between the world view of slave owners and their actual treatment of slaves. [73]

While white sources emphasised slave 'promiscuity' and took slave marriage and family less than seriously, the slave narratives tell a very different story. Slaves sought autonomous family lives, and the mutual support and affection of husband and wife was the norm. The overwhelming tone of the slave evidence was positive. Slaves therefore took marriage and the family very seriously, and strove for autonomy within their courtship and marriage rituals. Furthermore, in their quest for autonomy, slaves acted upon their desire to live in stable, nuclear partnerships.

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[73] On the gulf between the world view of slave owners and their treatment of their slaves, see Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*. xxi-xxii. Also 'The Persistent Myth of Paternalism'.

Chapter Two

Family Structure: The Importance of Cross-Plantation Marriages

> My husband was a slave of de Sloans and didn't get to see me as often as he wanted to; and of course, as de housemaid then, dere was times I couldn't meet him, clandestine like he want me. Us had some grief over dat, but he got a pass twice a week from his marster, Marse Tommie Sloan, to come to see me....Sam was a field hand and drive de wagon way to Charleston once a year wid cotton, and always bring back something pretty for me. [1]

Introduction

In order to take further the argument that, despite owners, a strong sense of family was the norm among South Carolina slaves, the structure of slave families will now be examined. This chapter is concerned with the extent to which two-parent families were the norm among slaves, and particular attention will be paid to cross-plantation marriages (that is, where husband and wife lived on different slaveholdings). Hitherto, historians have found it difficult to assess the extent and nature of such marriages. This is largely because white sources give no basis for estimating their scale or character. Estate papers and business records often list slaves belonging to a particular owner, but such lists give no indication of spouses and other relatives of those slaves who might belong to neighbours. Similarly, except for scattered comments on visiting privileges given to certain slaves, or references to the possible advantages and inconveniences of allowing slaves to marry off the plantation, owners took little interest in the vigour of such unions.

Black sources, and the W.P.A.narratives in particular, are probably the only sources from which we can reconstruct the numerical importance of these cross-

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[1] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 300.

plantation marriages, and from which we can gain a substantial sample to investigate their character. This chapter will argue that cross-plantation unions accounted for some 34 per cent of slave households. It will argue that cross-plantation marriages were far from weak and nominal relationships. Instead, these marriages, like same-residence unions, were usually vigorously supported by the slaves concerned, as the comments of Louisa Davis illustrate. Cross-plantation unions therefore point to the resilience of the slave community.

Cross-plantation marriages, although they have not been closely researched by historians, have often been assumed to be weak and unstable. Essentially, however, historians have developed speculative interpretations on the nature of these unions from a combination of their overall view of slavery and the use of scattered quotations. Kenneth Stampp, in *The Peculiar Institution*, emphasised absent fathers and the weakness of slave marriages and this tradition passed on into the Moynihan Report of 1965. [2] Later, in seeking to reinstate the slave family, and in particular, the husband-oriented nuclear family, Herbert Gutman focused mainly on consolidated residence families, although he did emphasise that when freedom came ex-slaves made great efforts to reunite families that had been split between different locations. [3] Some writers have recently commented on the possible benefits for *owners* of cross-plantation marriages. Eugene Genovese claimed that owners 'knew that a man who fell in love with a woman off the place would be a poor and sullen worker, and probably soon a runaway, if deprived of his choice.'[4] Similarly, Richard Steckel has argued that owners benefited from slave marriages, including cross-plantation unions since: 'The

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[2] See Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution*, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family*.

[3] See Gutman, *The Black Family*.

[4] Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 473.

slaves were probably better workers when connected to a desirable home life and [for the owner of the wife] the marriages also yielded offspring.' [5]

Paul Escott's study of the W.P.A. narratives touched briefly and impressionistically on cross-plantation marriages and suggested that such unions were viable. [6] Stephen Crawford's study of W.P.A. narratives, however, was much more detailed than Escott's, and included some analysis on the statistical importance and viability of cross-plantation unions. [7] This study would agree with his overall conclusion that: 'Clearly an overwhelming majority of those mentioning anything about visiting [to maintain cross-plantation unions] claimed that their fathers visited regularly.' [8] This study will, however, revise Crawford's statistical results, and will make more ambitious claims for the importance of cross-plantation marriages within slave society. Deborah White speculated that from the slave, rather than the master's point of view, cross-plantation marriages might have held benefits for slaves. She argued that

> Although an abroad marriage had its problems, many couples preferred this arrangement. Jealousies and suspicions *were* harder to deal with at a distance, but spouses were also spared the misery of witnessing each other's abuse....Abroad marriages usually contributed to the independence of women from their husbands. If men were not always present to fall back on, women were compelled to develop methods of dealing with domestic responsibilities and crises. [9]

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[5] Richard H. Steckel, *The Economics of U.S. Slave and Southern White Fertility* (New York: Garland 1985), 229.

[6] Escott, *Slavery Remembered*, 50-52, 62.

[7] Crawford, "Quantified Memory" 149-154.

[8] Crawford, "Quantified Memory" 151.

[9] White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 154.

This study will also consider the significance of cross-plantation marriages from the perspective of the slave, but with a different emphasis from that of White. Some slaves lived in cross-plantation unions because of practical necessity (for example because they lived on small slaveholdings with no suitable marriage partners). But, the very existence of cross-plantation marriages among slaves who lived on larger units suggests a desire on the part of slaves for autonomy from their owners. Slaves strove to make their own marital decisions. Moreover, cross-plantation marriages are also suggestive of the gender patterns that operated within the world of the slaves. The fact that male slaves frequently risked the wrath of their owners and the patrollers in visiting their wives and girlfriends is illustrative not only of the extent of male-female bonding, but also of notions of the role of the male. It was males, not females, who saw it as their role to undertake visits, and this role suggests wider conclusions -- that male slaves, despite slavery, saw themselves as initiators, protectors and providers.

The extent of cross-plantation marriages: methodology and results

We can now turn to the South Carolina W.P.A. narratives in order to estimate the numerical importance of cross-plantation marriages. A later section of this chapter will document the vigour of such relationships. Results from the South Carolina W.P.A. sample are summarised in Table 2:1 and Figure 2:2. In concluding that a cross-plantation marriage was sustained (rather than there being simply a broken family), I required certain tests to be met. These criteria related primarily to the marriages of the parents of the respondents, since few respondents were of an age to be married themselves during slavery times. First, I took as cross-plantation unions cases where a respondent specifically stated that his or her father belonged to another owner, and spoke of being in touch with their father during slavery. Similarly, I took as cross-plantation unions cases where a respondent commented on his or her father visiting , without necessarily stating the residence of their father. Again, I included cases where a respondent commented on the name of his or her father's owner and, despite the fact that the name was different from the name of the owner of the respondent and their

mother, expressed a familiarity with their father's owner. My results produced significantly higher percentages of cross-plantation households than all other studies (except for a case study of some 75 slaves held on quite small units in Georgia). [10]

Table 2:1:

The Family Structure of the South Carolina W.P.A. Respondents

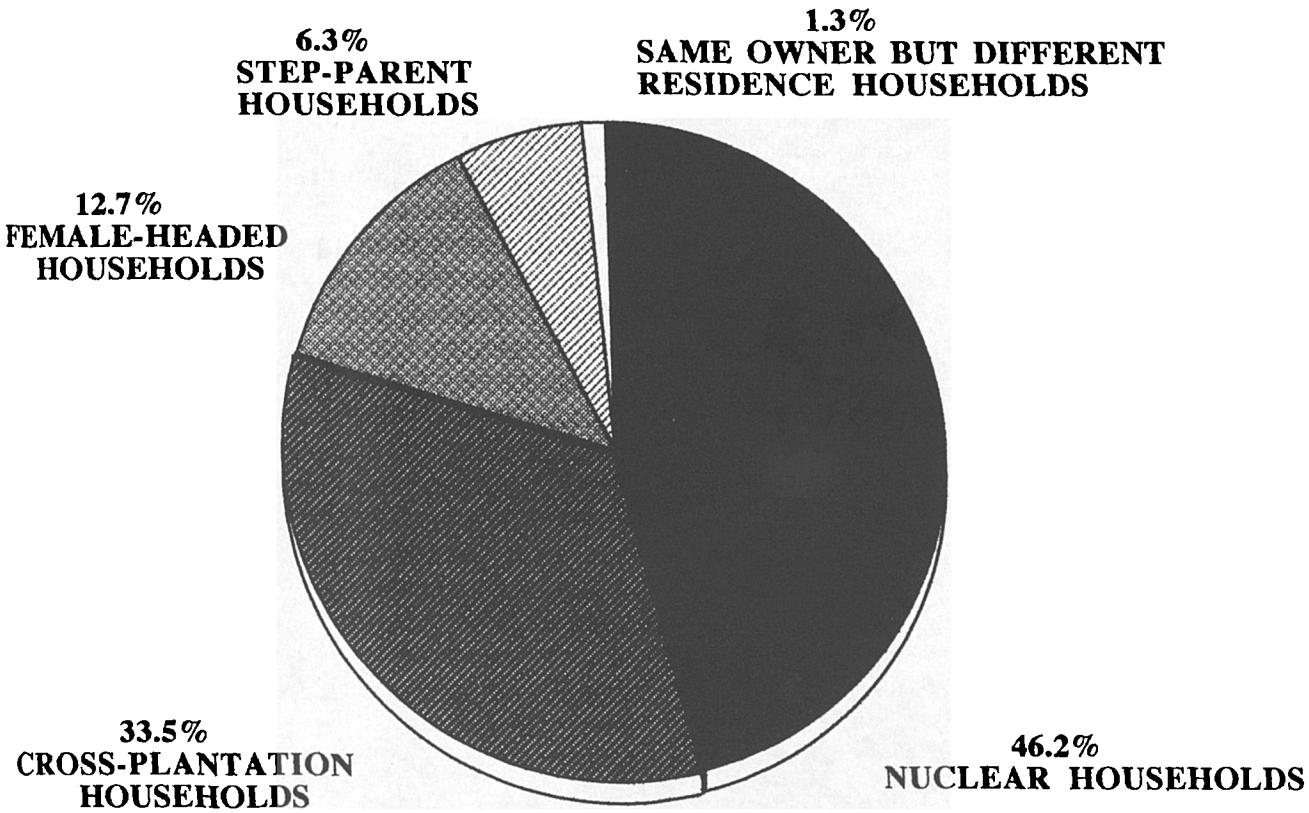
Nuclear Households:	73	(46.2%)
Cross-Plantation Households:	53	(33.5%)
Female-Headed Households:	20	(12.7%)
Step-Parent households:	10	(6.3%)
Different-Residence Households:	2	(1.3%)
Total:	158	(100%)

Source: Rawick, *The American Slave.*

[10] See Carole E. Merritt, "Slave Family and Household Arrangements in Piedmont, Georgia" (PhD, Emory University 1986)

Fig. 2:2

THE HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURE OF THE SOUTH CAROLINA W.P.A. RESPONDENTS



Source: Rawick, *The American Slave.*

Several points should be noted about the nature of the South Carolina sample. First, it was not possible to undertake extensive quantitative work on the relationship between size of unit and incidences of cross-plantation marriages, since only 26 respondents commented on both the size of the unit and the residential arrangements of their parents under slavery. It was found, however, that those on smaller units were more likely to have parents who lived on different residences, and those on larger units were more likely to have parents who lived together. Such residential arrangements seem to have been motivated by practical reasons. For example, Nancy Washington, married during slavery to a man belonging to another owner, would have been forced to look for a spouse off her place of residence since her master only owned her, her siblings, and her mother. [11]

We should also note the geographical context of the results in Figure 2:2. Those residing in the South Carolina Low Country were more likely to live on larger units, because of the preponderance of large rice and sea-island cotton plantations in this region. [12] The sample did not, however, show any skew towards same-residence marriage in the Low Country. Of the 104 respondents who commented on both family structure and geographical location, 11.1 per cent of those in nuclear families and 12.2 per cent of those in cross-plantation families, resided in the Low Country.

I shall suggest below that Stephen Crawford's technique for classifying family structure led to a consistent undercount of cross-plantation unions. Nevertheless, his study is important, and several results from his large W.P.A. sample should be noted.

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[11] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 4, 184-7.

[12] In this article, the South Carolina Low Country has been defined as the coastal districts of Beaufort, Colleton, Charleston, Georgetown and Horry. See Michael E. Stauffer, *The Formation of Counties in South Carolina* (Columbia: South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1994), 14.

He found, as I did from my smaller sample, that plantation size was important. Crawford noted that on units of fewer than sixteen slaves, two-thirds of unions were cross-plantation, whereas on units of 16-49 slaves (or higher), only about fourteen to twenty per cent were cross-plantation. [13] He found, too, that in the slave exporting states (like South Carolina), the proportion of cross-plantation marriages was higher (at 14.7 per cent), than in the slave importing states (where he gave the proportion as only 5.2 per cent). [14]

Finally, Crawford found that, in overall patterns, occupation made no difference to the ratio of same-residence and cross-plantation marriages. He wrote that

> Quite clearly there was no difference between the family structure of houseservants and fieldhands. It is possible that the family relationship differed in other ways, but there was no significant difference in the proportion of two-parent and one-parent families. [15]

Although I shall question Crawford's technique in establishing the overall level of cross-plantation unions, his results concerning plantation size and Southern region will not be disputed. Furthermore, his results on occupation are particularly important, and contradict the idea that there was one family structure type for domestics, and another for field slaves. [16]

We can now turn to the detailed results from my South Carolina W.P.A. sample (see Table 2:1 and Figure 2:2). The statistics were derived from those respondents who commented on the residential arrangements of their parents, and also from five

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[13] Stephen Crawford, 'The Slave Family', in Goldin and Rockoff, *Strategic Factors*, 346.

[14] Crawford, 'The Slave Family', 347.

[15] Crawford, 'The Slave Family', 345-346.

[16] In my own investigations, I actually found that house servants were slightly more likely to have parents who resided in nuclear marriages, and field slaves were more likely to have parents in cross-plantation unions. See Chapter Four, Table 4:3.

respondents who were themselves married before the Civil War. [17] It was possible to calculate family structure for 158 of the 334 South Carolina respondents (47.3 per cent of all respondents). Despite the fact that my sample of 158 individuals represents a little less than half of the total number of respondents, it would seem likely that those who commented upon family structure were representative of the South Carolina experience as a whole. This is because, firstly, the respondents were not prompted to answer questions upon their family structures, hence their comments were made in the natural flow of the conversation. Secondly, basic family structure, unlike more sensitive topics such as sexual abuse or punishments, was an area about which the respondents were not likely to be reticent when discussing with white interviewers.

Table 2:1 has presented detailed statistics. Seventy-one of South Carolina respondents stated that their parents resided together. In addition, two respondents who were married during slavery resided with their spouses. Thus we have 73 reported marriages that were nuclear (46.2 per cent of the 158). Fifty-three reported marriages met my definition of cross-plantation unions (33.5 per cent of the 158). This 53 comprised 50 who said that their parents resided with different owners, and three

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[17] The five respondents married before the Civil War were as follows: Albert Means, 19 years old in 1865, and a field worker. His father belonged to a different owner, as did his wife, Jane. (See Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 3, 182-4.) Alfred Sligh, 23 years old in 1865, and also a field worker. His parents had the same owner, and his wife Sarah, also belonged to this owner. (See Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 4, 92-4.) Gordon Bluford, 20 years old in 1865, and a house worker. She resided with 250 other slaves, and married Arthur Bluford, who belonged to the same owner. (See Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 62-4.) Louisa Davis was 103 years old at the time of her interview. She was a house worker, and her father and mother belonged to the same owner. Her husband belonged to a different owner. (See Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 299-303.) Nancy Washington was 32 years old in 1865, and worked in the house, then the field. Her owner only owned her mother and siblings. She was married to a man belonging to another owner. (See Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 4, 184-7).

respondents who themselves lived in cross-plantation unions. Twenty respondents said that they resided with their mother and (sometimes) their siblings, with no father being mentioned. Thus 12.7 per cent of the 158 families were female-headed. Ten respondents said that they lived within families in which they had a parent and a step-parent. This constitutes 6.3 per cent of the 158. Finally, two respondents said that their parents belonged to the same owner, but resided in different houses (1.3 per cent of the 158). [18] The overall result therefore suggests a very large majority living in viable families. [19]

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[18] These were Ryer Emmanuel and Will Dill. See Rawick, The *American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 23; and Vol. 2, Part 1, 319.

[19] The South Carolina W.P.A. results can be compared with those from the small sample of full-length slave narratives. It was found that only two of the narrators (Charles Ball and Tom Jones), commented on their own family structure upon reaching adulthood, both of whom resided within cross-plantation unions. However, when the household structure of the parents of the narrators was established, it was found that, of the ten narrators who actually mentioned their parents' residential arrangements, four had parents who lived together (40 per cent); three had parents who lived in cross plantation marriages (30 per cent); and three lived within female-headed households (30 per cent). Despite the fact that a higher percentage of slaves who wrote full-length narratives, then, lived within female-headed households, when compared with the W.P.A. results, the percentage of those who lived within nuclear and cross-plantation families was roughly the same.

Cross-plantation marriages: a comparison with other studies

Table 2:3:

A Summary of Findings on Slave Family Structure

	Family Structure (in percentages)		
Author:	Nuclear	Cross-plantation	Female-Headed
Crawford:	51.1	12.4	33.2
Escott:	72.5	27.5	N/A
Malone:	49.0	N/A	14.5
Merritt:	19.2	76.4	N/A
West:	46.2	33.5	12.7

Sources:

Stephen Crawford, "Quantified Memory".

Paul Escott, *Slavery Remembered.*

Ann Patton Malone, *Sweet Chariot.*

Carole Merritt, "Slave Family and Household Arrangements".

Rawick, *The American Slave.*

As has been noted earlier, few studies have seriously explored cross-plantation families. Comparisons can, however, be made with Crawford and Escott's W.P.A.-based studies; with Anne Patton Malone's analysis of Louisiana plantation records; and with Carole Merritt's case study of two small groups of slaves held on Georgia plantations. As Table 2:3 shows, the results of the various studies differ greatly. This is partly because of the source bases used, and partly because of differing criteria for defining cross-plantation unions. Paul Escott's results can be dealt with briefly. He simply suggested that slave marriages were of two types: 'One was marrying at home and the other was called marrying abroad [cross-plantation].' He found that 27.5 per cent of marriages were cross-plantation. [20] Differences between Escott's results and

[20] Escott, *Slavery Remembered,* 50-51.

my own arise to a great extent because he only considered reported *marriages* and did not include family structures such as female-headed households. Furthermore, he did not give any indication of the criteria he used for classifying testimony on marriage types.

Crawford's work is more directly comparable to my own. He found that 51.1 per cent of slave families consisted of two parents living together in nuclear families. This figure is slightly higher than my own 46.2 per cent. Crawford found, however, only 12.4 per cent of slaves living in cross-plantation families, compared to my 33.5 per cent. In addition, 33.2 per cent of Crawford's respondents lived in female-headed families, compared to my 12.7 per cent. [21] It is difficult to know how Crawford reached these figures as he provided no clues as to his technique. He did state that roughly twenty per cent of female-headed families might actually have been cross-plantation families, but 20 per cent of 33.2 is only 6.6 per cent. [22] Thus the maximum number of cross-plantation marriages that Crawford could have is only 19 per cent.

It appears that the differences in our figures are due to differences in criteria for identifying cross-plantation unions. It is possible that Crawford defined a family as female-headed when, for example, a respondent mentioned his mother but not his father, although his father could have actually resided elsewhere. In my work, however, I defined as female-headed families, only those households where a respondent both *specifically* mentioned that they lived only with their mother, and did not comment on their father visiting. It seems likely, then, that Crawford's technique systematically under-represented cross-plantation unions.

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[21] Crawford, "Quantified Memory", 149.

[22] Crawford, "Quantified Memory", 155.

Anne Patton Malone has also offered a classification of the structure of slave families in her study of rural Louisiana. Her study was based upon evidence found from plantation and parish records. [23] The nature of Malone's sources is highly significant, since her records -- essentially lists of slaves belonging to a particular owner or plantation -- would almost never include reference to cross-plantation marriages, precisely because the missing spouses from within such unions belonged to other owners. As was noted earlier, it is generally only when we examine records left by slaves themselves that we can make quantitative estimations of the extent of cross-plantation marriages. Malone's work, therefore, almost completely ignores cross-plantation households.

Malone's classification scheme for slave households has been modelled on the work of Peter Laslett and the Cambridge group. Her slave households were categorised into various groupings, namely, simple families (detailed below); solitaires (single, widowed, or unknown marital status); non-nuclear households (co-resident siblings, other relatives, or co-residents who were not related); extended family households (conjugal families with the addition of relatives other than offspring); multiple families (two or more conjugal units connected by kinship or marriage, for example a couple residing with an unmarried daughter and her child). [24] She found that nearly three-quarters of the slaves in her sample lived in 'simple families'. Such households included married couples, both with and without children, and single persons with children. Relevant to my work is the fact that within this type, 'standard nuclear families' (fathers, mothers and children) made up 49 per cent of the sample. This compares closely with my 46.2 per cent. Malone also found that single-parent households, predominantly women and children, made up around 14.5 per cent of her sample. [25] Again, this compares closely with my 12.7 per cent. Malone argues that

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[23] Malone, *Sweet Chariot*, 6.

[24] Malone, *Sweet Chariot*, 7-8.

[25] Malone, *Sweet Chariot*, 14-16.

'slightly fewer than half of the sampled Louisiana slaves...were members of two-parent nuclear families.' [26] This is important since she then goes on to emphasise the stability of the female-headed family unit within slave society.

Malone, however, does not investigate cross-plantation marriages, except to say that there was little evidence that such marriages were common in Louisiana, except on small holdings 'where marriage choices were so limited as to convince owners that the merits outweighed the risks.' [27] This omission constitutes a major limitation of her work. Instead, Malone emphasises the importance of female-headed families within slave society. She argues that female-headed families were both a consistent feature in the nineteenth century and also an accepted family form. She states:

> About 14.5 per cent of the slaves in the Louisiana sample were part of female-headed, single-parent households. Although this percentage by no means constitutes a matriarchal structure, in slave society single parenthood was viewed as a viable option for slave women to a greater degree than was true of contemporary white society. [28]

By not dealing with cross-plantation marriages, then, Malone gives a far from complete picture of slave household structure. Furthermore, her claims on the stability of female-headed families are not borne out by the evidence obtained from an investigation into the W.P.A. narratives.

Problems encountered in defining family types also become apparent when we examine Carole Merritt's work. Merritt undertook a case study of the families of slaves belonging to Lindsey Durham of Piedmont, Georgia. She found that by 1860, Durham had a work force of 75 slaves residing on two plantations. [29] She states: 'Although the

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[26] Malone, *Sweet Chariot*, 254.

[27] Malone, *Sweet Chariot*, 227.

[28] Malone, *Sweet Chariot*, 202, *n.3.*

[29] Merritt, "Slave Family", 85.

Durham slave plantations were relatively large slave ownership units, they were too small to incorporate within the plantation's boundaries most nuclear and extended family relationships.' [30] This meant that cross-plantation marriages were common among the Durham slaves. Merritt claims that they accounted for 76.4 per cent of the total number of adult slaves whose marital status could be established, compared to only 19.2 per cent of slaves who lived in two-parent families. [31] She therefore uses this evidence to criticise Herbert Gutman's emphasis upon the importance of nuclear families. Merritt argues that Gutman's data is atypical due to the large size of the slave holding units he examined. [32]

Rather than using the fact that many slaves lived in cross-plantation marriages as evidence of the strength of the relationship between spouses though, Merritt seems to assume that women in such unions saw themselves as 'single-parents'. She states: 'Single parent families represented one of the constraints within which slave families functioned. The slave man's residence apart from his wife and children restricted family interaction.' [33] The W.P.A. evidence, as we shall see in greater detail below, suggests, however, that cross-plantation unions were usually highly resilient institutions.

Owners' perspectives on cross-plantation marriages

When they commented at all on cross-plantation unions, owners almost always did so from their perspective rather than from that of their slaves' priorities. It was quite common for owners to mention these marriage arrangements in their plantation rule books, and generally they were disapproved of in these records. For example, in his plantation rules the Sumter planter, John B. Miller wrote:

'Marriages Not to marry from house if to be avoided.

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[30] Merritt, "Slave Family", 128.

[31] Merritt, "Slave Family", 112, 131.

[32] See Merritt, "Slave Family", 219-221.

[33] Merritt, "Slave Family", 221.

Meetings and Religion Home at night. Not to go from home to them at night.' [34]

Later, in his list of 'Rules for Government of Plantation', he states:

> Negroes:
>
> To be kept in good order and at home and not to leave plantation without a ticket and that to express the place they are to go to and how long to be absent and not to be for any greater distance than a few miles without my express orders, except to the nearest church Tickets to be given alone by me, wife or son....No negro but those connected to my negroes and of good character to be allowed on plantation and they must have a ticket for that purpose from their owners to be brought to me except them that have a wife or husband on the plantation. [35]

The list of plantation rules in the Conway-Black-Davis family papers, refers indirectly to cross-plantation links. Overseers were advised to 'Prevent night visits in the week, and put an end to late hours. Let "early to bed and early to rise" be the word.'[36] Similarly, the planter Andrew Flinn worried about night visits and slave mobility. His plantation book stated that no slaves were to be allowed out of their houses after nine o-clock at night in summer and eight o-clock in winter.[37] Flinn also compiled a list of punishable offences, as follows:

> The following is the order in which offences must be estimated and punished. 1st, running away. 2nd, getting drunk or having spirits. 3rd, stealing hogs. 4th, stealing. *5th, leaving plantation without permission.* 6th, absence after horn blow. 7th, unclean house or person. 8th, Neglect of mules. 9th, neglect of

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[34] 'Negro Rules for Government', Cornhill Plantation Book, 1827-1873, [Plantation of John B. Miller], McDonald-Furman Papers, W.R.P.L.

[35] 'Rules for Government of Plantation', Cornhill Plantation Book, McDonald-Furman Papers, W.R.P.L.

[36] List of Plantation Rules, February 1815, Conway-Black-Davis Family Papers, S.C.L.

[37] List of Plantation Rules, Andrew Flinn Plantation Book, 1840, S.C.L.

tools. 10th, neglect of work. The highest punishment must not exceed fifty lashes in one day. [italics added] [38]

In his autobiography, the ex-slave I.E. Lowery detailed the courtship and marriage rules of his master, Mr. Frierson. Lowery wrote: :

> When the boys and girls reached a marriageable age he [the owner, Mr. Frierson] advised them to marry, but marry some one on the plantation, and he would see to it that they were not separated. But if they married some one from the adjoining plantations, they might be separated by the 'nigger traders' as they were called in that day and time. [39]

Thus Mr. Frierson tried to discourage his slaves from marrying off his plantation. Charles Manigault, however, took a harsher line on slave cross-plantation marriages. He simply dictated that his slaves could not marry those on other units, as illustrated in the following letter to his overseer. He wrote: 'I allow no strange negro to take a wife on my place.' [40] Manigault probably felt that the large size of his rice plantation meant that he did not need to 'allow' his slaves to make 'abroad' marriages.

We can see how owners acknowledged the existence of cross-plantation marriages, even if they tried to prevent them. However, from the number of cross-

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[38] List of Plantation Rules, Andrew Flinn Plantation Book, S.C.L.

[39] Lowery, *Life on the Old Plantation*, 42.

[40] Letter to Mr. J. F.Cooper [overseer at Gowrie] from Charles Izard Manigault, 10 January 1848, Charles Izard Manigault Letterbook, 1846-1848, S.C.L. Manigault however, did have around one hundred slaves living in his Gowrie Plantation on Argyle Island in the Savannah River. This would have meant that his slaves would have had a wider choice of potential spouses upon their place of residence than many other slaves. Hence the consequences of Manigault's decision would not have had as many repercussions as elsewhere. For a more detailed description of Manigault's plantation see the 'introduction' to James M. Clifton, (ed.), *Life and Labor on Argyle Island: Letters and Documents of a Savannah River Rice Plantation* (Savannah, Georgia: Beehive Press 1978).

plantation marriages found among the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents and their parents, it would appear that those such as Charles Manigault, who did not allow their slaves to live in cross-plantation marriages, were in the minority. Indeed, the following letter to the planter Caleb Coker from his sister Maria suggests that owners saw it as the norm that slaves, and perhaps only slaves, visited each other on Sundays. Maria wrote:

> Brother Coker, I wish you and sister H[annah] could see Lizzy's beau. (At least I call him hers - he is either sister Mary's or Lizzy's, I don't know which). I know you would laugh heartily; he, *negro like*, makes his visits on Sunday nights. [Italics added] [41]

Some, among the minority who owned more than one plantation, allowed their slaves to live in cross-plantation marriages provided that they owned both slaves. James Henry Hammond, for example, stated in his plantation diary: 'negroes living on one plantation and having wives at the other can visit them only between Saturday night and Monday morning'.[42] However, Hammond also stated that 'no marriage will be allowed with negroes not belonging to the master.'[43] By trying to limit cross-plantation marriages to marriages between his own slaves, then, Hammond was exercising the control he had over his slaves. Similarly, a few owners only allowed cross-plantation marriages between their own slaves and those of their white relations. Such practices inevitably heightened the degree of control that owners held, whilst also enabling them to reaffirm their benevolent self-image. Owners could take a paternalist pride in the existence of both black and white family ties throughout their extended familial networks.

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[41] Letter to Caleb Coker from Maria [sister], 16 September 1844, Lide-Coker Family Papers, S.C.L.

[42] Quoted in Burton, *In My Father's House*, 163, *n.50.*

[43] Quoted in Burton, *In My Father's House*, 169, *n.69.*

An investigation into both the W.P.A. and full-length slave narratives suggests, however, that it was not the norm for slaves who lived in cross-plantation marriages to belong either to the same owner, or to owners who were related.Out of 53 cross-plantation marriages in the South Carolina W.P.A. narratives, only four seem to have involved spouses whose owners appear to have been related. In one of these cases, John Franklin lived with his mother on the plantation of Benjamin Bobo, and his father lived on the plantation of Bobo's brother-in-law, Henry Franklin. [44] Bill Leitner and his mother belonged to Robin Brice, whilst his father belonged to John Partook Brice. Leitner said: 'Daddy have to have pass to come to see mammy.' [45] Lucinda Miller and her mother belonged to Mat Alexander, whilst her father belonged to Mat's brother who 'lived two or three plantations away.'[46] Finally, Sam Polite said: 'My fadder b'long to Mister Marion Fripp and my mudder b'long to Mister Old B. Fripp.' [47] Also, within the sample of full-length narratives, Jacob Stroyer related the story of how two of his sisters met, and later married, two slave men belonging to the brother of Stroyer's owner. [48]

Slave perspectives: the importance of family

One indication of the typical slave's attachment to family is the absence, in the W.P.A. narratives and elsewhere, of reference to anything like a widespread desire for voluntary separation (divorce). Other indications, as we shall see in this chapter and elsewhere in this thesis, are the dread of white threats to the family, and the resilience, not just of same-residence marriages, but also of cross-plantation unions. It is striking that the South Carolina W.P.A. narratives make virtually no reference to voluntary separation between slave spouses. Several narratives (see Table 2:4) refer to living with

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[44] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 84.
[45] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 3, 100-101
[46] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 3, 191.
[47] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 3, 271.
[48] Stroyer, *My Life in the South*, 39.

step-parents, but in none of these cases was an original slave union broken voluntarily. Of the ten respondents who reported being adopted in the slave community by step-parents, four had a white father or mother, two had parents who had died, and two had had a parent sold away. In the remaining two cases, there was no testimony concerning the circumstances in which natural parents had been lost.

Table 2:4

Instances of Step-Parenting among the South Carolina W.P.A. Respondents

Reason:	Step-Father	Step-Mother
White Parent:	3	1
Death of a Parent:	2	0
Sale of a Parent:	1	1
No Comment:	2	0
Totals:	8	2

Source: Rawick,*The American Slave.*

One of the step-parenting cases, that involving Emanuel Elmore, is particularly interesting. Elmore reported that his father remarried after his mother was sold away to Alabama, but eventually the first wife managed to find her way back. Elmore explained that:

> When she did get back to Col. Elmore's [the masters] place, she was lanky, ragged and poor, but Col. Elmore was glad to see her and told her he was not going to let anybody take her off. Jenny had cared so well for her children while she was off, that she liked her. They lived in the same house with pa till my mother died. [49]

[49] Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol.2, Part 2, 9.

When we turn, in the W.P.A. sample, from step-families to female-headed families, the absence of voluntary separations (divorce) is again striking. Of the twenty female-headed families reported by respondents (see Table 2:1), two gave no details other than that the respondents lived only with their mothers. Seven reported that they and their mothers had been sold or given away, so separating them from their fathers. A further five, like Robert Smith, stated that their father had been sold away. Smith testified: 'My ma was Chlorrie Greer, and my pa was Bob Young. His white folks ca'ed him off somewhars and I never see'd him [again].' [50] Of the remaining six female-headed families in the sample, the respondents had white fathers and unmarried mothers. Female-headed families in the South Carolina narratives can be best defined as broken two-parent families, families that had been broken by slave owners.

The W.P.A. sample suggests that, with cross-plantation marriages, husbands made great efforts to visit their wives and families. Visits were usually at weekends, and sometimes mid-week visits might be managed. Although very few respondents commented specifically on the number of miles that their fathers travelled for such visits, the distance related by Millie Barber seems to be representative. She stated:

> Well, my pa b'longin' to one man and my mammy b'longin' to another, four or five miles apart, caused some confusion, mix-up, and heartaches. My pa have to git a pass to come to see my mammy. He come sometimes widout de pass. [51]

In visiting their loved ones, we can see not only the strength of the relationships between slave couples, but also a gender division in slave life. It was *male* slaves who

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[50] Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol.2, Part 1, 294.

[51] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol.2, Part 1, 39.

were expected to visit their wives and girlfriends. [52] Because of this, then, male slaves were more at risk than slave females of being caught and punished by the patrollers. Deborah White has raised this issue in her book. She states that:

> When 'abroad' spouses visited each other, usually once a week, it was most often the husband who travelled to the wife. All in all, it was female bondage, more than male bondage, that meant being tied to the immediate environment of the plantation or farm. This was a liability when it came to running away. [53]

White, then, focuses on the negative consequences of cross-plantation marriages for female slaves, but she does not emphasise the great burden placed upon *male* slaves who wished to visit wives or girlfriends, and in so doing, risked physical punishment.

A persistent theme in the W.P.A. narratives, however, was the trouble and risks that husbands took in visiting their families. In particular, they risked beatings at the hands of the patrollers. As Julia Woodberry explained, slave husbands would have to carry a pass. She said: 'You see, de nigger men would want to go to see dey wives en dey would have to get a [per]'mit from dey massa to visit dem.' [54] Manda Walker vividly recalled the slaves' dread of the patrollers. She testified:

> Him [her father] stayed over his leave dat was writ on de pass. Patarollers ...come ask for de pass. They say: 'De time done out, nigger'. Pappy try to explain but they pay no 'tention to him. Tied him up, pulled down his breeches, and whupped him right befo' mammy and us chillun. I shudder, to dis day, to think of it. [55]

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[52] The proposition that it was generally only male slaves who travelled to visit wives and girlfriends is supported by Orville Vernon Burton. See Burton, *In My Father's House*, 163.

[53] White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 76.

[54] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol.3, Part 4, 238.

[55] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol.3, Part 4, 170-71.

Numerous other respondents testified to the dread of patrollers, and to the courage of lovers, husbands, and fathers in running the gauntlet of patrols. Will Dill, for example, had an uncle who used to sneak off at night to visit a girl, and who had to give the patrollers the slip. [56] Charlie Grant stated that he would not dare leave his place of residence to visit anyone without a permit from his master, for fear of being whipped by patrollers. [57] Ben Horry said that, when visiting a girl on another plantation, that of Benjamin Allston, a pass was vital: 'Got to have paper. Got to carry you paper. Dem patroller put you cross a log! Beat you to death.' [58]

Slave owners sometimes insisted gently, sometimes violently on the need for a pass. The ex-slave Sam Aleckson described Mingo's visit to Dolly. First, Mingo had to show his pass to Dolly's owner, Mr. Ward. Aleckson wrote:

> Here Mingo produced the desired article. Mr. Ward read it, his brows contracting a little. "This is all right," he said, returning the paper, "Except that it does not say where you are to go. Now I never allow anyone on my place with such a ticket. The next time you visit Dolly you must have a different "ticket." Ask your master to give you one stating plainly that you are to visit my plantation. [59]

John Edwin Fripp's plantation journal contained the blunt entry: 'Gave Peter 25 lashes for going to the island without permission.' [60] Similalry, Ada Bacot wrote in her diary: 'I find some of my young negroes have been disobeying my orders, they were found away from home without a pass, I hope I may be able to make them understand without

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[56] Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol.3, Part 4, 319.

[57] Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol.2, Part 2, 174.

[58] Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol.2, Part 2, 304.

[59] Aleckson, *Before the War,* 56.

[60] John Edwin Fripp Plantation Journal, 2 September 1858, S.H.C.

much trouble that I am mistress and will be obeyed. I have never had any trouble with them until now. Even now I don't apprehend much.'[61]

The persistence of the theme of visiting suggests something of the vigour of cross-plantation marriages. Furthermore, the fact that males took the role of visitors, with its attendant risks and hardships, suggests the position of husbands and fathers as protectors and risk-takers. The wives, with their day-to-day childcare responsibilities, were the visited. The testimony of Charlie Davis, describing his parents relationship, gives a sense of the father as hero and protector. Davis said:

> Mammy said dat de patrollers was as thick as flies 'round dese plantations all de time, and my daddy sho' had to slip 'round to see mammy. Sometime they would ketch him and whip him good, pass or no pass. De patrollers was nothin' but poor white trash, mammy say, and if they didn't whip some slaves, every now and then, they would lose deir jobs. My mammy and daddy got married after freedom, 'cause they didn't git de time for a weddin' befo'. They called deirselves man and wife a long time befo' they was really married, and dat is de reason dat I's as old as I is now. I reckon they was right, in de fust place, 'cause they never did want nobody else 'cept each other, nohow. Here I is, I has been married one time and at no time has I ever seen another woman I wanted. [62]

Slave sources overwhelmingly show a pattern, not of neglect of family life by slaves, but of the central role of family life in the slave community. bell hooks has argued that slave husbands were routinely misogynist, that they put their interests before those of their wives, and also took a perverse pride in abusing and mistreating their wives. [63] It is very clear that these accusations are not borne out by South

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[61] Ada Bacot, Diary, 11 February 1861, S.C.L.

[62] Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol.2, Part 1, 252.

[63] hooks, *Ain't I a Woman?*, 35.

Carolina slave testimony. Instead, the narratives suggest strong affection between slave couples. John Collins was one who recalled the joy that was possible for slave spouses. He remembered that 'Daddy used to play wid mammy just lak she was a child. He'd ketch her under de armpits and jump her up mighty high to de rafters in de little house us lived in.' [64] Isabella Dorroh recalled:

> Marse didn't make slave women marry if dey didn't want to. Befo' my mammy and daddy married, somebody give a note to take to Mrs. Fair, her mistress. Mistress wouldn't tell what was in it, but daddy run every step of de way, he was so glad dey would let 'em marry.' [65]

The fact that South Carolina slave testimony provides virtually no cases of slave husbands abusing wives could, in part, be because ex-slaves sought to hide such events. Such abuse is, however, so completely against the positive tone of the slave testimony that it seems inconceivable that it could have been a significant part of the inner thoughts of ex-slaves. Instead, we get cases of husbands protecting wives, sometimes boldly, sometimes quietly. Philip Evans recalled a dramatic case of husband protecting wife. (In this case the couple were his aunt and uncle). Evans recalled:

> 'Pears like he insult my aunt and beat her. Uncle Dennis took it up, beat de overseer, and run off to de woods. Then when he git hungry, he come home at night to eat sumpin'. Dis kept up till one day my pappy drive a wagon to town and Dennis jined him. Him was a settin' on de back of de wagon in de town and somebody point him out to a officer. They clamp him and put him in jail. After de 'vestigation they take him to de whippin' post of de town, tie his foots, make him put his hands in de stocks, pulled off his shirt, pull down his britches and whip him terrible. [66]

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64 Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol.2, Part 1, 224-5.

65 Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol.2, Part 1, 326.

66 Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol.2, Part 2, 36.

Similarly, Henry Gladney's father used to try and protect *his* wife from the advances of other slave men, and once broke a slave man's leg for looking at his wife. His owners then intervened, and threatened Gladney's father with a whipping. [67] Also, in the full-length narrative of the South Carolina slave 'Wild Tom', Tom killed an overseer who was responsible for whipping his wife to death . [68]

Conclusions

This chapter has shown that it was not just same-residence marriages that were valued by slaves. The South Carolina slave testimony consistently shows strong slave attachment to cross-plantation unions. Husbands and lovers underwent hardships and considerable risks in order to visit their wives, children and girlfriends. Their visiting showed the role of the male slave as risk-taker and initiator, and often these circumstances might have led to the husband being seen by his wife and family as hero and protector. This chapter has therefore pointed to the numerical importance of cross-plantation unions, and also to their resilience.

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[67] Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol.2, Part 2, 129-30.

[68] See Tom Jones, *Experience and Personal Narrative.*

Chapter Three

Gender and Work

> Aw de colored people wha' ne'er hab no work to do 'bout de big house was field hand en day hadder ge' up at de fust crow uv de cock in de morning....Coase dey eat dey break'ast 'fore dey leab de quarter. Effen de sun look lak it wuz gwinna shine, de o'erseer 'ud send dem inde field to work en dey'ud stay in de field aw day till sun down in de evenin'. Carry dey basket uv victual en pot 'long wid em en cook right dere in de field. [1]

Introduction

The following two chapters will focus upon the work of slaves. This chapter will investigate work performed for owners and for the slaves' own families. It will also consider the extent to which work was segregated by gender, since, by undertaking such an investigation, we can assess the implications of slave work patterns on the bonding between males and females. As was the case in the first two chapters of this thesis, the desire for autonomy from slave owners will also be highlighted. In order to establish the work patterns of slaves, the South Carolina W.P.A. narratives have been utilised in conjunction with the sample of full-length slave narratives, and various owners' records. The South Carolina W.P.A narratives were found to be skewed towards those respondents who mentioned that they, or their parents, performed house work. Additional source materials will therefore be used to overcome this bias.

It will be argued that gender divisions in the work performed for owners were largely imposed by owners. Furthermore, extensive gender segregation at work restricted opportunities for male-female bonding, and this meant that the opportunities

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[1] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 4, 221.

for bonding within the cultural life of the slave community, as detailed in Part One of this thesis, were therefore extremely valuable. These assertions will be reinforced through a quantitative investigation into the relationship between occupation and marriage.

We shall see that gender was also important for the types of work performed for families -- this was largely a result of females' child-bearing roles. However, in work for their own families, we can also see the strength of support between males and females. Work for families, whilst being gendered, was also relatively egalitarian in terms of content. Both males and females worked hard to support and provide for their families in the face of the oppression of slavery. Working for families therefore contributed to the social space between the lives of slaves and owners, and hence also contributed to the autonomy and psychological independence of the slave community.

Methodology

As is the case with the other chapters in this thesis, this chapter will utilise three broad source materials. The South Carolina W.P.A. narratives have been used for assessing the quantitative trends associated with the work patterns of males and females. The W.P.A. narratives have also been used for assessing the types of work that males and females performed for their own families after the work assigned by their owners had been completed. [2] Comments made by the respondents on the work that they themselves performed, as well as the comments they made on the work performed by their parents, have both been used in this chapter. Full-length slave narratives have also been used, since they often provide more detailed accounts than the W.P.A. narratives. However, it was found that, as was the case with the W.P.A.

2.For a discussion of the lives of slaves after 'sundown', see George P. Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community* .

narratives, the full-length narratives do display a bias towards those slaves who mentioned housework.

It is possible, however, to counteract this problem by examining the records left by antebellum South Carolina slaveowners, since these records include many references to fieldwork. Indeed, it is within these owners' records that we can find some of the strongest evidence relating to gender differences in the work performed for owners. For example, owners' records display frequent references to gender differences in the work of field slaves. However, both the W.P.A. and the full-length narratives, with their bias towards house slaves, do not provide much evidence of this theme. A textual reading of a wide selection of owners' records, then, has revealed frequent reference to the sex-segregation of males and females at work, which is a finding of vital significance for this chapter.

The quantitative results on work patterns

The quantitative information on occupational patterns detailed within this chapter has come from an analysis of the comments made by the respondents of the South Carolina W.P.A. narratives. However, a major methodological problem was encountered in this analysis, because of the fact that house servants are over-represented, both in terms of the occupations of the respondents themselves, and also in terms of the occupations of their parents. This problem is one that has been noted by other investigators of the W.P.A. narratives. For example, Paul Escott, in his study of the W.P.A. narratives as a whole, has stated:

> As various commentators have suspected, house servants are substantially over represented in the slave narratives. The number of informants who had no job during slavery or merely performed light chores on the plantation is also very high. The heavy weighting of former house servants probably arose from the fact that the interviewers were pursuing former slaves known to them or to other white people. Because house servants often became enmeshed in the activities of their owners' families, they probably had good opportunities to

maintain contact with whites through the decades following emancipation. [3] Escott, however, did not believe that this bias diminished the usefulness of the W.P.A. narratives. He instead claimed:

> The potential bias that arises from over-representation of certain groups runs against the major findings of this study. Astute commentators have warned that the predominance of house servants and young slaves could produce overly fond memories of the master...and of the relationships between whites and blacks. The author has found few such memories in the narratives, and many of quite a different kind. [4]

The same might be said about the findings of this thesis. Despite the over-representation of house servants within the W.P.A. narratives -- house servants who may indeed have been more likely to relate fond anecdotes of their white owners --this study found significant mental and emotional distance between masters and slaves to be the norm. [5] However, those respondents who commented upon work, were not, for the most part, typical slaves. Therefore, the bias towards house servants within these narratives does significantly affect the quantitative investigation into the work patterns of male and female slaves. Of those South Carolina W.P.A. respondents who commented on their occupation, the majority performed house-related tasks. This contrasts with other evidence relating to the work patterns of slaves, including Fogel and Engerman's finding that 'About 80 percent of slave women labored in the fields', and their claim that 'Laborers accounted for 73 percent of the male slaves in the labor force in 1850.' [6]

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[3] Escott, *Slavery Remembered*, 13.

[4] Escott, *Slavery Remembered*, 16-17.

[5] For a discussion of this distance between slaves and slave owners, see Escott, *Slavery Remembered*, 27, and Hudson, 'All That Cash', in Hudson, *Working Toward Freedom*, 77-94.

[6] Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, 39-40. Herbert Gutman and Richard Sutch, however, believe that Fogel and Engerman actually underestimated the number of field

The over-representation of house servants within the South Carolina W.P.A. narratives was coupled with an over-representation of those who performed no work during slavery, and this methodological problem will be examined in more detail later in this chapter. In the case of the bias towards house work among young slaves, though, it seems likely that this might be attributed, to some extent, to the age of the respondents at the time of interview. The average age of the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents in 1865 was only 10 years old. Therefore, since the vast majority of the respondents were only children during slavery times, they would have been more likely than adults to have performed small errands in the 'Big House', or to perform no work. Indeed, young slaves were often likely to work for their owners in the Big House before switching to fieldwork at adolescence. Within the South Carolina W.P.A. narratives, thirteen of the 146 respondents who related their occupation to their interviewer said that their occupation changed from housework to fieldwork during slavery. Most of these also said that this shift occurred between the ages of twelve and thirteen. [7]

The next part of this chapter will establish the occupational patterns of the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents and their parents. In the quantitative analysis undertaken, it was found that 146 of the 334 South Carolina W.P.A. respondents used in this thesis commented on their occupations during slavery. This represents 43.7 per cent of all respondents. Of these respondents, 78 were males (representing 41.1 per cent of all males), and 68 were females (representing 47.2 per cent of all females). For purposes of clarity and simplicity, the occupations given by the respondents were

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slaves. See Gutman and Sutch, 'Sambo Makes Good', in David *et al*, *Reckoning with Slavery*, 77-80.

[7] Similarly, Stephen Crawford, in his study of the W.P.A. slave narratives found that around the ages of thirteen and fourteen there was a major shift from housework into permanent fieldwork. See Crawford, "Quantified Memory", 55.

classified into three broad categories of house and skilled work, fieldwork, and no work, as detailed in Table 3:1.

Table 3:1:

The Occupations of the South Carolina W.P.A. Respondents During Slavery

	TOTAL	MALES	FEMALES
House & skilled work:	72 (49.3%)	26 (33.3%)	46(67.6%)
Fieldwork:	50 (34.2%)	36 (46.2%)	14 (20.6%)
No work:	24 (16.4%)	16 (20.5%)	8 (11.8%)
Totals	146 (100%)	78 (100%)	68 (100%)

Source and notes: Rawick, *The American Slave.*

See Appendix Two for an explanation of how the occupations of the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents were categorised.

When the 'no work' category is excluded from the sample, those performing housework represented 59 per cent of the total sample, 42 per cent of males, and 71 per cent of females.

There was a marked gender difference in the occupational patterns of the W.P.A. respondents, with more females than males performing housework. This was probably a reflection of the desirability of young, female house servants by slave owners. Also worthy of note is the fact that more males than females said that they did not perform any work during slavery. It appears, then, that in terms of the work assigned to the young, females were more desirable than males. Therefore, the quality of life of young males may have been somewhat higher than the quality of life of young females, since females were firstly, more likely to work than young males, and

secondly, they were more likely to work in the relative isolation of the Big House than were young males. [8]

The occupations held by the parents of the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents are also of significance. Through an examination of parental occupations, we can investigate the gender differences in the work patterns of slave men and slave women as a whole, rather than merely gender differences in the work patterns of predominantly young slaves. The occupations of 105 parents of the respondents could be established. Of these, 68 mothers' occupations and 37 fathers' occupations were established. The occupations of the respondents' parents were classified in the same way as the occupations of the respondents themselves (but excluding the 'no work' category since no respondents said their parents did not work). These results are detailed in Table 3:2.

Table 3:2:

The Occupations of the Parents of the South Carolina W.P.A. Respondents During Slavery

	TOTAL	FATHERS	MOTHERS
House & skilled work:	69 (65.7%)	29 (78.4%)	40 (58.8%)
Fieldwork:	36 (34.3)	8 (21.6%)	28 (41.2%)
Totals:	105 (100%)	37 (100%)	68 (100%)

Source and note: Rawick, *The American Slave.*

See Appendix Two for an explanation of how the occupations of the parents of the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents were categorised.

[8] These assertions reinforce the claims of Stephen Crawford that male and female slaves underwent significantly different childhood work experiences, with females being more likely to perform work at an earlier age, and also being more likely to work in the house than males. See Crawford, "Quantified Memory", 47-50.

The occupations of parents again show a marked skew towards domestics. Of those respondents with work experience (see Table 3:1), 59 per cent performed housework; whereas for the respondents' parents, 66 percent did housework. Among *male* respondents with work experience only 42 per cent did housework, whereas 78 per cent of fathers were domestic slaves. With *female* respondents, 77 per cent of those with work experience did housework, but only 59 per cent of mothers did housework. The main conclusion from this seems to be that, since parents as well as respondents were likely to be domestics, the W.P.A. narratives, in so far as work is concerned, are indeed strongly skewed towards such slaves. In particular, the data for fathers seems to reflect an especially strong bias towards domestics.

Evidence from full-length narratives: house and field work

The sample of full-length narratives used in this study also displays a bias towards house or skilled slaves. Tom Jones worked both in his owners' house and also at their store. [9] Charles Ball, whilst performing fieldwork at some stages of his life, was eventually promoted to the position of overseer by his owner. [10] Moses Roper served as a domestic slave upon reaching adulthood. [11] Jacob Stroyer took care of horses as a child, but, upon reaching adulthood, he worked as a carpenter before being sent to wait on officers fighting in the Civil War. [12] Similarly, Sam Aleckson became an 'Officer's Boy' in the Confederate army during the Civil War. [13] Finally, I. E.

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[9] Tom Jones, *Experience and Personal Narrative*, 10-11.

[10] See Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 301, for a description of his role as an overseer. This was a skilled position that has been included in the category of house and skilled occupations as detailed in Appendix Two.

[11] Roper, *A Narrative*, 70.

[12] See Stroyer, *My Life in the South*, 17, 32, 34-35, for descriptions of his occupations as a slave.

[13] Aleckson, *Before the War and After the Union*, 87.

Lowery, was a house slave who actually slept in the same room as his master and mistress at night. [14]

In a similar way, the female slave narratives consulted for this study also display a bias towards house or skilled slaves. Harriet Jacobs was a house servant who lived in her owner's house. [15] Similarly, Mattie J. Jackson, Lucy A. Delany and Kate Drumgoold were also house servants. [16] Annie L. Burton, a child during slavery, performed no work. [17] Finally, Mattie Griffiths worked as a house servant during slavery. Interestingly, Mattie Griffiths lamented the isolation caused by living under the same roof as her owners. She wrote:

> I now had no companionship among those of my own color. Aunt Polly was in the grave; Amy wrapped in the silence of her own grief; and Sally (the successor of Aunt Polly in the culinary department) was a sulky, ignorant woman who did not like to be sociable; and the men, with their beastly instincts, were objects of aversion to me. So my days and nights passed in even deeper gloom than I had ever before known. [18]

Indeed, in comparing the quality of life of field slaves with that of house slaves, the relative isolation of house servants, caused by them being separated from the wider slave community, must be taken into account. House servants, whilst not having to endure the arduous daily grind of outdoor fieldwork, were often victims of isolation.

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[14] See Lowery, *Life on the Old Plantation*, 15.

[15] Jacobs, *Incidents*, 44.

[16] See Mattie J. Jackson, *The Story of Mattie J. Jackson*, 26; Lucy A. Delany, *From the Darkness Cometh the Light*, 24; Kate Drumgoold, *A Slave Girl's Story*, 10.

[17] Annie L. Burton, *Memories*, 3.

[18] Griffiths, *Autobiography of a Female Slave*, 200. Incidentally, Griffiths later changed her attitude towards slave men when she fell in love with Henry. Her love for him has been detailed in Chapter One.

Similarly, the South Carolina W.P.A. respondent Jessie Sparrow described the isolation of her mother from the wider slave community when she said to her interviewer:

> My ole missus take she 'way from her mammy when she wus jes' uh little small girl en never wouldn't 'low her to go in de colored settlement no more. She been raise up in de white folks house to be de house girl. Never did work none 'tall outside. She sleep on uh pallet right down by de Missus bed.[19]

Female house servants, too, in their relative isolation form the wider slave community, could also be more at risk from sexual abuse at the hands of their owners, as the experience of Harriet Jacobs will show. [20]

Field slaves, in contrast, had more opportunities to bond with other slaves and to develop a shared work camaraderie than did house slaves, as the comments made by Genia Woodberry at the beginning of the chapter show. Similarly, Charles Ball, in his narrative, described being part of a great gang who set out to work together in the field.[21] These times therefore provided an opportunity for slaves to socialise with each other. Since what we are concerned with here though is the extent to which the working lives of the mass of slaves led to bonding within gender groups and across gender lines, an examination of the working lives of field slaves is vital. Deborah White has argued persuasively that the sex-segregated work patterns facilitated female slave bonding. She states:

> Harvesting season on staple crop plantations may have found men and women gathering the crop in sex-integrated gangs, but at other times women often worked in exclusively or predominantly female gangs. Thus women were put in one another's company for most of the day. This meant that those with whom

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19 Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 4, 121-122.

20 See Chapter Five for a discussion of the sexual abuse that Jacobs suffered at the hands of her owner.

21 See Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 116-118

> they ate meals, sang work songs, and commiserated during the work day were people with the same kind of responsibilities and problems. If anything, slave women developed their own female culture, that is, a way of doing things and a way of assigning value that flowed from the perspective that they had on Southern plantation life. Rather than being diminished, their sense of womanhood was probably enhanced, and their bonds to one another made stronger. [22]

It is true that being in such close proximity to each other all day certainly provided opportunities for field slaves of the same gender to bond and forge strong relationships. Indeed, White's claims are reinforced by the comments made by the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents. For example, Gus Feaster gave a vivid description of female hoe-workers. He stated: 'Seed as many as a dozen hoe-womens in de field at one time. Dey come when dey finished breakfast and de plows had got a start. Dey used mulberry skins from fresh mulberry saplins to tie around dere waists fer belts.' [23] Jane Johnson also illustrated sex-segregated work patterns when she said 'Most of de grown slave women knocked off from field work at dinner time on Saturdays and done de washin' for de rest of de slaves.'[24] Similarly, Nelson Cameron stated:

> ...a white man start out wid a few women folk slaves, soon him have a plantation full of little niggers runnin' 'round in deir shirt-tails and a kickin' up deir heels, whilst deir mammies was in de field a hoeing and geeing at de plow handles, workin' lak a man. You ketch de point? Well I's one of them little niggers. My pa name Vander. Him b'long to one of de big bugs, old Marse Gregg Cameron. [25]

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[22] White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?:*, 121.

[23] Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol. 2, Part 2, 50.

[24] Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol. 3, Part 3, 49.

[25] Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol. 2, Part 1, 173.

Evidence from the records of slave owners

From a textual reading of a selection of owners' manuscripts, it appears that male and female slaves were, for the most part, separated into sex-segregated gangs for their working lives. This evidence therefore supports the comments made within the W.P.A. and full-length narratives on gendered work patterns. Take, for example, the following description of rice sowing by Anne Simons Deas. She stated:

> The row of trenchers were well ahead of the others, keeping abreast but at some distance apart. With their narrow trenching-hoes they were making long black lines, as straight as an arrow in the well-pulverized soil. Some little way behind them came the sowers, *all women*, with their skirts tied up, and carrying the seed-rice in handle baskets, open-mouthed bags, or even in their aprons. With the regularity of machines, their hands went into the receptacles, and with a long, graceful, far-reaching, and apparently careless sweep of the arm, they sent the rich yellow grain flying through the air straight into the trench. Unless it is a very windy day, scarcely a grain lies outside. It is a fascinating sight. [italics added]. [26]

The South Carolina rice planter Louis Manigault also made reference to the division of tasks according to gender in the following letter to his father. He wrote, in 1854: 'The women are levelling the dirt from the new quarter drains dug in 37 acre square, and the men are clearing ditches in the swamp.' [27]

It is, however, the plantation journals of slave owners that have proved the most illuminating in any assessment of gender and work. Entries in plantation journals frequently refer to the division of tasks according to gender. For example, entries in the plantation journal of Ben Sparkman included: 'The fellows were employed in cutting up

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[26] Anne Simons Deas, "Two Years of Plantation Life", 124, S.C.L.

[27] Letter to Charles Manigault from Louis Manigault, 4 March 1854. Quoted in Clifton, *Life and Labor on Argyle Island*, 177.

logs in [the] 29 acre field. The women in cutting down bushes in [the] potato field.' [28] A few day later, Sparkman said: 'The women were cutting down bushes in [the] 31 acre field. On Wednesday morning...they planted potatoes. The fellows, with the exception of the ploughman, were employed...at Wilson's place, in mending brakes in banks, with the help of women on Wednesday evening.' [29] Similarly, the plantation journal of John Edwin Fripp again fits with the pattern of tasks being divided according to gender. He wrote, in 1857: 'Ordered ...[Peter] to take in the few ripe peas, to strip the May corn tomorrow, and when they get through, gin out the yellow cotton etc, to work the slips with the women etc and start the men cutting.' [30] Also, in 1858 Fripp wrote: 'Men digging canal in woods. Women listing cowpenned land in swamp field.'[31]

Evidence obtained on the work performed for owners by male and female slaves, then, supports the propositions that, firstly, men and women worked in sex-segregated gangs, and secondly, that they also tended to perform different tasks. Men performed the most arduous work, whilst women tended to perform lighter tasks such as hoeing. [32] These propositions lend support to Deborah White's theory of a female slave solidarity forged through work. However, despite the existence of such a solidarity, the fact that slave males and females still sought the love and support of a spouse upon adulthood tells us something about the primary importance of spousal bonding within the slave community.

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[28] Entry from 9 April 1853, Ben Sparkman Plantation Journal 1848, 1853-1859, S.H.C.

[29] Entry from 12 April 1853, Ben Sparkman Plantation Journal 1848, 1853-1859, S.H.C.

[30] Entry from 24 August 1857, John Edwin Fripp Plantation Journal, S.H.C.

[31] Entry from 2 February 1858, John Edwin Fripp Plantation Journal, S.H.C.

[32] See Appendix Two for more specific descriptions of the work of male and female slaves found within the South Carolina W.P.A. narratives.

The relationship between occupation and marriage

Chapter One showed the ways in which slave courtship rituals provided slaves with opportunities to meet, and to marry, members of the opposite sex. This chapter will now investigate how far work influenced marriage patterns. The patterns that emerge from the slave sources suggest two main results. First, for practical or status reasons, most slaves married within their occupational group. Second, a significant minority of marriages brought field and domestic slaves together. This latter finding suggests important networks reaching throughout the slave community.

Within the sample of full-length narratives, three narrators mentioned the occupation of their spouse, or their loved one, during slavery. Charles Ball married a house servant. Tom Jones married a seamstress, and Mattie Griffiths expressed her love for a slave, Henry, who was a head-steward. All three of these narrators were house or skilled slaves themselves, which seems to suggest a correlation between occupation and marriage, and suggests that slaves tended to meet and marry individuals from their own occupational grouping. [33] We can, however, more systematically examine the opportunities for bonding between male and female slaves that existed during their work-days by means of a quantitative investigation into marriage patterns found within the South Carolina W.P.A. narratives. Field slaves marrying field slaves, and house slaves marrying house slaves, might suggest marriage markets operating according to status divisions among slaves. Such patterns might also suggest that some slaves of different genders, but of the same occupational groupings, did find the time to socialise and to bond with one other during the working day. [34]

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[33] See Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 21; Tom Jones, *Experience and Personal Narrative*, 24; Griffiths, *Autobiography of a Female Slave* , 257.

[34] The relationship between marriage and occupation will also be examined in Chapter Four, since this relationship is of significance to the social structure of the slave community.

The South Carolina W.P.A. narratives were examined in order to assess any correlation between the occupations of slave spouses. Only one respondent, Louisa Davis, gave both her own occupation and the occupation of her spouse. Davis was a house servant, whose husband worked in the field. [35] Evidence obtained on the marital patterns of the parents of the respondents is therefore more helpful for this type of analysis. When the occupations of the parents of the respondents were examined, seventeen respondents gave the occupations of both of their parents. These were examined in order to see if there was any link between occupation and marriage and the results are displayed in Table 3:3.

Table 3:3:

Correlation between Occupation and Spouse among the Parents of the South Carolina W.P.A. Respondents

	Number who commented
Both spouses house workers:	8 (47.1%)
Both spouses field workers:	3 (17.6%)
Spouses with different occupations:	6 (35.3%)
Totals:	17 (100%)

Source: Rawick, *The American Slave.*

These results do reflect the bias in the overall sample towards house servants. Despite this bias, however, we can see that whilst house slaves did tend to marry other domestics, [36] over one-third of the sample said that their parents held different occupations. This tells us much about the marriage patterns of slaves and about the networks through which male and female slaves bonded with each other. Field and domestic slaves therefore did not often segregate themselves into parallel communities. Furthermore, as has been seen in Chapter One, dances and frolics were vitally

[35] See Rawick, *The American Slave,* Vol. 2, Part 1, 299-303.

[36] Escott also found a high level of same-occupation marriage among slaves. See *Slavery Remembered,* 61.

important in the marriage market. Such gatherings were therefore probably important in making links across a slaveholding, as well as between slaveholdings. The size of some slaveholdings could have affected choice within marriage markets, but the fairly high level of marriage across occupational lines suggests important links within the slave community.

Where slaveholdings were small, the result might be restricted marriage markets, or an increased tendency to marry across plantations. [37] The practicalities of occupation were also important for many, so that the relative isolation of house servants may have contributed to the fact that they tended to marry other house servants. House slaves tended to live in slave quarters near to their owners' houses, if not within their owners' houses themselves. As Anne Simons Deas stated in her fictionalised reminiscences, however, field slaves lived in their own settlement. She wrote: 'The Hill is where the field hands live....It is a little village of two rows of double-houses, with a wide street between....A partition divides each house in half, and the chimney is in the middle.'[38]

Field slaves, then, had considerable opportunities to mix within a wide group of slaves. Their greater distance from owners might also have meant that they were more likely than house slaves to socialise with other slaves who belonged to different owners, and this might explain the slightly larger tendency for field slaves to reside within cross-plantation marriages (as will be seen in Chapter Four). [39] The high incidence of viable cross-plantation marriages (discussed in Chapter Two), together with the secondary pattern of a significant rate of marriage spanning different occupations, suggests that marriage markets worked in important ways to sustain community solidarity and slave autonomy.

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[37] Also on marriage markets, see Crawford, "Quantified Memory", 188.

[38] Anne Simons Deas, "Two Years of Plantation Life", 28.

[39] See Table 4:3, Chapter Four.

Work performed by slaves for their families

This chapter will now move on to an investigation of the work that slaves performed for their families, and it will investigate how this type of work shaped both family responsibilities and gender relations. In performing work for their families, female slaves could (as was the case with the work they performed for owners) become victims of gender discrimination. As will be seen in Chapter Four, female slaves often had to perform 'extra' tasks for their owners, such as sewing or knitting slave clothes, as well as performing extra tasks in the home through their childcare responsibilities. The amount of work that male and female slaves performed for their families reflected gendering patterns within the slave community and impacted on the quality of life of male and female slaves.

The South Carolina W.P.A. narratives have proved valuable in investigating work performed for slave families, with 48 of the 334 respondents (14.4 per cent of all respondents) commenting on the work that they performed for their families after 'sundown'. Of these comments, 32 were made by males (representing 16.9 per cent of all males), and sixteen comments were made by females (representing 11.1 per cent of all females). These comments have been categorised in Table 3:4.

Table 3:4:

Work for Families Performed by the South Carolina W.P.A. Respondents During Slavery

	A	B	C
	TOTAL	MALES	FEMALES
Gardens or patches:	21(43.7%)	14 (43.7%)	7 (43.7%)
Fishing:	11(22.9%)	11(34.4%)	0 (0.0%)
Hunting:	21(43.7%)	20 (62.5%)	1 (6.2%)
Making clothes:	8 (16.7%)	2 (6.2%)	6 (37.5%)
Raising animals:	2 (4.2%)	2 (6.2%)	0 (0.0%)
Washing:	3 (6.2%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (18.7%)

Source and note: Rawick, *The American Slave.*

Within this table, the percentages in column A are for all 48 who responded; percentages in column B are for all 32 males who responded; and percentages in column C are for all 16 females who responded. The totals add up to more than the *number of respondents who commented, since some respondents* mentioned more than one type of work.

By breaking down the comments of the South Carolina respondents, we can see the extent to which the work that slaves performed for their families was dependent on gender. The same percentage of male and female respondents commented on working gardens or patches, because working in the garden was likely to be a task in which all of the slave family -- men, women and children -- participated. Fishing and hunting, on the other hand, show a strong male bias, since these were both 'traditional' male tasks. Women dominated when it came to making clothes and washing, both of which were 'traditional' female tasks. In general, then, the work performed by slaves for their families coincides with traditional white norms about conventional gender roles. Males tended to perform the more arduous physical tasks, whilst the work of females tended to revolve around the home. However, the fact that slaves worked in their gardens or

patches as a *family* is also of significance, since this shared task provided an important opportunity for male-female (as well as parent-child) socialisation and bonding. As the South Carolina W.P.A. respondent Genia Woodberry said: 'It jes lak I tellin' yunnah my Massa gi'e he colored peoples mos' eve't'ing dey hab en den he 'low eve'y family to hab uh acre uv land uv dey own to plant. Hadder work dat crop in de night.'[40]

Woodberry's testimony broadly supports the proposition of Betty Wood, who, in her study of the informal slave economies of Lowcountry Georgia, found that the slave garden tended to be a shared responsibility. She states:

> it may be safely assumed that the division of labor on gardens reflected the outcome of negotiation between husband and wife, parents and children. More often than not it was shared work, rather than the exclusive responsibility of any one family member. [41]

Similarly, Larry Hudson has argued persuasively for the importance of the slave family as an economic unit. He claims that

> Without assistance from family members, individual slaves would have struggled fully to exploit the land they tilled and other means of reducing their dependency. Throughout the state slaves worked in family groups and pooled their efforts. [42]

The results obtained from the above quantitative analysis of the comments of the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents correlate with the more qualitative evidence found within these narratives on work performed for families, and also with the evidence

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[40] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3. Part 4, 219.

[41] Betty Wood, *Women's Work, Men's Work: The Informal Slave Economies of Lowcountry Georgia* (London: University of Georgia Press 1995), 41.

[42] Larry E. Hudson, *To Have and To Hold: Slave Work and Family Life in Antebellum South Carolina* (Athens, Georgia.: University of Georgia Press 1997), 32-33.

found within the sample of full-length slave narratives. The comments of the W.P.A. respondent John N. Davenport are typical of the comments made on work performed for families. He stated: 'Sometimes de fellows would slip off and hunt or fish a little on Sunday. Women would do washing on Saturday nights, or other nights.'[43] Other South Carolina W.P.A. respondents commented on slaves producing goods for sale on the market. This was an important means by which slaves raised money to buy supplementary goods. For example, Sam Polite said:

> W'eh you knock off wuk, you kin wuk on your land. Maybe you might hab two or t'ree tas' ob land 'round your cabin what Maussa gib you for plant. You kin hab chicken, maybe hawg. You kin sell aig [egg] and chicken to store and Maussa will buy your hawg. In dat way slabe kin hab money for buy t'ing lak fish and w'atebber he want. [44]

Within the sample of full-length slave narratives, too, much information was given on the work that slaves performed after 'sundown'. Jacob Stroyer, for example, reminisced about slave boys hunting on a Sunday. [45] However, the most extensive descriptions of the types of work performed by slaves in order to support their families have come from the narrative of Charles Ball. A talented slave, Ball made wooden trays and bowls, which he sold in order to help support the family (Nero, Dinah and their children) that he lodged with as a slave. He wrote:

> *Before Christmas, I had sold more than thirty dollars worth of my* manufactures; but the merchant with whom I traded, charged such high prices for his goods, that I was poorly compensated for my Sunday toils, and nightly labors; nevertheless, by these means, I was able to keep our family supplied with molasses, and some other luxuries, and at the approach of winter, I

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[43] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol.2, Part 1, 241.

[44] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 3, 272.

[45] Stroyer, *My Life in the South*, 46-47.

purchased three coarse blankets, to which Nero added as many, and we had all these made up into blanket-coats for Dinah, ourselves, and the children. [46]

Ball also described how slave families supported both themselves and each other, by growing and exchanging produce. He stated:

> We were supplied with an abundance of bread, for a peck of corn is a much as a man can consume in a week, if he has other vegetables with it; but we were obliged to provide ourselves with the other articles necessary for our subsistence. Nero had corn in his patch, which was now hard enough to be fit for boiling, and my friend Lydia had beans in her garden. We exchanged corn for beans, and had a good supply of both.[47]

Conventional norms, then, dictated that female slaves should perform work about the house, and also that male slaves were also expected to undertake certain types of work in order to support their families. This is well exemplified by the comments made by Ball on his friend Lydia's husband, who did not perform any work other than that for the master. Ball described him in somewhat derogatory tones when he stated:

> He was compelled by the overseer to work, with the other hands, in the field, but as soon as he had come in to his cabin, he took his seat, and refused to give his wife the least assistance in doing anything. She was consequently obliged to do the little work that it was necessary to perform in the cabin; and also to bear all the labor of weeding and cultivating the family patch or garden. [48]

Conclusions

Whilst female slaves were victims of gender discrimination in terms of the fact that they had to perform work about the house, in addition to work for their owners and any childcare responsibilities, male slaves also had their own particular duties and

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[46] Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 134.

[47] Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 133.

[48] Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 197.

obligations. The work that male and female slaves performed for their families was therefore very much a shared responsibility. Furthermore, it was the strength of the relationships between male and female slaves that facilitated this sharing of responsibilities. In caring for their families, the work roles for male and female slaves were different, but were also relatively egalitarian. [49] This egalitarianism also facilitated male-female bonding. Take, for example the reminiscences of Tom Jones in his slave narrative. He stated that

> Father and mother tried to make it [their cabin] a happy place for their dear children. They worked late into the night many and many a time to get a little simple furniture for their home and the home of their children; and they spent many hours of willing toil to stop up the chinks between the logs of their poor hut, that they and their children might be protected from the storm and the cold.[50]

Evidence on work therefore shows a high level of gendering, but also significant links across the slave community and significant sharing within the family. Evidence from the W.P.A. narratives has shown that an important minority of marriages brought field and house slaves together, and this suggests a high level of community solidarity. Work for slave families, like work for owners, was often gendered, but again there was usually much sharing when slaves worked on their family plots. Once slaves had settled into a stable union, both partners worked together, albeit sometimes in different ways, to provide for their families and to make their lives as comfortable as possible. Evidence on work, then, suggests status differences according to gender, but within a context of broad co-operation. The next chapter will explore these status differences further.

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[49] This supports the proposition made by Deborah White, that equality within the slave family was founded on complementary roles. See White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 158.
[50] Tom Jones, *Experience and Personal Narrative*, 6.

Chapter Four

The Social Structure of the Slave Community: Status and Gender Divisions

> I tell you how Eliza worried me last Saturday. She brought in her work after breakfast and said she was going to wash. I asked her how she could think of washing when I had told her Delia was to wash for her and she was to work every Saturday. She said Delia would not like to wash her children's dirty clothes, and besides, she must have some time to work for herself, she had her children to take care of. I told her though I had given her a whole day every week off to wash, that she only washed about half a dozen clothes, and her children were always dirty. She said they had not the clothes to change. I told her the clothes I had given her for them she had not made up yet, so I did not know what she would do if she had more. She said she had no time to work for herself, that she could not see to wash at night, her eyes were bad, and after getting her supper and putting her children to sleep, there was very little time until nine o'clock, the hour you said she must go to bed, and after working all day steadily for me, she was not able to work at night. [1]

Introduction

The above letter, written by Elizabeth Franklin Perry to her husband Benjamin, exposes the 'triple burden' that was placed upon female slaves. Female slaves were victims of gender oppression in that they had to perform work for their owners, they had to work at home, and they also had the heavy burdens of child-bearing and much of the responsibility of child-rearing. Women's child-bearing role impacted upon every area of their life, including their work and status. In part, the child-bearing role led

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[1] Letter to Benjamin Franklin Perry from Elizabeth Perry, 'Monday afternoon', [no year], Benjamin Franklin Perry Papers, S.C.L.

owners to see females as less valuable workers and less suitable for training in certain types of work. This chapter will therefore consider how child-bearing and child-rearing impacted on the status and experience of slave women.

Early sections of the chapter will be concerned with contrasting white and black notions of status within the slave community. So far as slaves (but not owners) were concerned, high status was associated with those slaves who performed important roles within the slave community. It is important to contrast the way owners and slaves defined status, since differences in these definitions can tell us much about the gulf between the worlds of slaves and owners. In particular, examining the ways in which owners assigned social status can tell us much about the ways in which they rationalised slavery. I shall argue, as Michael Tadman has, that owners rationalised slavery through favouring a minority of 'key slaves'. Tadman argues that, for the typical owner, certain elite slaves (the driver and his wife, and one or two senior domestics), were psychologically and ideologically of critical importance. Masters, he argues, could congratulate themselves that they treated these 'worthy' (key) slaves with benevolence, and this then allowed them to treat 'less worthy' (non-key) slaves with indifference and racist contempt. This process, Tadman argues, was critical for the maintenance of the owner's benevolent self-image. [2]

Social structure within the slave community

Historiographically, the social structure of slave communities has been of considerable interest to historians. Writing in the 1930s, E. Franklin Frazier's comments on slave communities now appear patronising and dated. However his comments do make a useful starting point for a historiographical investigation into the social structure of slave communities. Frazier claimed that it was masters who created

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[2] On the concept of key slaves, see the 'Introduction' to Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*. Also 'The Persistent Myth of Paternalism'.

social divisions among slaves, by placing certain slaves in positions of authority over others. [3] He also claimed that house slaves held higher social positions than field slaves, and furthermore, that mulatto slaves were more likely to perform house work than darker-skinned slaves. Frazier thus claimed that mulatto slaves were of the highest social standing in slave society, due to both their light colouring, and the nature of their occupations. [4] Frazier also believed that increased contact with the whites of the 'Big House' meant that these mainly mulatto house servants adopted the 'superior' white forms of 'life, language, traits and habits.' [5] As such, house servants supposedly constituted a type of hereditary caste.

Frazier has, however, been criticised by more recent historians for only examining social structure within the slave community as it was perceived by slave owners. Indeed, Frazier actually believed that this owner-defined pattern was the only social structure that existed for slaves. But, the fact that owners put certain slaves to work in the house does not automatically mean that these slaves were awarded a higher social standing from their peers, despite what owners may themselves have liked to believe. More recently, then, historians have attempted to analyse the social structure of the slave community from the point of view of the slave. This trend has its roots in the broader changes in the historiography of American slavery that took place from the 1970s, when increasing importance was placed upon using source materials that allow us to understand slavery from the perspective of the slave, rather than merely from that of the owner.

A key example from this 1970s literature is Eugene Genovese. He has analysed the concept of what he terms, 'the legend of the house-slave elite', and in doing this, he has disputed Frazier's assertion that house servants were regarded as a hereditary caste,

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[3] Frazier, 'The Negro Slave Family', 207.

[4] Frazier, 'The Negro Slave Family', 208-209.

[5] Frazier, 'The Negro Slave Family', 211.

and, he has also suggested that this 'legend of the house-slave elite' was largely created by whites. [6] Instead, house servants were merely favoured by whites because they underwent significant training, and were therefore hard to replace. [7] Genovese suggests that within the slave community, house servants were not automatically recognised as being of high social standing. Indeed, whilst some slaves preferred house work, others preferred to work in the fields. It was only whites who assumed that their slaves would desire a job in the Big House. Genovese also provides various explanations as to why some slaves preferred field work to house work. He states:

> A few simply liked the rough outdoor work better than the physically less demanding house chores. Others wanted to work alongside a husband or wife or wanted to avoid proximity to ever demanding whites whom one had to wait on hand and foot. These slaves spoke of the camaraderie of fieldwork and the constricting atmosphere of the Big House. In particular field hands often enjoyed more leisure time and freedom of movement at the end of a day's work and on weekends. [8]

The views of Genovese, then, generally support the propositions made in Chapter Three, that field slaves enjoyed a greater camaraderie and more freedom of movement to participate in slave cultural and community affairs than did house slaves. However, in a similar vein to Frazier, Genovese does claim that a small mulatto elite existed within slave society. Unlike Frazier though, he argues that this elite was firstly, very small, and secondly, concentrated within a few status-bound great plantations. [9] Genovese claims that 'Blacks and mulattos worked side by side in the plantation Big House and in the fields,' [10] and he adds that 'the two-caste system in the old South

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[6] Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 328.
[7] Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 329.
[8] Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 331.
[9] Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 338.
[10] Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 429.

drove the mulattoes into arms of the blacks, no matter how hard some tried to build a make-believe third world for themselves.'[11]

From his analysis of the slave South then, which for the most part utilised qualitative information that he extracted from slave narratives, Genovese has claimed that, according to the slave perspective, working in the Big House did not, except in a minority of cases, lead to higher social standing within the slave community. A more structured quantitative analysis of the slave narratives can, however, also be enlightening in deciphering the social structure of the slave community. Paul Escott, in his study of the W.P.A. narratives, states:

> Whites have long believed that class lines were very strong among the slaves and that the privileged house servants identified with their aristocratic masters rather than with the common field hands. Extensive materials in the slave narratives reveals that for a small minority of slaves, this was partially correct, but that for the large majority, there was no well-developed class system and group loyalty overrode tendencies toward class divisions. [12]

Escott and Genovese therefore reach similar conclusions over the issue of the social structure of the slave community, with both being critical of the assumption that slaves derived their community social structure from the work that they were assigned by owners. Even so, Escott is somewhat critical of Genovese's preoccupation with the minority of slaves on large plantations who were status conscious. He states:

> Professor Genovese, in his study of slavery, accurately pointed out one of the major limitations on internal class divisions. Only on the large plantation could an extensive system of classes among the slaves exist, and such plantations accounted for no more than a minority of the slave population. Yet, for that minority Professor Genovese seemed to take class attitudes very seriously

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[11] Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 431.

[12] Escott, *Slavery Remembered*, 59.

> indeed. In his discussion of an aristocratic ethos absorbed by the slaves, he probably underestimated both the amount of role playing that took place on plantations and the desire to satisfy white interviewers. Repeatedly in the narratives the former slaves spoke of the concern for each other that united their group and ignored the supposed attractions of the big house. [13]

In noting the fact that the W.P.A. respondents were anxious to please white interviewers, Escott has highlighted one of the major problems of using these narratives in any investigation into the social structure of slave communities. For this reason, the South Carolina W.P.A. narratives have been used here (as is the case with the rest of this thesis) in conjunction with the sample of full-length slave narratives and with many slave-owner records. The South Carolina W.P.A. narratives, as noted in earlier chapters, have posed a methodological problem in their bias towards house servants. Therefore, by combining sources, an attempt will be made to take account of this bias.

There is some evidence that respondents who were themselves house servants, or whose parents were house servants, were more keen than those linked to field work to mention their occupation or their parents' occupation to their interviewers. Such a pattern might have reflected a desire to impress, and this in turn would have reflected a white perception of status within slavery. The W.P.A. narrative of the ex-slave Rosa Starke touched on white notions of the higher status of domestics. Starke said that

> A house nigger man might swoop down and mate wid a field hand's good lookin' daughter, now and then, for pure love of her, but you never see a house gal lower herself by marryin' and matin' wid a common field-hand nigger. Dat

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[13] Escott, *Slavery Remembered*, 63-64.

offend de white folks, 'specially de young misses, who liked de business of match makin' and matin' of de young slaves. [14]

Starke therefore pointed to white manipulation of marriage patterns. She even said that slaves tended not to marry people from different occupational categories for fear of 'offending' whites. However, from the evidence presented in this chapter, it would seem that Stark's comments are atypical. Most slaves married whom they wanted to marry, regardless of their occupation (although practically, as we saw in Chapter Three, slaves from the same occupational grouping may have had more chance to mix with each other). Starke's comments therefore tell us more about what white owners wanted to believe about the social structure of the slave community, than about the actual social structure of the slave community itself.

As was noted earlier, the use of both full-length slave narratives and owner's records can help us to overcome the limitations of the W.P.A. narratives. For example, full-length slave narratives are often much more revealing than the W.P.A. narratives in terms of the quality and quantity of information provided about slave community life. The narrators frequently described the nature of their lives in considerable detail, rather than merely answering questions posed to them by their intimidating white interviewers. The use of owner's records is also of fundamental importance to this chapter, since establishing owners' perceptions of social structure among their slaves is of vital significance in establishing the slaves' own perceptions of social structure. Differences in slave and owner perceptions can then be used to illustrate how, in establishing different criteria for social status, the slave community was acting upon its own, autonomous cultural norms.

Another limitation of using the W.P.A. narratives for quantitative analysis of social structure arises from the fact that when certain questions are asked, the sub-set of

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[14] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol.3, Part 4, 148.

relevant respondents is small. For example, in looking at the alleged existence of a mulatto elite, as detailed by Frazier, I found only eight respondents who were described as being either mixed race or 'mulatto', and who also commented on their occupation during slavery. Several of these respondents were too young for regular work as slaves, and all were male (which makes any gender analysis of the relationship between racial origin and status difficult to investigate). Of these light-skinned respondents who commented on work, three performed house work (but two of these also went on to work in the field), four performed no work, and one was a field slave. On certain issues, then, W.P.A. records produce only small samples, so that broad conclusions are not justified from W.P.A. evidence alone.

A combination of primary sources can allow firmer conclusions on owners' preference for house slaves. For example, an examination into owners' buying and selling practices reveals frequent references to mulatto house servants. Typical is the following example from Samuel A.Townes. He wrote: 'Last sale day at private sale I bought a young mulatto woman with two children (the oldest a boy big enough to "pick up chips") for $1200. The woman is a first rate cook, washer, seamstress and house servant.' [15] Furthermore, within the sample of full-length slave narratives used for this study, there was also a tendency for mulatto slaves to work within the house. Three of the narrators had white fathers (Moses Roper, Mattie Griffith and Annie L. Burton), and two of these (Roper and Griffith), worked in the house. [16]

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[15] Letter to George Franklin Townes from Samuel A. Townes, 15 January 1840, Townes Family Papers, S.C.L.

[16] See Roper, *A Narrative*, 70 and Griffiths, *Autobiography of a Female Slave*, 22.

Slave owners and social structure

This part of the chapter will seek to establish how and why owners accorded social status to their slaves. Examining social structure from the white perspective, and then from the slave perspective, as stated earlier, makes it easier to see both how the worlds of slaves and owners differed, and also how slaves strove for autonomy within their community affairs. Furthermore, examining how owners defined social status for their slaves can also reveal much about how they rationalised slavery by defining a minority of their slaves as favoured key slaves. This allowed owners to sustain a benevolent, paternalistic, self-image.

Establishing the relationship between the occupations of slaves and those of their parents is vital in assessing black and white interpretations of social structure. A pattern of slave children following in their parents' occupational footsteps would suggest that owners favoured certain slaves, or certain slave families, when it came to ascribing tasks. Owners, then, might have had their favoured slaves working in the house, or might have trained their favoured slaves in skilled work. For example, Stephen Crawford, in his quantitative study of the W.P.A. narratives, found that 79 per cent of the daughters of house servants in his sample, held house servant positions as their initial adult job.[17] He therefore claimed that slave daughters generally worked in the same capacity as their mothers. [18]

There is, however, evidence that certain slaves may have had some input into the types of occupation that they held, or else they may have been influenced into certain occupations by their parents, rather than by their owners. For example, in his autobiography, Jacob Stroyer says that he was taken to work in the field, having previously taken care of his master's horses. He complained to his mistress, saying that

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[17] Crawford, "Quantified Memory", 63.

[18] Crawford, "Quantified Memory", 63.

his deceased master had said that he could become a carpenter. He eventually got his own way. He wrote: 'I was informed by one of the slaves, who was a carpenter, that she [his mistress] had ordered that I should go and work at the trade with him. This gave me great joy.' [19] By protesting to his mistress then, Stroyer eventually got to perform the job that he wanted. Similarly, Charles Ball, having, on his own initiative, made a weir across a river to catch fish, was subsequently put in charge of supplying his plantation with fish. [20]

At a broader level, such independent desires reveal a great deal about the differences in slave and owner interpretations of social status. For example, in her investigation into the lives of slave women, Deborah White has said that 'Becoming a cook or seamstress or midwife sometimes involved more than just having the favor bestowed on one by the master or mistress. Skills were sometimes passed down from one generation to the next within a slave family.' [21] Some of the slave girls mentioned by Crawford (who followed in their mothers' occupational footsteps), might, then, have become house servants not simply because of their owners' directions but because their mothers taught them valuable skills, or because they expressed a desire to work as house servants.

Certainly slave mothers appear to have helped their daughters in teaching them valuable skills. In her narrative, Lucy A. Delenay describes how she was sold to a Mrs. Mitchell, in order to work as a house servant. However, since Delany's only previous occupation had been looking after children, she wrote: 'I had no more idea how it was to be done than Mrs. Mitchell herself. But I made the effort to do what she required,

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[19] Stroyer, *My Life in the South*, 30-32.

[20] Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 203-205.

[21] White, *Ar'n't I a Woman*, 129.

. and my failure would have been amusing had it not been so appalling.' Delany then asked her mother for help, who showed her how to clean clothes properly. [22]

The ultimate decision as to an individual slave's occupational path, however, did rest with slave owners. For example, Stroyer could not have worked as a carpenter had his mistress not eventually given her consent. Similarly, Lucy Delany was chosen to work in the house in spite of having no previous knowledge of housework. When we compare the occupations of parents and children we are therefore finding patterns which were usually strongly influenced by owners. Tables 4:1 and 4:2 provide a comparison of the occupations of the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents with those of their parents. Occupations have been separated, for clarity and simplicity, into the broad categories of house and field slaves. [23]

Table 4:1:

The Occupations of the South Carolina W.P.A. Respondents and the Occupations of their Fathers:

Occupation of respondent	Number of respondents	Occupation of father	
		House	Field
House:	3 (100%)	2 (66.6%)	1(33.3%)
Field:	9 (100%)	8 (88.9%)	1 (11.1%)
No Work:	4 (100%)	4 (100%)	0 (0.0%)
Totals:	16 (100%)	14 (87.5%)	2 (12.5%)

Source: Rawick, *The American Slave.*

[22] Delany, *From the Darkness Cometh the Light,* 24-25.

[23] See Appendix Two for an explanation of how the occupations of the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents were categorised.

Small sample size constituted a problem in comparing occupations, with only sixteen respondents commenting on both their own occupation under slavery and that of their fathers. There was also a strong bias within this sample towards the mentioning of fathers with house or skilled jobs. Only two of the sixteen respondents stated that their father worked in the field. This bias, coupled with the small sample size therefore makes it impossible to gain useful evidence on the likelihood of young slaves following the occupations of their fathers. A comparison of the occupations of the respondents with those of of their mothers proved more fruitful for two reasons. Firstly, the sample size was larger, with 41 respondents who commented on their own occupation also commenting on the occupation of their mothers. Secondly, there was not such a pronounced bias towards house work. The results for females are summarized in Table 4:2.

Table 4:2:

The Occupations of the South Carolina W.P.A. Respondents and the Occupations of their Mothers:

Occupation of respondent	Number of respondents	Occupation of mother	
		House	Field
House:	15 (100%)	11 (73.3%)	4 (26.7%)
Field:	13 (100%)	5 (38.5%)	8 (61.5%)
No Work:	13 (100%)	8 (61.5%)	5 (38.5%)
Totals:	41 (100%)	24 (58.5%)	17(41.5%)

Source: Rawick, *The American Slave.*

From Table 4:2 there does appear to be a correlation between the occupation of the respondents and those of their mothers. Overall, those respondents who either worked in the house, or performed no work, were more likely to have mothers engaged in housework. Also, those respondents who worked in the field were more likely to have mothers who performed fieldwork. Slave occupational patterns, then, do seem to

have been somewhat hereditary. Slaves may have played a role in this process through slave parents training their children, or through slaves themselves having their own occupational desires. But, at the fundamental level, the occupations held by slaves were due to the preferences of their owners, with owners tending to employ slaves in similar occupational positions to the parents of those slaves.

This is important for any assessment of social structure as defined by slave owners. Slave owners do seem to have ascribed house servants a higher status than field slaves, as will be seen later in this chapter. This had implications for the slave community, since the children of house servants were more likely to become house servants themselves. High status, skilled house slaves who held close relationships with their owners were therefore more likely to have children who would move into senior domestic positions. Conversely, some rank-and-file field slaves would never have the opportunity of performing housework themselves or having children who performed housework. Thus differences between slaves of different occupational categories were cultivated over generations. Slave owners believed in, and strove to create, a house servant 'elite', and in reserving certain occupations for favoured slave families (from whom a core of key slaves would emerge) close relationships between owners and a minority of their slaves were cultivated and maintained.

Table 4:3:

The Occupations of the Parents of the South Carolina W.P.A. Respondents and their Residential Patterns

Occupation of Parent	Number of Cases	Parents' Residence		% Nuclear
		Nuclear	Cross-Plantation	
House & Skilled:	37	27	10	73%
Field:	18	9	9	50%

Source: Rawick, *The American Slave.*

There is some evidence in the South Carolina W.P.A. narratives (as Table 4:3 shows) that a house slave had a greater likelihood of living in a nuclear family (with both parents at the same place of residence) rather than in a cross-plantation marriage. The sample sizes are small, but Table 4:3 shows, for house slaves and for field slaves respectively, some 73 per cent, and some 50 per cent living in nuclear (as opposed to cross-plantation) marriages. In some cases owners indulged house slaves by buying their chosen partners, and in some cases, perhaps, the marriages of key slaves would have been protected from sale and separation. Michael Tadman has suggested that the marriages most likely to be protected were not simply those of domestics as a group, but especially the sub-set of key slaves with whom owners felt that they had special bonds of affection and respect. [24]

For many slaves, however, working in the Big House would have had more pressures and inconveniences than owners cared to admit to themselves. Since slaves strove for autonomy in their community affairs, being a house slave, in close proximity to owners, could actually be restrictive. This reinforces the point that it was owners, rather than slaves, who ascribed a high status to slaves who performed housework. In ascribing this high status to their domestics, owners strove to divide their slaves along status lines, and by generating a slave elite they also took comfort in their self-image as benevolent paternalists who treated 'worthy' slaves well.

Within the records left by owners, we can find numerous examples of the ways in which they awarded house slaves a higher status than field labourers. For example, Charles Izard Manigault wrote: 'Jane and Malsey had better accustom themselves to fieldwork, for they will never see town again.' [25] A letter of Morcedai Cohen was

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[24] On the protection of the marriages of key slaves from sale, see Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves* , xix-xxxvii.

[25] Letter to James Coward [overseer at Silk Hope] from Charles Izard Manigault, 1 March 1847, Charles Izard Manigault Letterbook, 1846-1848, S.C.L.

more explicit: for the crime of courting a field slave of whom he disapproved, his house servant, Mary-Ann, was punished by being forced to work in the field. [26] It has also been asserted that owners saw house servants as more similar to themselves than field slaves, and that they had closer relationships with their house servants than with their field hands. The South Carolina owner, Ada Bacot touched on these ideas in her diary. After a slave mistress had died, apparently at the hands of her own slaves, Bacot feared violence from her own field slaves. However, she was not fearful of her house servants, as the following extract illustrates:

> After tea Pa asked me if I had heard of Mrs. Witherspoon's death. I had not. Gus it seems had heard of it and told Pa, but didn't tell him anything about what he had heard was the cause of her death. He was in the room so I asked if he knew what was the matter with her, he said he had heard but didn't know if it was true that she had been smothered in her bed. That he had heard some of the servants were in jail. Terrible, I can't get it out of my mind. We none of us know when we are safe. I have some about me that I fear it would take very little to make them put me out of the way. *I don't mean any of my house servants for I think they are very fond of me.* [Italics added] [27]

Because owners saw their house servants and their favoured slaves as more similar to themselves, they allowed them privileges that they did not allow their other slaves. The South Carolina W.P.A. respondent Rebecca Jane Grant mentioned a significant example when she said: 'De drivers and de overseers, de house servants, de bricklayers and folks like dat'd go to de white folk's church. But not de field hands.'[28] In allowing their house slaves to attend the same church as themselves, then, owners showed the entire slave community that they regarded certain slaves as superior to

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[26] Letter to Michael Lazarus from Morcedai Cohen, 2 October 1809, Lewis Malone Ayer Papers, S.C.L. This case has been detailed more extensively in Chapter One.
[27] Ada Bacot, Diary, 21 September 1861, S.C.L.
[28] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol.2, Part 2, 184-185.

others. Other South Carolina W.P.A. respondents were well aware of the privileges that slave owners might grant to house slaves, but not to field slaves. Take, for example, the comments of John Collins, who was the child of a field hand. He said that

> Marster didn't have many slaves. Best I 'member, dere was about twenty men, women, and chillun to work in de field and five house slaves. Dere was no good feelin's twixt field hands and house servants. De house servants put on more heirs than de white folks. They got better things to eat, too, than de field hands and wore better and cleaner clothes. [29]

From the comments of John Collins, we can see how owners sought to create divisions among their slaves by awarding them unequal privileges. However, despite encouraging social divisions in this way, the slaves' own notions of status limited the effectiveness of 'divide-and-rule' tactics. Owners did not, for the most part, succeed in dividing their slaves along status lines.

Slaves and social structure

Social structure within the slave community was not based upon being defined as a favoured slave by slave owners, since slaves strove for autonomy in their marital, residential and cultural arrangements regardless of their occupation. Since social status within the slave community was not dictated purely by white notions of occupations, we must ask how social status within slave communities was defined. Clues to this question have come from the work of other historians. It seems likely that, as Deborah White notes, the occupation of seamstress, cook and midwife all held places of considerable social standing for female slaves. [30] Notably, these were occupations that, firstly, required a considerable amount of skill. Secondly, they all required skills that could be transferred over generations. Thirdly, they were all occupations that benefited the slave community as well as the white community. It might also be noted

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[29] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 225.

[30] White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 129.

that, for male slaves, the occupations of blacksmith, carpenter or shoe-maker all possessed the same three characteristics. They required skills that could be of use to the slave community, as well as the white community, thus differentiating them from the occupation of general house servant. Community values, rather than straight-forward 'skill' was therefore an important consideration.

Since acquiring the skills necessary to become competent in the occupations listed above took a considerable amount of time, it is likely that social structure within slave communities was also influenced by age. Elderly, skilled slaves would have most likely been awarded positions of high social standing. For example, Deborah White has noted how, in the case of female slaves, status increased with age. She states: 'The slave woman's status in the slave community seems to have increased with old age as a consequence of her service as caretaker of children, nurse, and midwife.'[31]

The work of Larry Hudson has also investigated the ways in which slaves defined social status in different ways to their owners. He argues that it was the increased use of cash in slave quarters in the antebellum period (for example through selling produce from slave gardens) that facilitated the development of social status divisions among slaves. He states:

> A close look at the slaves in the last generation or two of slavery in South Carolina reveals a...complex picture of work and status in the slave quarters. Inherited rank, such as 'born in the house', for example, could actually count against the slaves wishing to move toward a respectable level of economic autonomy in the slave quarters. Evidence...that slaves reserved the top rung of the social ladder for those...who performed services for other slaves rather than for whites is substantial. [32]

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[31] White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 129.

[32] Hudson, 'All That Cash', in Hudson, *Working Toward Freedom*, 83.

Later, Hudson even seems to suggest a type of slave community meritocracy that existed for entrepreneurial slaves, who strove to own property themselves. He states: 'However humble their beginnings, industrious slaves, be they skilled or unskilled, house or field, young or old, male or female, could, if they desired, aspire to positions of power and influence in the slave quarters.' [33]

However, much of the initial research into the social structure of the slave community as defined by slaves, rather than by slave owners, has come from John Blassingame. It was Blassingame who originally stated that 'Slaves reserved the top rungs of the social ladder for those blacks who performed services for other slaves rather than for whites.' [34] Blassingame therefore placed conjurers, preachers, midwives and root-doctors at the top of his slave social structure. [35] It is also the case

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[33] Hudson, *To Have and To Hold*, 31.

[34] John W. Blassingame, 'Status and Social Structure in the Slave Community: Evidence from New Sources', in Harry P. Owens, (ed.), *Perspectives and Irony in American Slavery* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press 1976), 142.

[35] Blassingame, 'Status and Social Structure', 142-143. Blassingame also provides a classification system for the internal social structure of the slave community, by dividing it into three classes, as follows:

A. Upper Class	B. Middle Class
1. Conjurers	1. Creators of material culture
2. Physicians and midwives	2. Verbal artists
3. Preachers	3. Cool cats
4. Elders	4. Self-employed slaves
5. Teachers	5. Bondsmen whose jobs carried them away from the plantation
6. Creators and carriers of culture	6. Artisans who made the slave's shoes, liquor, clothes, and houses
7. Entertainers	7. Artisans who made the slave's tools (blacksmiths, coopers)
8. Rebels	8. Unusually strong, handsome, pretty or intelligent field hands
	9. Drivers who protected the slave's interests

that the holders of these positions were likely to be elderly slaves. The importance of elderly female slaves will be examined in the second part of this chapter. However, other significant slaves, for example conjurers, or those who held spiritual powers, were held in awe by the slave community, as the following comments made by the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents show us. Thomas Harper said: 'There was a conjurer in our neighbourhood who could make you do what he wanted, sometimes he had folks killed.'[36] Similalry, Sallie Layton Keenan said that

> When my paw, Obie, wuz a courtin, a nigger put a spell on him kaise he was a wantin' my maw too. De nigger got a conjure bag and drapped it in de spring what my paw drunk water from. He wuz laid up on a bed o' rheumatiz fer six weeks. [37]

It was those slaves who used their alleged spiritual powers for positive purposes, though, who were elevated to the highest-status within the slave community. Gus Feaster commented on old women on his plantation who served as 'root-doctors' by making herbal remedies. He said: 'Dem old womens made pine rosin pills from de pine rosin what drapped from de pine trees and give de pills to de folks to take fer de back ache.' [38] Similarly, Solomon Caldwell said that it was his mother who used to make the herbal medicines on their place of residence. He said: 'I 'member my ma would take fever grass and boil it to a tea and have us drink it to keep de fever away.

C. Lower Class
1. Temporary house servants and servants residing in the quarters
2. Ordinary field hands
3. Exploitive drivers
4. Live-in house servants with long tenure
5. Voluntary concubines
6. Informants
[From Blassingame,'Status and Social Structure', 150-151.]

[36] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 240

[37] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 3, 78.

[38] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 55.

. She used branch elder twigs and dogwood berries for chills.'[39] It is likely that such individuals held a place of high esteem among members of slave communities.

The importance of Christian religion within the slave community would have also meant that religious leaders would have commanded considerable respect, and thus also a high social status. Within the South Carolina W.P.A. sample, 132 respondents commented on religion, representing 39.5 per cent of all respondents. Only two of these respondents spoke about their lack of religion. [40] All other respondents who commented, however, expressed positive views on religion, and respect for religion suggests that slave preachers would have held positions of high status within the slave community. As the W.P.A respondent Affie Singleton said, slaves used to sing at night: 'didn't my soul feel happy when I come out the wilderness leaning on the Lord.'[41]

The first part of this chapter has established that there were considerable differences in the ways in which slaves and slave owners ascribed social status. Slave owners awarded predominantly house slaves a high social status. This was done for the purpose of rationalising slavery, since by favouring certain key house and skilled slaves, and treating them benevolently, slave owners reaffirmed their belief in their own paternalism. Slaves, however, awarded social status in different ways. Slaves who held positions of social prestige within the slave community were those who held skills

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[39] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 171.

[40] One of these was M. E. Abrams, who said that she was a non-believer in slavery times, although she did believe in the power of spiritualism. See Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 2. The other was John C. Brown, who expressed a negative view on religion. Brown was the son of a white mother, and lived with a step-mother who was mean to him. It was possibly these experiences that led him to hold negative views on religion. See Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 130; also Chapter Five of this thesis.

[41] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 11, 283

that were of benefit to slaves and well as white slave owners. We know that slaves did tend to marry someone of the same occupational grouping, and that house and field slaves did tend to have differing residential arrangements. Even so, one third of the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents married someone from a different occupational grouping (as seen in Chapter Three), and slaves strove to marry whom they wanted (regardless of both the whims of their owners and the residential arrangements that marriage might entail). These patterns suggest that, despite the efforts by owners to control the lives of their slaves, and to indoctrinate a few key slaves into their own white world, slaves sought to live according to the norms and customs of their own community.

Gender oppression within the slave community

This chapter will now investigate gender oppression within the slave community. This area of slave life is inextricably linked to issues of social structure, since gender played a large role in affecting the chances of moving up the social strata for individual slaves. It will be argued, from an examination of owner's records as well as slave source materials, that male slave labour was seen as superior to female slave labour. This limited the prospects for occupational mobility for female slaves. It will also be shown that female slaves often had to perform additional work for their owners because of their gender. Despite these tendencies, though, the slave community itself did allow some females to hold positions of power and prestige, most notably plantation midwives. White slaveowners, on the other hand, who defined social status differently from the way that slaves did, believed that it was generally the plantation cook, the 'Mammy' figure, who held the highest social status upon plantations. Their belief in Mammy, a key slave, reinforced their belief in their benevolent paternalism. This chapter will examine some of the ways in which female slaves were discriminated against because of their gender, most obviously through their child bearing and child rearing responsibilities -- responsibilities that female slaves held in addition to their roles as full-time workers.

The extent of gender exploitation faced by female slaves has been of considerable interest to historians. Angela Davis claimed in 1971 that

> The slave system could not confer upon the black man the appearance of a privileged position vis-a-vis the black woman. The man-slave could not be the unquestioned superior within the 'family' or community....The attainment of slavery's intrinsic goals was contingent upon the fullest and most brutal utilisation of the productive capacities of every man, woman and child. They all had to 'provide' for the master. [42]

For Davis, then, male and female slaves held positions of relative equality within the slave community, since the work that they performed for their owners was not differentiated by gender. However, evidence presented within this chapter, as well as in the previous chapter of this thesis, contradicts Davis's assertions. It appears that, firstly, the work of male and female slaves was usually segregated according to gender, and secondly, that female slaves were victims of gender oppression under slavery in various ways.

Other historians, too, have questioned Davis's position. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has claimed that whilst 'No slave holder refrained, out of respect for female delicacy, from letting a slave woman exercise her full strength,' slave women were more inclined to work at tasks with other slave women, since slave owners did reserve certain types of heavy work for men. [43] Thus 'masters...had differing expectations for the quantities of work that slave men and women should be expected to perform.' [44] Fox-Genovese's analysis of the gender divisions operating in the work lives of slave males and females, is similar to that of Deborah White. She states that 'Despite their limited sensitivity to regarding female slave labor...slave owners did reluctantly

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[42] Davis,'Reflections', 7.

[43] Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household,* 172-174.

[44] Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household,* 176-177.

acquiesce to female physiology...men were given the more physically demanding work unless there was a shortage of male hands.' [45]

In this sense, then, gender discrimination on the part of owners towards their female slaves would seem to be in the interests of female slaves, since they had less arduous tasks to perform. However, gender discrimination could also operate against female slaves in other ways. For example, the work of Jacqueline Jones shows how female slaves were indeed victims of sexual discrimination. She argues that female slaves were limited in their opportunities for occupational mobility because of their gender. [46] It is the impact of gender upon social status and occupational mobility that will be examined next.

It has been shown from an investigation into owners' records in Chapter Three, how males and females, for the most part, worked within sex-segregated work gangs. This chapter will now investigate some of the reasons why owners segregated male and female slaves in the realm of work. Investigating owners' records shows that whites believed in the physical superiority of male slaves, and, indeed, in the overall superiority of male slave labour. For example, Ben Sparkman's plantation journal shows his belief in the physical inferiority of female slaves. He wrote: 'The six fellows cut wood. The *women and two old fellows* cut down the corn stock in [the] 31 acre field.'[italics added] [47] Thus it was only elderly male slaves who were expected to perform the same work as female slaves, in this case cutting corn. Male slaves, however, performed the more physically arduous task of chopping wood.

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[45] White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 121.

[46] This proposition has been advocated by Jacqueline Jones. See Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, Chapter One.

[47] Ben Sparkman, Plantation Journal, 18 December 1854, S.H.C.

In part, then, the sexual division of labour assigned by owners was a reflection of the differing physical capabilities of male and female slave labour. The consequence of these physical differences, though, was that the work performed by males was generally seen as superior to the work performed by females. Owners appear to have attached a higher prestige to male slave labour than to female, which was then internalised by the slaves themselves. An extract from the diary of Samuel Cram Jackson illustrates this point. He related a story of a male slave who was instructed by his owner to do grinding work. The slave refused, however, and 'the next morning [he was] found in the woods hanging. He would not do women's work.' [48]

From an investigation into slave source materials, too, we can see how male slave labour was regarded by owners as superior to female. For example, it was men who held the majority of skilled occupations upon plantations, as illustrated by the South Carolina W.P.A. respondent Genia Woodberry. She provided extensive descriptions of skilled slave occupations upon her plantation in Marion County, including a description of the work of slaves in the 'shoe house' and the 'gin house' and the blacksmiths shop. All of these were run by male slaves. [49] Woodberry only mentioned two female slaves as being of importance to the running of the plantation, 'Gran'mudder Phoebe', who was in charge of the plantation dairy, and Patience, who 'help do aw de weaving fa de plantation.' [50] Similarly, in his narrative, Charles Ball described being taken to work in the field:

> We walked nearly a mile through one vast cotton field, before we arrived at the place of our intended day's labor. At last the overseer stopped at the side of the field, and, calling to several of the men by name, ordered them to call their companies and turn into their rows. The work we had to do today was hoe and weed cotton, for the last time; and the men whose names had been called, and

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48 Samuel Cram Jackson, Diary, 10 December 1832, S.H.C.

49 Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 4, 223.

50 Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol.3, Part 4, 222.

> who were, I believe, eleven in number, were designated as captains, each of whom had under his command a certain number of the other hands. The captain was the foreman of his company, and those under his command had to keep up with him. [51]

It was male slaves, rather than females then, who were put into positions of authority over other slaves.

Male slaves, then, were aware of the fact that their work was regarded as superior in both content and status to the work of female slaves. It was only male slaves, such as Charles Ball, who could rise to the position of overseer. Indeed, Ball himself states at one point in his narrative:

> I hung down my head, and felt very much ashamed of myself when I found that my cotton [picking] was so far behind that of many, even of the women, who had heretofore regarded me as the strongest and most powerful man of the whole gang. [52]

Similarly, the male slave Moses Roper, who frequently ran away, was actually punished by his owner by being chained to a female slave who had also run away. He therefore had to perform the same work as the female slave. Roper stated in his narrative:

> On the third day, he [his master] chained me to this female slave, with a large chain of 40lbs. weight round the neck. It was most harrowing to my feelings thus to be chained to a young female slave, for whom I would rather have suffered 100 lashes than she should have been thus treated; he kept me chained to her during the week, and repeatedly flogged us both, while thus chained together, and forced us to keep up with the other slaves, although retarded by the heavy weight of the log-chain. [53]

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[51] Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 118-119.

[52] Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 147.

[53] Roper, *A Narrative*, 16.

Thus gender distinctions in the work of males and females meant that, firstly, male and female slaves tended to work separately (as seen in Chapter Three). Secondly, males had more opportunities for occupational mobility within the slave regime; and thirdly, male and female slaves also tended to perform different tasks, with men performing the heaviest tasks in the field, and women performing the lighter tasks such as hoeing. As the following extract from the plantation book of Thomas Blewitt shows, female slaves were also the ones expected to perform 'traditional' female tasks such as sewing and knitting. Blewitt states that on rainy days, whilst male slaves still undertook fieldwork, his female slaves were expected to stay indoors and sew clothes. In September 1855 he wrote: 'Rain today. The cotton put up...women sewing their clothes.' [54] Similarly, in October of the same year, he wrote: 'Rain today. Men gathering corn, the women sewing their winter clothes.' [55]

The fact that female slaves did tend to perform 'traditional' female tasks, however, meant that, in certain respects, their lives were harder than the lives of male slaves. For example, female slaves often had to perform extra work for their owners after their work in the field was finished. We can find examples of females having to perform what might be termed 'traditional' female tasks in various source materials. The plantation mistress Margaret Ann Morris made frequent reference in her diary to giving her female slaves cloth to make into clothes. Typical is the entry made on 15 May 1864, when she wrote: 'I gave each of the women servants a yard of long cloth to make an apron.' [56] Similarly, Lucy Carpenter, in a letter to her brother William Blanding in which she described a visit to James Chesnut's plantation, wrote: 'It was four o'clock, we passed many of the negroes returning from their labours...walking

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54 Entry for 29 September 1855, Thomas Blewett Plantation Book 1848-1856, S.C.L.
55 Entry for 5 October 1855, Thomas Blewett Plantation Book 1848-1856, S.C.L.
56 Margaret Ann (Meta) Morris, Diary, 15 May 1864, S.H.C.

leisurely, the females knitting.' [57] This extract illustrates the fact hat female slaves often had to perform extra work for their owners because of their gender. After finishing their work in the field, they then had to begin knitting.

Elizabeth Franklin Perry, in one of her many letters to her husband, also described how a female slave had to perform extra work in addition to field work. Mrs. Perry described the visit of a slave Milly to her daughters Caroline (owned by a neighbour) and Delia (owned by Mrs. Perry herself):

> Very differently situated did she [Milly] find Caroline, who she went to see and passed one night with. She said Mrs. Lynch [Caroline's mistress] gave her [Caroline] a most dreadful character, which she does all of her servants except one, that she gives her very little to eat, and that all the clothes she had on, would not be enough to make an apron, and after working out all day, when she comes home at night from the fields, she has to spin a yard of cotton, which would take her until ten o'clock, and Mrs. Lynch wont let her have the bed clothes to sleep on....She must be treated very badly....She and Delia both cried at the thought of Caroline's situation. [58]

The harsh treatment by Mrs. Lynch towards her slave was therefore condemned by Mrs. Perry. Ironically though, as we saw earlier in this chapter, another of Mrs. Perry's slaves (Eliza) was also very dissatisfied about the amount of work that she had to do at night. Perhaps Milly and her daughters (Delia and Caroline) were favoured by Perry, whilst Eliza was not. Certainly Perry did not appear to see any similarities between the situation of Mrs. Lynch's slave (Caroline), and her own slave (Eliza).

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[57] Letter to William Blanding from Lucy Carpenter [sister], 23 January 1849, William Blanding Papers, S.C.L.

[58] Letter to Benjamin Franklin Perry from Elizabeth Perry, 29 November 1843, Benjamin Franklin Perry Papers, S.C.L.

Slave, as well as white, source materials make reference to the 'extra' work that female slaves had to perform because of their gender. Within the South Carolina W.P.A. narratives we can find frequent examples of female slaves having to weave or spin in addition to performing other tasks. Josephine Bristow described how female slaves used to spin and weave when it was raining, and they couldn't work in the field.[59] Similarly, Adeline Grey described helping her mother weave at night. She said: 'Used to give a brooch [hank] or two to weave at night. I'se sometimes thread de needle for my Ma, or pick out de seed in de cotton, an make it into rolls to spin.' [60] Margaret Hughes also said: 'De grown up slaves had to work in de field all day and then at night they spin cloth and make their clothes.'[61] Although she does not specify that it was female slaves who had to do this, from the weight of other available evidence, we can presume that this was the case.

The fact that male slave labour was regarded as superior to female also meant that males had more opportunities to hold jobs that were seen as being of a high social status by their owners. In the South Carolina W.P.A. narratives, whilst slave women did hold jobs of some prestige, the majority of the high-ranking jobs were held by slave men. This becomes apparent upon examination of Appendix Two. [62] The fathers of the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents held a wider variety of house or skilled occupational positions than did the respondents' mothers. Women slaves were therefore restricted in terms of the variety of skilled, or high status occupations that they could enter. As such, they were, in this realm of life too, discriminated against because of their gender. These results therefore support the findings of Jacqueline Jones. She

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[59] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol.2, Part 1, 100

[60] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol.2, Part 2, 206

[61] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol.2, Part 2, 327.

[62] See Appendix Two for a description of the various occupations held by the fathers of the W.P.A. respondents.

argues that it was slave men who held the significant skilled jobs on plantations. As Jones states:

> Very few women served as skilled artisans or mechanics; on large estates men invariably filled the positions of carpenter, cooper, wheel-wright, tanner, blacksmith and shoemaker. At first it seems ironic that masters would utilise women fully as field laborers, but reserve most of the skilled occupations that required manual dexterity for men. Here the high cost of specialized and extensive training proved crucial in determining the division of labor. Although women were capable of learning these skills, their work lives were frequently interrupted by childbearing and nursing; a female blacksmith might not be able to provide the regular service required on a plantation. [63]

Similarly, Fogel and Engerman noted that female slaves were the victims of gender oppression in slave occupational hierarchies. They claimed that, on large plantations:

> about 7.0 per cent of the men held managerial posts and 11.9 per cent were skilled craftsmen (blacksmiths, carpenters, coopers etc.). Another 7.4 per cent were engaged in semi-skilled and domestic or quasi-domestic jobs: teamsters, coachmen, gardeners, stewards, and house servants. Occupational opportunity was more limited for women. About 80 per cent of slave women labored in the fields. Virtually all of the 20 per cent who were exempt from the field tasks worked as house servants or in such quasi-domestic positions as seamstresses and nurses. [64]

Deborah White, however, notes that some female slave occupations did carry prestige and status, although she acknowledges that the occupations of overseer, manager, foreman or driver were normally held by black or white men. [65] However, the skilled

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[63] Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 18.

[64] Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, 39.

[65] White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 129.

female slave occupations of seamstress, cook and midwife all held places of considerable social standing upon plantations. [66] The work of Betty Wood has developed this theme. She notes how the occupational opportunities for female slaves were related to plantation size. She states that on large plantations upward of 10 percent of bondwomen might be employed as cooks, maids, washerwomen, nurses, midwives and seamstresses. [67]

Certainly the female plantation cook was seen as important by both the white slave-owners, and the slave community, although, as a slave who performed work for slave owners, rather than work for the slave community, her status may have been lower in the eyes of slaves than in the eyes of owners. Important female house servants have traditionally been characterised as 'Mammys', and in 1976, Eugene Genovese described the Mammy as follows:

> Primarily, the Mammy raised the white children and ran the Big House either as the mistress's executive officer or her *de facto* superior. Her power extended over black and white so long as she exercised restraint, and she was not crossed. She carried herself like a surrogate mistress -- neatly attired, barking orders, conscious of her dignity, full of self-respect. [68]

More recently however, it has been suggested that Mammy was more important as a stereotype that existed within white minds for the purpose of rationalising slavery. Mammy, and her stereotypical opposite 'Jezebel', reflected the dominant white views of gender roles among slaves, rather than those gender roles themselves. [69] Mammy, then, represented the harmonious nature of the slave regime. Reflecting motherhood

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[66] White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 129.

[67] Betty Wood, *Women's Work, Men's Work*, 106.

[68] Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 355-356.

[69] On stereotypes, see Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 291-292; White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, Chapter One; and Chapter Five of this thesis.

and reproduction, she displaced sexuality into nurture, and she also illustrated the ultimate devotion of black women to whites. [70]

Thus it is mainly within owners' records and conservative slave narratives that we actually find reference to Mammy. Note how, in the following extract from the reminiscences of Mary Esther Huger, most slaves who were perceived as being of a high status were male, with the exception of the Mammy figure, 'Maum Sarey', and the dairy maid Marianne. Huger wrote:

> When I was a child, our servants were Ketch -- an old grey headed negro and Johnnie, whom he had trained. [w]hen Ketch was too old and tired of work, Johnnie, then a young man, took his place, and had the cook's son, Smart, to train. Smart's father was Old Smart the cook, and he had an elder son help in the kitchen with him, to do the work, for his health was not strong, and he was required to leave the kitchen and work in the garden, near by, where his wife was a regular garden woman named Hew. Many cooks were employed as gardeners for some hours daily, as it was not good for them to be all the time in a kitchen. Besides these there was Maum Sarey --who had been my mother's maid and had a house quite near us in the yard. She was first maid and seamstress, and made all our clothes when we were children. Then there was always one, and sometimes two girls, to help in housework and sewing. Then the pastry cook and dairy maid Marianne....Then Johnnie's mother was the washerwoman and had a girl to help her, and then there was Old Sam the coachman, and Maum Sarey's son Bertram the hostler he afterward became coachman. [71]

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[70] Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 292.

[71] Mary Esther Huger, Reminiscences, 1890-1892, S.C.L.

Anne Simons Deas also described a Mammy figure on her plantation during slavery times. She wrote:

> There are three women servants -- seamstresses and chambermaids -- besides 'Mauma', the children's nurse who is everything by turns, and is, next to family, the most important personage in the household....She is her Mistresses right-hand, and can do everything, from nursing the sick to clear-starching and making the most delicious pie-crust you ever ate. [72]

Margaret Anne Morris also fondly described her plantation Mammy, as the following extract illustrates. She wrote in her diary:

> In the evening...W[illiam] and H[arry] [her sons] sat at the fire with their Old Mauma W., smoking and the Old Mauma smoking too, quite comfortably, and having a cosy talk. She is a remarkable looking old woman and has been a faithful nurse to my children. She must now be 82 or 3. [73]

The comments of slave owners, then, emphasize the closeness of the relationship between the white slave owning family and the Mammy figure. Certainly, in the above cases, Mammy was what we might define as a key slave.

Mammy can also be found within certain slave narratives, although interestingly, she was not described in the South Carolina W.P.A. narratives. This omission emphasises the fact that the Mammy stereotype was essential for whites, while 'Mammy' was peripheral to most in the slave community. Mammy can be found in certain full-length slave narratives, especially those with a conservative bias. The narrative of I. E. Lowery provides a good case in point. He fondly describes his Mammy figure, 'Granny the cook':

> Granny, though she was black, considered herself to be the mistress on that plantation. She thought that her color was no fault of hers, but circumstances

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[72] Anne Simons Deas, "Two Years of Plantation Life", 7,.S.C.L.

[73] Margaret Ann (Meta) Morris, Diary, 30 December 1863, S.H.C.

(part of the time Mr. Frierson having no wife) and efficiency, made her head of the household. When Granny gave orders those orders had to be obeyed. White and colored respected and obeyed her. [74]

Whilst it is true that close relationships between slave owners and certain elderly, skilled female slaves did exist, these relationships should not be taken as representative of the norm among slave-slave owner relations. The majority of rank-and-file field slaves did not possess these types of relationships with their owners. Neither should the existence of Mammy be taken as illustrative of the high social status of female slaves within the slave community, since it was generally owners, rather than the slave community itself, that awarded Mammy high status. Instead, as had been shown earlier in this chapter, the slave community tended to award status to those slaves who worked for the slave community in addition to working for owners.

Child bearing and rearing

The assertions made by Deborah White on the importance of the female slave midwife within the slave community have much validity. Her comments are backed up by evidence found within the South Carolina W.P.A. narratives on the importance of, and therefore status granted to, certain female slaves. For example, elderly female midwives are well documented in these narratives, often being referred to as 'Grannys'. The origin of this term is unclear, but a possible explanation is connected to the fact that these women did tend to be elderly, respected female slaves. Often a Granny would replace the role of the white doctor in childbirth. As Millie Barber states: 'De fact is I can't 'member us ever had a doctor on de place; just a granny was enough at childbirth.' [75] Similarly, Phillip Evans said: 'I help to bring my brother Richard, us calls him Dick, into de world. Dat is, when mammy got in de pains, I run for de old

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[74] Lowery, *Life on the Old Plantation*, 51-52.

[75] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol.2, Part 1, 39.

granny on de place to come right away.'[76] Ellen Godfrey also spoke of the granny. She said: 'Never have a doctor, granny for me yet. My Mary good old granny. Catch two set o' twin for me.' [77]

The role of the midwife, or Granny then, is illustrative both of the self-sufficiency of the slave community, and also of the community networks that existed among slave women. Slave women in childbirth turned to their own community, rather than to their owners. Comments made on slave Grannys therefore back up the assertions made earlier in this chapter, that having an occupation that was of an intrinsic benefit to the slave community, as well as to owners, most likely dictated a high social status for individuals within the wider slave community.

We can also find out about the importance of the female slave midwife from owners' records. Although these women were not perceived by owners to be of as high a social standing as certain male slaves on a plantation, they were still seen as important individuals. Elizabeth Franklin Perry, for example, made reference to the slave midwife 'Mom Phillis', in the letters she wrote to her husband. She wrote:

> I am sorry to tell you that Eliza's child did not live a day. It was five weeks or more to[o] soon, and owing to her falls I suppose, was outwardly bruised and inwardly hurt, and also Mom Phillis not being here in time, might have been bad for it. From the fact of it being born alive I wrote to you in good spirits, thinking it would live, for Mary's that was so delicate lived five or six weeks, and perhaps longer if she had been careful, but Niny came to see Eliza a few hours after, and as soon as she saw it, said she did not think it would live. [78]

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[76] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol.2, Part 2, 35.

[77] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol.2, Part 2, 162.

[78] Letter to Benjamin Franklin Perry from Elizabeth Perry, 30 November 1850, Benjamin Franklin Perry Papers, S.C.L.

Later Perry wrote:

> I will begin by telling you the news that Sindy this morning after breakfast was taken sick, and after dinner gave birth to an infant, a girl, she suffered I expect a great deal but I am glad the event is safely over, and hope she and her baby will do well....Fanny wishes upon having it as her maid instead of Sarah. I think we will name it Caroline or Emily after one of Sindy's sisters. I sent first for Mom Phillis, and Mom Phillis afterwards begged me to send for Dr. Crook so he was with her. [79]

In this case then, we can see the shared responsibility of elderly slave women and white male doctors in matters of childbirth. Upon the arrival of complications, Mom Phillis asked for a doctor to be brought.

Despite the fact that some female slaves could rise to positions of high social status within the slave community, however, slave women in general were victims of gender oppression in various ways. This was firstly, because they often had to perform 'extra' work for their owners and secondly, because their owners did not allow them to enter occupations that offered a high social sanding in the eyes of whites. Thirdly, it was because slave women were victims of gender oppression in facing a unique 'triple burden' in having to perform work for owners, work for families, and also undertake child-care responsibilities. This triple burden will be examined next.

The childcare responsibilities of female slaves impinged heavily on their work lives. Whilst pregnant women were generally released from their responsibilities in the field, as the following comments of the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents illustrate, they were often assigned alternative tasks, such as spinning or carding. Gracie Gibson

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[79] Letter to Benjamin Franklin Perry from Elizabeth Perry, 29 March 1852, Benjamin Franklin Perry Papers, S.C.L.

said that 'Some of de old women, and women bearin' chillun not yet born, did cardin' wid hand-cards; then some would get at de spinnin' wheel and spin thread.'[80] Similarly, Adeline Jackson testified that 'Yes, women in family way worked up to near de time, but guess Doctor Gibson knowed his business. Just befo' de time, they was took out and put in de cardin' and spinnin' rooms.'[81] Henry D. Jenkins commented that 'Yes sir, he [his master, Joseph Howell] made us all work; women in de perils of child birth drapped cotton seed and corn kernels. Dr. Turnipseed, dat was our doctor, 'low dat light labor lak dat good for them.'[82]

Other South Carolina W.P.A. respondents commented on the time that slave women had off after childbirth. These comments varied considerably. Millie Barber claimed that 'Slave women have a baby one day, up and gwine 'round de next day, singin' at her work lak nothin' unusual had happened.'[83] Susan Hamlin also suggested that slave women did not have much time off work after childbirth. She said: 'In de days of slavery woman wuz jus' given time 'nough to deliver dere babies. Dey deliver de baby 'bout eight in de mornin' an' twelve had to be back to work.' [84] In contrast, Ryer Emmanuel claimed that slave women had a month off work after childbirth. She said:

> Always when a woman would get in de house, old Massa would let her leave off work en stay dere to de house a month till she mended in de body way. Den she would have to carry de child to de big house en get back in de field to work. [85]

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80 Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 114.
81 Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 3, 3.
82 Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 3, 24.
83 Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 39.
84 Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 236.
85 Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 12.

Sam Polite also said that slave women generally had a month off work after childbirth. He stated: 'W'en 'ooman hab baby he hab mid-wife for nine day and sometime don't haffa wuk for month w'en baby born.' [86] One gets the impression from the comments of the female South Carolina W.P.A. respondents that the time they were given off after childbirth was not enough, and that the lives of female slaves, in caring for their babies as well as performing work for their owners, was very hard. The comments of Maggie Wright illustrate this point. She said: 'He [the overseer] wanted us to work all day when we had been up de night befo' rocking babies. [87]

Evidence contained within owners' records also suggests that slave women were generally allowed one month off after childbirth. John Edwin Fripp stated in his plantation journal: 'Pat...will be out on Monday as it's [her baby is] a month old.' [88] Elizabeth Franklin Perry, similarly wrote to her husband:

> Francis left yesterday, and she has not long gone when Minerva was taken sick, and in a short time was delivered of a girl, and both doing well. She will now be up when Francis returns in a month....You ought to be thankful that your property is gradually increasing as you now have an additional negro. Minerva's children do not interfere with her work, as Mary's baby did. [89]

The comments made by Perry illustrate well both the fact that slave children were ultimately an economic asset to owners, and also the fact that life was hard for female slaves, in having to care for their children as well as perform work for their owners. It appears that Perry's slave Minerva was more adept at coping with this burden than was her slave Mary.

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[86] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 3, 273.

[87] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 11, 316

[88] John Edwin Fripp, Plantation Journal, 16 June 1857, S.H.C.

[89] Letter to Benjamin Franklin Perry from Elizabeth Perry, 30 June 1848, Benjamin Franklin Perry Papers, S.C.L.

In his plantation book, John B. Miller of Sumter District, similarly wrote under his 'Rules of the Plantation': 'Such women as may be near being confined must be put only to light work and after delivery and able to go about must be put to light work for a time.' [90] Andrew Flinn also wrote in his plantation book:

> Pregnant women and sucklers must be treated with great tenderness, worked near home and lightly. Pregnant women should not plough or lift, but must be kept at moderate work until the last hour if possible. Sucklers must be allowed time to suckle their children from twice to three times a day according to their ages. At twelve months old children must be weaned. [91]

Therefore, the fact that slave women had both to work through their pregnancies, and also return to work soon after childbirth, suggests that the lives of female slaves could be extremely hard. Slave owners sought to find a compromise between their short-term economic interests (having all their slaves working hard) and their long-term economic interests (protecting the health of their unborn and newly born slaves). It was slave women, however, who bore the brunt of this compromise by bearing and rearing children in addition to performing work for their owners.

The South Carolina W.P.A. respondents also made frequent comments on the nature of child-care provision under slavery. All of the comments made by the respondents said that child-care provision was the preserve of female slaves. For example, Henry Brown said that:

> The babies were taken to the negro house and the old women and young colored girls who were big enough to lift them took care of them. At one o'clock the babies were taken to the field to be nursed, then they were brought

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[90] Cornhill plantation book, 1827-1873, [Plantation of John B. Miller], McDonald Furman Papers, Manuscript Department, W.R.P.L.

[91] Andrew Flinn, Plantation Book, 1840, S.C.L.

back to the negro house until the mothers finished their work, then they would come for them.' [92]

The fact that it was either young or old slave women who tended to care for children is reflected in the South Carolina W.P.A. narratives, since two of the young, female respondents said that they themselves cared for slave children. [93] Caring for children, then, was undoubtedly a female task. Furthermore, where young or elderly female slaves did not care for children, this burden fell upon slave mothers themselves. Henrietta Fields described the plight of her mother, struggling to care for her children in addition to working in the field. She said: 'My Mother'd set down an' tell us all about how she'd have to struggle to git 'long wid allus little chillun. Dey'd put us little uns in de baskets and set um in de edge of de field.' [94]

Within the narrative of Charles Ball, reference is also made to female slaves leaving their children at the edge of the field. He wrote:

> As we went out in the morning, I observed several women, who carried their young children in their arms to the field. These mothers laid their children at the side of the fence, or under the shade of the cotton plants, whilst they were at work; and when the rest of us went to get water, they would go to give suck to their children, requesting some one to bring them water in gourds, which they were careful to carry to the field with them. [95]

In the realm of work, the lives of female slaves were undoubtedly harder than the lives of male slaves, as evidence presented in this chapter, as well as the previous chapter, has shown. Despite the supportive network of the slave community, and despite the

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[92] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 119.

[93] These were Jane Smith, 8 years old in 1865, Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 4, 110, and Mary Smith, 12 years old in 1865. Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 4, 112.

[94] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 11, 124.

[95] Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 122.

love and support that female slaves gained from their spouses and children, gender oppression in patterns of work, social status and childcare, all meant that female slaves in antebellum South Carolina had a 'triple burden' to endure under slavery.

Conclusions

This chapter has contrasted white and slave attitudes towards status in the slave community. This is vital for any investigation into social structure and gender oppression under slavery. White attitudes to status and to 'key slaves' were part of the process of white rationalisation of slavery, whilst slaves accorded status to those who contributed, not necessarily to whites, but to the welfare of the slave community. Work was highly gendered, but some slave women had leading roles in the slave community. Women's child-bearing and child-rearing roles made profound differences to the lives (including the working lives) of males and females, and placed heavy burdens on slave women.

Chapter Five: Sexual Contact Between Slaves and Whites

> The slave master's sexual domination of the black women contained an unveiled element of counter-insurgency....In confronting the black woman as adversary in a sexual contest, the master would be subjecting her to the most elemental form of terrorism distinctively suited for the female: rape. Given the already terroristic texture of plantation life, it would be as potential victim of rape that the slave woman would be most unguarded. [1]

Introduction

Part Three of this thesis will examine the exploitation inflicted on the slave community. Exploitation could take many different forms, including sexual abuse, sale and separation from loved ones, or physical punishment. What is of significance, however, is that exploitation also stimulated resistance and a communal desire to create social space -- distance between the lives of slaves and owners. Although forms of exploitation were sometimes gender-specific, resistance to exploitation was part of the bonding process between male and female slaves.

This Chapter will investigate an area of exploitation that affected female slaves more than males -- namely sexual contact with and abuse by whites. Indeed, it will be argued that the sexual abuse of slave women by white men constitutes one of the major differences in the lives of slave men and women. This chapter will begin, however, by highlighting one of the parallels in the lives of male and female slaves, namely the way in which both were stereotyped by whites as being sexually promiscuous. This stereotyping served the purpose of rationalising sexual contact and sexual abuse in the minds of whites, and it also removed the blame for sexual abuse from white members of society (with the exception of poor white women). These stereotypes therefore

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[1] Davis, 'Reflections', 12-13.

provide an important context from which issues of sexual contact and sexual abuse can be examined.

After establishing the white myth-making of black sexuality, this chapter will firstly explore what seem to be exceptional sexual liaisons, those between white women and black men. I shall then explore more widespread patterns -- sexual liaisons between white men and slave women. I shall argue that owners, rather than overseers or other whites, were the main abusers or white sexual partners of female slaves. The significance of this abuse for possible bonding between slave women and the wives of planters will then be explored. Finally, possible links between sexual contact and manumissions will be explored. It will be argued that the number of female slaves who actually gained their freedom following sexual liaisons with white men was actually very small. Sexual contact with owners was not, therefore, a significant route to freedom. Instead, slave women strove to survive their oppression by gaining the love and support of a spouse.

One major problem encountered when examining sexual relationships between whites and blacks in antebellum South Carolina, revolves around the fact that it is often difficult to establish whether sexual liaisons took the form of voluntary relationships or forced sexual abuse. It cannot be assumed that all white women who were sexually involved with black men were victims of sexual abuse (despite the stereotyping of all black men as potential rapists). Neither can it be assumed that all black women involved in sexual liaisons with white men were victims of sexual abuse (although it will be argued that most such liaisons did take the form of sexual abuse). Within this chapter, then, when referring to black-white sexual liaisons, the term sexual contact will be used in conjunction with the term sexual abuse in order to encompass both voluntary and involuntary sexual liaisons.

This chapter will utilise various types of primary source materials. The South Carolina W.P.A. narratives have been used extensively in the construction of quantitative trends concerning the extent of sexual contact and abuse. However, these narratives have also proved extremely valuable for their often detailed qualitative information upon these issues. In addition to the W.P.A. narratives, the sample of full-length narratives has also proved extremely useful, especially the narrative of Harriet Jacobs, since one of the main themes in her autobiography has been the sexual abuse she received at the hands of her master. [2] Manuscript materials left by white Southerners, however, have been of more limited use in investigating sexual contact and abuse. Many white Southerners did not mention these issues in their manuscripts, or else matters pertaining to these issues may have been destroyed by later generations. However, owners' records have proved valuable in assessing the attitudes of slave mistresses towards issues of sexual contact and sexual abuse, as well as in assessing how whites stereotyped their slaves as promiscuous, as will now be seen.

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[2] See Jacobs, *Incidents*.

The stereotyping of male and female slaves

Before the extent and nature of sexual exploitation in antebellum South Carolina is examined, an important parallel in the lives of slave males and females will be investigated -- namely the ways in which both sexes were stereotyped by whites in an attempt to justify sexual contact and sexual abuse. The fact that the 'Jezebel' stereotype of slave women, brilliantly analysed by Deborah White, bears a striking resemblance to the 'Buck' stereotype of slave men, is immensely significant. White has stated of Jezebel:

> One of the most prevalent images of black women in antebellum America was of a person governed almost entirely by her libido, a Jezebel character. In every way Jezebel was the counterimage of the mid-nineteenth-century ideal of the Victorian lady. She did not lead men and children to God; piety was foreign to her. She saw no advantage in prudery, indeed, domesticity paled in importance before matters of the flesh. [3]

Stereotyping female slaves as Jezebels emphasized promiscuity in much the same way as the stereotyping of male slaves as Bucks emphasized promiscuity. Indeed, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's description of Buck is very similar to White's description of Jezebel. Fox-Genovese states:

> The notion of Buck -- a white gender convention represented a caricature or reversal of the notion of [the noble planter] cavalier. It encoded white male fears of black sexuality in particular and of virility in general. The convention of the Buck emphasized white views of the single, sexually active black male as divorced from other social roles....The Buck evoked a sexually active, perpetual adolescent. Implicitly, it also evoked the threat of black sexuality to white women -- a fascinating reversal since the main interracial sexual threat was that of white predators against black women. The presumed threat of black

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[3] White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 28-29.

> male sexuality never provoked the wild hysteria and violence in the Old South that it did in the New, but self-proclaimed slave holding paternalists harbored their own anxieties. [4]

Buck therefore contradicted the other stereotype to which male slaves were subjected -- that of 'Sambo'. Sambo represented an image of black male subservience and docility, that served to reassure whites of their ability to control their slaves. [5] Similarly, Jezebel contradicted the other female slave stereotype of the 'Mammy'. As Fox-Genovese has argued:

> The image of Jezebel explicitly contradicted the image of Mammy....Jezebel lived free of the social constraints that surrounded the sexuality of white women. She thus legitimized the wanton behaviour of white men by proclaiming black women to be lusty wenches in whom sexual impulse overwhelmed all restraint. The image eased the consciences of white men by suggesting that black women asked for the treatment they received. [6]

It is this last sentence written by Fox-Genovese that is of paramount importance, since, by defining certain female slaves as Jezebels, white men could excuse themselves from any blame involving issues of sexual contact and abuse. Likewise, the Buck stereotype removed the blame from certain white women involved in sexual relationships with black men, as will be seen later in this chapter.

We can see how the stereotype of Jezebel eased the consciences of white men through the images of slave women that were presented in the manuscripts records of antebellum Southerners. For example, the following 1864 extract from the diary of John C. Gorman illustrates the stereotype of Jezebel. Gorman wrote:

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[4] Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household,* 291.

[5] See Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 291 for a detailed description of the Sambo stereotype.

[6] Fox Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 292.

> Besides soldiers, there are but few whites, but a great many citizen negroes [in Beaufort, S.C.] among them oceans of women, who live by harlotry and do little or no more work -- They dress generally flashy and use the manners of their former mistresses. They live on easy equality with the Yankee women, are even impudent to them, and appear as if they felt they were their equals every way. Their state of morals, from what I have witnessed, is decidedly loose, and illicit intercourse is general. I often see the soldiers lounging in the shade in company with their dark-skinned mistresses, rollicking and playing with a freedom from all coyness or shame. They have their classes, a few, especially whose blood is intermixed with that of the white man, are the elite. They class together and dress finer, and some evenings they promenade the streets arrayed in purple and fine linen. They are probably the kept mistresses of officers. [7]

The image of black women presented by Gorman, then, displays many of the characteristics typically associated with Jezebel, for example being light-skinned, impudent and immoral. Gorman was compelled to conclude from his observations, that these black women would be 'kept mistresses'. Whether this was true or not is less significant than the fact that he *assumed* that these black women actually *wished* to be kept mistresses. His assumptions are therefore revealing in terms of the perceptions of black women by white men in antebellum South Carolina.

However, the Jezebel stereotype of slave women was not only held by white men. Many white women also utilised the Jezebel stereotype in order to remove the blame from their husbands in any case of sexual contact and abuse. For example, in her diary, the South Carolina plantation mistress, Keziah Brevard, illustrates the contempt that was felt by many white women at the alleged promiscuity of female slaves. Brevard wrote of her slaves:

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[7] Diary-Memoir 1864, John C. Gorman Papers, W.R.P.L.

> They are not prepared for freedom, many of them set no higher value on themselves than the beasts of the field do -- I know a family in five miles of me where there are six women who have & have had children for thirty years back & not one of them but [have] been bastards & only one ever had a husband....I own many slaves & many of the females are of the lowest cast -- making miserable their own fellow servants by meddling with the husbands of others -- I am not excusing the males, but in the world they are not so degraded by such conduct as the females. [8]

Female slaves therefore bore the brunt of the blame for sexual contact and abuse by being defined as promiscuous Jezebels. Whilst slaves of both sexes could potentially be characterised as promiscuous, such a characteristic was seen as especially in conflict with notions of femininity. Male and female slaves were therefore both seen as promiscuous, but female slave 'weakness' was seen as removing them from the 'protections' of femininity.

Slave sources give a unique perspective on sexual contact between white men and black women. In the South Carolina W.P.A. narratives, only one comment was made by a respondent that suggested slave women were 'Jezebels'. The statement was made by Cornelius Holmes, who testified that

> De negro women protected de pure white women from enticement and seduction of de white man in slavery times. My grandpap say he never heard of a bad white woman befo' freedom. I leave it wid you if dere's any dese times? Dat was worth more to de South, my grandpap say, dis sanctification of de white women, than all de cotton and corn dat de negroes ever makes, in all de years of slavery times. [9]

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[8] Moore, *A Plantation Mistress on the Eve of the Civil War*, 39.

[9] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 296-297.

Holmes also unwittingly illustrated just how the stereotype of Jezebel allowed for the existence of the 'Lady' stereotype of white womanhood. It was precisely because of the existence of Jezebel -- being there for the sexual pleasures of white men -- that white women could be elevated to the status of the Lady. This stereotype had connotations of purity and virginity. As Catherine Clinton has noted, white women were assigned the role of 'moral exemplar and counselor', with purity and spirituality being her vital assets. [10]

Furthermore, within the sample of full-length slave narratives, only one reference to the alleged promiscuity of slaves could be found, and that was found within the conservative narrative of I.E. Lowery. He stated that his master, Mr. Frierson 'Had it understood on his plantation that there should be no little bastard slaves there. He gave it out that they were not wanted.' [11] Thus even within this narrative, the assumption of promiscuity on the part of slaves was coming from an owner rather than a slave. The slave narratives do not suggest that slaves saw themselves as a promiscuous community -- this image was one that was cultivated by whites for white purposes. Both male and female slaves were defined as promiscuous sexual beings so that owners could convince themselves that they were not to blame in any instances of sexual contact or sexual abuse.

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[10] See Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 87-91 for an an extensive description of the stereotype of the 'Lady'.

[11] Lowery, *Life on the Old Plantation*, 42.

Sexual contact and sexual abuse: white women and black men

The lives of male and female slaves differed in terms of how sexual contact and abuse affected their relationships with whites. Hence, when investigating interracial sexual liaisons between white women and slave men, an examination of the records of white Southerners can be especially revealing. Such records can show, for example, how the Buck stereotype manifested itself in the minds of whites. In general, black men as a whole were perceived as sexually threatening beings. For example, in his diary , William Valentine, refers to a black man accused of rape as a 'monster'. Valentine wrote:

> This day must be memorable to a certain poor respectable family in this county, on account of a horrible crime, revolting to human society, perpetuated on that family. This is a rape, an offence that calls up the highest sympathy and the strongest resentment....This alleged rape was committed a day or two ago. Today there was an examination ...of the *monster in the shape of a black negro*. [italics added] [12]

In a similar vein, the following judicial cases involving slave men who were charged with intention to commit rape, reflect a fear of black male sexuality. In the first case:

> Lewis was tried for burglary and assault and battery, with intent to commit a rape upon a white woman....That between the hours of nine and ten o'clock at night, a negro man...forcibly entered her house by breaking open the door, besides greatly alarming herself and two girls,...and committed an assault on the former...*believes his intention was to commit a rape*....The prisoner was

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[12] Entry for 17 February 1838, William D. Valentine Diaries 1837-1855, S.H.C.

convicted of the second offence charged, and sentence of death was passed upon him. [italics added] [13]

Similarly, in the second case, Elizabeth Mitchell stated that

> "At the residence of my mother...I was attacked by a negro boy....I had a hard scuffle, he got me down on the ground and choked me until he had left marks on my neck, and, by my promising him ...money...he let me go. I went into the house and gave him one dollar,...he left....I am not acquainted with...Nathan, but from what I have heard, I believe it to be him." Nathan was tried...under the charge of an assault and battery with the intention of committing a rape....The court found the prisoner guilty of an assault and battery....[He was given] one hundred lashes on the bare back with a switch.[14]

Characterising black males as Bucks therefore had broad implications. By defining black men as sexually threatening, white Southerners could express their alleged fear of black male sexuality in all aspects of life, especially those that threatened the status quo. For example, in claiming that a free black community would be sexually threatening to white women, white owners could (without losing their paternalist image) justify harsh treatment of potential insurrectionaries. This linkage between the fear of insurrection and the fear of black male sexuality is implicit in the following letter from Rachel Blanding to her cousin. She stated

> Our village and neighbourhood has been in great confusion for two days owing to the fear of an insurrection of the blacks....It was their intention to have set fire to one part of the town and while the attention of the people was taken up

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[13] Case of State v. Lewis (a slave), November 1849, Helen Tunnicliff Catterall, *Judicial Cases concerning American Slavery and the Negro, Vol. II: Cases from the Courts of North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington 1929), 413.

[14] Case of State v. Nathan (slave of Gabriel South), November 1851, in Catterall, *Judicial Cases concerning American Slavery,* 428.

with that they meant to have taken possession of the arsenal which is filled with arms and ammunition and proceeded to murder the men but *the women they intended to have reserved for their own purposes.* This is their own confession. Our jail is filled with negroes. [italics added] [15]

Interestingly, fears of black male sexuality are said to have increased in the postbellum period in the South. It has been alleged that since whites no longer owned blacks as property, by elevating the importance of the Buck stereotype, the appalling physical treatment of black men at the hands of white men could continue. This treatment could then be justified under the guise of 'protecting' virtuous white women. As Eugene Genovese has stated:

> The titillating and violence-provoking theory of the superpotency of that black superpenis, while whispered about for several centuries, did not become an obsession in the South until after emancipation, when it served the purposes of racial segregationists.'[16]

A textual reading of available manuscript materials seems to confirm this hypothesis. The letters and diaries of white slave owners in nineteenth century South Carolina suggest that fears over black male sexuality, as characterised by Buck, increased over the nineteenth century. This was especially true in the aftermath of emancipation, when fears for the safety of white women at the hands of freed male slaves were expressed. This is illustrated within the following extract from an 1865 letter to Peter Glass. J. B. Glass stated:

> A young lady at Greenwood was outraged a few days since by two negroes and a white man, and I have heard of much insolence and some threats in this neighbourhood. The visits to Sulphur Springs by ladies also have been stopped

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15 Letter to Hannah Lewis from Rachel Blanding, 4 July 1816, William Blanding Papers, S.C.L.

16 Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 461-462.

since some of them met a burly negro man at the Spring house who was very familiar.[17]

However, whilst the 'black rapist' stereotype could cause great panics in post-slavery white society, slaves accused of rape also stood little chance of justice. [18] The cases of alleged rape described in petitions to the South Carolina State Assembly illustrate this fact. Individual owners could petition the Assembly for compensation for slaves they owned who were executed under the charge of rape. Furthermore, the fact that these owners were claiming for compensation of the *value* of their executed slaves serves as a reminder of the brutality of chattel slavery. Typical is the following petition on behalf of Nathan Boon, of Pickens County, asking for compensation for the execution of his male slave, Lem. The petition stated:

> That in the month of December last, [1828], one Jane Ross, a young woman, was travelling through this neighbourhood, and at a distance of several miles from his [the petitioner's] house, was ravished by a negro man, a stranger to her....He believed his negro boy, or man, of nineteen years of age, named Lem, had committed the diabolical act [as he was identified by Jane Ross]. [19]

Cases such as these serve as a stark reminder of the paramount importance of racial oppression in nineteenth-century South Carolina, especially when we consider the differences in the treatment of black men accused of raping white women, and of white men who sexually abused black women. Racism allowed white men the opportunity

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[17] Letter to Peter from J. B. Glass, 25 June 1865, Glass Family Papers, S.C.L.

[18] See Peter W. Bardaglio, 'Rape and the Law in the Old South: "Calculated to excite indignation in every heart"' *Journal Of Southern History* **60**, 4 (1994), 751. Also on the treatment of black men accused of raping white women, see Peter W. Bardaglio, *Reconstructing the Household: Families, Sex and the Law in the Nineteenth Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1995).

[19] Nathan Boon, petition and supporting papers asking compensation for the execution of his slave on a charge of rape, 15 September 1829. Petitions to the South Carolina State Assembly, S.C.D.A.H.

systematically to abuse their female slaves, whilst black men who were accused of raping white women often faced the loss of their own life.

It was, however, not only the Buck stereotype that came into play in rationalising sexual liaisons between white women and black men. As well as racism, gender and class stereotyping could play a role, with lower-class white women being vulnerable to the stereotype of being 'wanton'. The stereotyping process lifted almost all upper-class white women above accepting any responsibility for their relationships with black men. As Catherine Clinton has shown, white women who entered into sexual relationships with black men were labelled deviant. [20] Poverty, too, was also shameful for white women, though, for poverty violated Southern norms of white femininity. Victoria Bynum has argued that poverty de-feminised poor white women in the same way that race de-feminised black women. [21] Furthermore, by ascribing deviant characteristics to poor white women, by assuming that it was poor white women who would be inclined to enter sexual liaisons with black men, the Lady stereotype of the Southern planter class was upheld.

It was therefore rare in the extreme for an elite white woman to be suspected of having a relationship with a black man, and such women were liable to receive harsh societal sanctions. The petition of Marmaduke James to the South Carolina State Assembly illustrates this situation. James wished to divorce his wife, Ann, after she had given birth to a 'mulatto child'. His petition stated:

> That he continued to live with said Ann as husband and wife until the twenty fourth day of August ...[1847], at which time she, the said Ann, was brought to bed and there delivered of a mulatto child, for the proof of which, your petitioner would refer your Honorable Body to Paper B. And your petitioner

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[20] Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 210.

[21] Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1992), 6-7.

> further showeth that he has always supported and maintained a good name and character with, and among, all the good and honest people of Barnwell district and with and among all the good and honest people who were acquainted with your petitioner....And your honorable body well knowing, (under the circumstances set forth), that it is impossible for your petitioner to live with the said Ann, as husband and wife, and also well knowing that under the laws of this [state] your petitioner is deprived from marrying again during the life of the said Ann, which must necessarily subject your petitioner to great inconvenience, and deprive your petitioner from the enjoyment of a family. Your petitioner therefore prays that your honorable body would pass some act or resolution in the nature of a divorcement, so that your petitioner may be released from the said Ann.

Paper B stated that: 'We whose names are here unto subscribed, do certify that we have seen the child of the said Ann James...that the father of the said child is a black negro.'[22]

The above case shows just how severely white women were sanctioned for alleged relationships with black men. Ann James put the respectability of not only herself, but also her husband, at stake. Furthermore, when we compare the treatment of Ann James with the treatment of white men who engaged in sexual relationships with their female slaves, we can see just how much white women were the victims of gender discrimination at the hands of white men. White women would have been ostracised from their families and communities as a consequence of their relationships with black men, regardless of whether these relationships were voluntary or not. For example, the following case, in which a white woman was found wandering in woods, illustrates the

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[22] Marmaduke James, of Barnwell district, petition and supporting papers, for a divorce from Ann Ross, following the birth of a mulatto child, 1847. Petitions to the South Carolina State Assembly, S.C.D.A.H.

shame felt by white women about having 'mulatto' children. In this case Maria Cumming wrote:

> Brother when he returned brought a strange account...a woman was found in the woods with no clothing on but her underdress -- an infant a few days old to which she was trying to administer nourishment although she said she had not eaten one mouthful since its birth *and the child was a black one*. She was taken to some person's house but positively refused to give her name. She was apparently so overcome by shame as to have wandered away from her home, wherever that may be, and when her child was born she had no assistance at all. Brother said...he could find out nothing of the persons name or family. [italics added] [23]

Sexual liaisons between white women and black men, however, also impacted upon the children of such liaisons. Two children of white women and black men whose poignant stories are worth quoting at some length are John C. Brown, a South Carolina W.P.A. respondent, and Lucy Andrews, who petitioned the South Carolina State Assembly a number of times requesting that she be permitted to become a slave. The case of John C. Brown is very unusual. Brown lived on the plantation of Tom Dawkins during slavery times, with some two hundred other slaves. He told his interviewer that his mother was white, and said:

> I never knowed my mammy. They say she was a white lady dat visited my old marster and mistress.Dat I was found in a basket, dressed in nice baby clothes, on de railroad track at Dawkins, S.C. ....Marse Tom carry me home and give me to miss Betsy. Dat was his wife and my mistress. Her always say dat Sheton Brown was my father. He was one of de slaves on de place; de carriage driver. After freedom he tell me he was my real pappy. [24]

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[23] Letter to Julia A. B. Cumming from Maria Cumming, 11 March 1831, Hammond-Bryan-Cumming Papers, S.C.L.

[24] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 127.

It is case studies such as these, then, that offer us a glimpse into the complexities of the interaction of race, gender, and class exploitations in the antebellum South. For example, it may have been the case here that Brown's father did not want to reveal his real identity to his son for fear of recriminations from the white slave holders. The fact that Brown's father was the carriage driver also offers us a hint as to what types of male slaves were likely to enter sexual relationships, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, with white women. The fact that Brown said that his step-mother was mean to him may also have stemmed from the fact that Brown was not her natural child. [25] Also of possible significance here is the fact that Brown was the only South Carolina W.P.A. respondent to express an ambivalent view of religion. This may have been a consequence of his life situation. As he eloquently said:

> Adeline [his wife] b'long to de church. Always after me to jine but I can't believe dere is anything to it, though I believes in de law and de Ten Commandments. Preacher calls me a infidel. Can't help it. They is maybe got me figured out wrong. I believes in a Great Spirit but, in my time, I is seen so many good dogs and hosses and so many mean niggers and white folks, dat I 'clare I is confused on de subject. Then I can't believe in a hell and everlastin' brimstone. I just think dat people is lak grains of corn; dere is some good grains and some rotten grains. [26]

Occasionally, then, testimony from the children of sexual liaisons between white women and black men can offer us poignant insights into the consequences of liaisons between white women and slave men. In a similar way to Brown, the case of Lucy Andrews, born of a white mother and black father, is also both sad and interesting. In her petitions to the South Carolina State Assembly, Andrews expressed a desire to return to slavery, stating that she was isolated from both white and slave

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[25] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 127-130.

[26] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 130.

communities. She had a slave husband, and requested that she be made a slave of her husband's master. Extracts from two of her petitions are detailed below. One of her first petitions stated:

> That she is now sixteen years of age and the mother of an infant child, being a descendant of a white woman and her father, a slave. That she is dissatisfied with her present condition, being compelled to go about from place to place to seek employment for her support, and not permitted to stay at any place more than a week or two at a time, no one caring about employing her.
> That she expects to raise a family and will not be able to support them. That she sees, and knows to her own sorrow and regret, that slaves are far more happy, and enjoy themselves far better than she does in her present, isolated condition of freedom, and are well-treated and cared for by their masters, whilst she is going about from place to place hunting employment for her support.
> That she cannot enjoy herself, situated as she now is, and prefers slavery to freedom in her present condition. Your petitioner therefore prays that your honorable body would enact a law authorising and permitting her, to go voluntarily into slavery, and select her own master. [27]

A later petition stated:

> Your petitioner would further show that she has had three children, of whom one is now dead, and the other two alive and living with her. The eldest is about three years old and a female, and the youngest about fourteen months old and a male....Your petitioner would further state that the said Mr. Henry H. Duncan

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[27] Lucy Andrews, free mulatto, petition to be allowed to return to slavery and to choose her own master, c. 1858. Petitions to the South Carolina State Assembly, S.C.D.A.H.

owns her husband Robbin, with whom she, together with her above mentioned children, [are] comfortably fixed and situated. [28]

In explaining the reasons behind Andrews's petitions, a desire to stay with her husband seems to be central. Her emphasis on the benevolence of the slaveholding class might have been much more a ploy to appeal to members of the State Assembly than a comment on the nature of slavery.

The scarcity of evidence relating to sexual liaisons between white women and black men is of significance. Only one South Carolina W.P.A. respondent (John C. Brown) had a white mother. Furthermore, within the sample of full-length narratives, only one reference to a sexual liaison between a white woman and a slave man was found, and this incident did not even directly involve the narrator herself. The liaison was mentioned in the narrative of Harriet Jacobs, *who wrote:*

> I have myself seen the master of...a household whose head was bowed down in shame; for it was known in the neighbourhood that his daughter had selected one of the meanest slaves on his plantation to be the father of his first grandchild. She did not make her advances to her equals, nor even to her father's more intelligent servants. She selected the most brutalized, over whom her authority could be exercised with less fear of exposure. Her father, half frantic with rage, sought to revenge himself on the offending black man; but his daughter, foreseeing the storm that would arise, had given him free papers, and sent him out of the state. [29]

The lives of slave men and women could therefore be very different in the realm of sexual exploitation. Both were depicted by whites as promiscuous, but women seem

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[28] Lucy Andrews, a free black of Lancaster District, petition asking that she and her children be allowed to become the slaves of Henry H. Duncan, 25 November 1863. Petitions to the South Carolina State Assembly, S.C.D.A.H.

[29] Jacobs, *Incidents*, 80-81.

to have been at much greater risk than men of direct sexual exploitation by whites. Whites wove complex rationalisations around sexual contact with blacks, and these contacts left tragic victims in their wake.

Sexual contact and sexual abuse: white men and slave women

Sexual contact between white men and slave women again highlights both similarities and differences in the lives of slave men and women. Of fundamental importance is the fact that white sexual abuse impacted much more directly on slave women than on slave men. Indeed, it has been argued that the rape of slave women by white men was part of the institutional apparatus used by male slave-holders in their attempt to subjugate their slaves.[30] Angela Davis, writing in 1971, has also said the resistance of slave women to sexual abuse at the hands of white men constituted an extension of the mechanisms of resistance employed in the slaves' every day life: 'a response to a politically tinged sexual repression.'[31]

As has been noted earlier, sexual contact between white men and slave women is particularly difficult to establish through records usually used by historians. The W.P.A. narratives, however, have perhaps a unique potential as a basis for advancing knowledge in this area. White sources give only the most fragmentary and mostly self-serving comments on these issues. The W.P.A. narratives were not originally designed to address questions of sexual contact, and therefore they leave major gaps. Even so, they will be used to provide significant statistical information on the extent of white male sexual contact with female slaves; evidence on which whites (masters, overseers, or others) had most sexual contacts with slave women; and evidence on which slaves (field or domestic) were most likely to be abused. A qualitative investigation into the W.P.A. narratives, along with an examination of the sample of full-length narratives

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30 See Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 153.

31 Davis, 'Reflections', 14.

has also revealed that most sexual contact between white men and slave women took the form of sexual abuse, and that many female slaves lived under the threat, if not the reality, of sexual abuse at the hands of their owners.

Firstly, though, some of the problems of using quantitative analysis to try and calculate the amount of sexual contact and abuse in the antebellum slave South will be examined. Whilst any quantitative estimate of such contacts can tell us a great deal about black-white relations under slavery, attempting to 'measure' the amount of sexual contact in the antebellum South is fraught with difficulties. Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman, in their pioneering quantitative work on the slave South, *Time on the Cross*, did attempt to provide quantitative estimations of the extent of miscegenation under slavery. [32] The widespread criticisms that both their results, and their methodological technique received, however, serve as a reminder of the fact that extreme caution needs to be used when attempting any quantification of miscegenation trends.

In their quantitative investigation, Fogel and Engerman concluded that there was a low level of miscegenation between white men and slave women in the South, a proposition that was based on three broad claims. Firstly, they argued that the racism and prudishness of owners prohibited them from seeking sexual contact with slave women. Secondly, they maintained that the high age of slave women at first birth shows a lack of sexual interference with slave women; and thirdly, they suggested that there was a low number of 'mulatto' children in the slave South. Using evidence from the 1850 U.S. census, Fogel and Engerman claimed that

> The fact that during the twenty-three decades of contact between slaves and whites which elapsed between 1620 and 1850, only 7.7 percent of the slaves

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[32] See Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, 126-144 for their attempt at quantifying the extent of miscegenation in the slave South.

were mulattoes suggests that, on average, only a very small percentage of the slaves born in any given year were fathered by white men. [33]

Fogel and Engerman have, however, been widely criticised for being simplistic in their analysis. Herbert Gutman and Richard Sutch, for example, have stated that 'It should be noted immediately that neither this designation [mulatto] nor the term "black" was officially defined by the Census Office and that the reports of the skin color of slaves were made by their owners.' [34] Susan Brownmiller has also suggested that

> Any census statistic on the proportion of mulattoes on a plantation would be a most unreliable figure. In addition, why do Fogel and Engerman assume that a rape, even in a 'non-contraceptive society', as they put it, is necessarily going to result in pregnancy and birth?[35]

The W.P.A. narratives, as has been noted earlier, do, however, provide a basis for progress in investigating rates of sexual contact and sexual abuse. From the comments made by the South Carolina respondents, it is possible to calculate a *minimum estimate* of the extent of sexual contact and abuse in antebellum South Carolina. Caution is, however, necessary when attempting to calculate levels of sexual contact from these narratives, since methodological problems are encountered at various levels of analysis. Firstly, it should be taken into account that not all respondents who had sexual contact with whites, or who had a knowledge of such contact, would be willing to relate their experiences to a white interviewer. Secondly, it must be remembered that using the number of respondents who had a white parent as an indication of the extent of sexual contact will in itself be an underestimate, since not all such contact resulted in offspring.

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[33] Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, 132.

[34] Gutman and Sutch, 'Victorians All?: The Sexual Mores and Conduct of Slaves and their Masters', in David *et al*, *Reckoning with Slavery*, 149.

[35] Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 171-172.

By totalling all the respondents who had either a direct or an indirect knowledge of sexual contact with whites -- including those who only related broad anecdotes about sexual contact or sexual abuse in general -- it is possible, however, to provide a minimum estimate of the amount of sexual contact and abuse that occurred in antebellum South Carolina. Included within this sample, then, will be those respondents who stated that they had a white parent; those respondents who said that they had had some other blood link to whites; and also those respondents who mentioned issues of sexual contact or abuse in more general terms.

Within the sample of South Carolina W.P.A. respondents, eight stated that were fathered by white men (2.4 per cent of all respondents). When we add John C. Brown whose mother was a white woman, this produces nine respondents who had a white parent, representing 2.7 *per cent of all respondents.* Interestingly, of these nine respondents, seven were male, but only two were female. This implies that sexual contact may have been an area of slave life that male respondents were more willing to discuss with their white interviewers than were females, which in turn, suggests that the higher male rates could well be more representative. A further sixteen respondents, aside from those who had a white parent, had some other blood link to whites. [36]

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[36] Three respondents (Ramsom Beckett, Henry Davis, and Alexander Suits) were described by their interviewer as being of mixed race or mulatto. Another three respondents (Abe Harris, Jim Henry and Cornelius Holmes) told their interviewers that they that they had some 'white blood'. A further six respondents (John C. Brown, Adeline Brown, George Patterson, Martha Richardson, Rosa Starke and Delia Thompson) mentioned either that one of their parents was mulatto, or else that one of their parents had some 'white blood'. Two respondents (Susan Hamlin and Reuben Rosborough) had white grandfathers. One respondent (George Fleming) said his wife had a white father. Finally, Susan Hamlin had a brother who was the son of her master, Edward Fuller. Where a respondent had more than one blood link to whites, they were included more than once in the sample, for purposes of clarity in assessing the extent of sexual contact and abuse in antebellum South Carolina.

Adding these respondents to the nine respondents who had a white parent gives us a total of 25 respondents who had a direct, or indirect blood link with whites, representing 7.5 per cent of all respondents included within the sample. Furthermore, five other respondents reported knowledge of particular incidents of white sexual abuse. This combination of W.P.A. testimony therefore hints at the general level of sexual contact and abuse, which will be statistically presented later. [37]

Interestingly, both Paul Escott and Stephen Crawford, in their quantitative studies of the W.P.A. narratives as a whole, found that around 6 per cent of their respondents had white fathers. Escott also found that 0.5 per cent had white mothers.[38] These figures were higher than the number of respondents that I found with white fathers, with only around 2.4 per cent of the South Carolina sample acknowledging that they had white fathers, and 0.2 per cent acknowledging white mothers. The difference between my South Carolina results and those of Escott and Crawford seems to arise because in my study I asked how many respondents reported white fathers, whilst whose of Escott and Crawford, in effect, took a sub-set by asking how many of those respondents *who mentioned their father's colour* reported that their father was white.

My method would almost certainly under count white fathers, since as stated previously, some respondents with white fathers would not have wished to, or had the opportunity of mentioning this in their interview, especially in so far as female respondents were concerned. My figures almost certainly contain a downward bias, then, but taking these biases into account, it seems likely that *of those interviewed,*

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[37] The fact that we can find out about issues of sexual contact and sexual abuse through the experiences of the parents and other relatives of the W.P.A. respondents, also supports my proposition that the South Carolina narratives can be used to investigate slave life as a whole, rather than just slave childhood.

[38] See Escott, *Slavery Remembered*, 47, and Crawford, "Quantified Memory", 159.

some three-to-six per cent would have had a white father, falling somewhere between the estimates of myself, and those of Escott and Crawford. Crawford also found that slave women on small plantations were twice as likely to have a child by a white man than on large plantations.[39] Crawford's proposition may well hold true, but unfortunately, the size of the South Carolina sample made any correlation between race of father and size of unit impossible to determine.

In order fully to appreciate the impact of white sexual contact and abuse upon the lives of the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents, however, it is necessary to examine slave experiences at the individual as well as at the aggregate level, since the nature of sexual contact and sexual abuse is as significant as its extent. The respondents who had white parents, though, tended to be reticent about explaining their parentage to their interviewers, for example merely stating that their fathers were 'white men'. [40] Take Ed Barber, who told his interviewer: 'My mother name Ann. Her b'long to my marster, James Barber. Dat's not a fair question when you ask me who my daddy was. Well, just say he was a white man and dat my mother never did marry nobody while he lived.'[41] Similarly, Alexander Robertson said:

> Her [his mother] and de white folks never tell me who my father was. I have to find out dat for myself, after freedom, when I was lookin' 'round for a name. From all I hear and 'pear in de lookin' glass, I see I was half white for sure, and from de things I hear, I conclude I was a Robertson which have never been denied. Maybe it best just to give no front names. [He elaborated on his father no further, although the name of his master was Stewart]. [42]

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[39] Crawford, "Quantified Memory", 160.

[40] Ed Barber, John N. Davenport, Thomas Dixon and Alexander Robertson all said only that their fathers were white men.

[41] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 35.

[42] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 4, 32.

Two of the respondents who had white fathers said that their fathers were overseers. These were Adeline Brown and Victoria Perry. Adeline Brown's story was told by her husband, John C. Brown, who stated that

> Her daddy was a full-blooded Irishman. He come over here from Ireland and was overseer for Marse Bob Clowney. He took a fancy for Adeline's mammy, a bright 'latto gal slave on de place. White woman in them days looked down on overseers as poor white trash. Him couldn't git a white wife but made de best of it by puttin' in his spare time a honeyin' 'round Adeline's mammy.[43]

Similarly, Victoria Perry, who used to find her mother crying at night from being beaten by their master, Bert Mabin, also said her father was a white man, a white overseer she suspected. [44] Another two respondents said that their master was their father. These were Jack Johnson and Isiah Jefferies. Johnson stated explicitly that his master, Tom Reed, was his father, and that he himself was his mother's only child. He said his master was kind to both of them. [45] Jefferies implied that his master was his father. He referred to himself as an 'outside child' and said that his mother was sold to his father, Henry Jefferies. [46]

Comments made by the five respondents (mentioned earlier) who referred to witnessing or knowing directly cases of sexual contact or abuse by whites are also worth examining in more detail. Interestingly, it is these comments that have proved to be the most revealing. Three of these respondents described sexual encounters between white men and their female slaves, and two described the impact upon slave mistresses

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[43] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 128

[44] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 3, 260-261.

[45] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3. Part 3, 41.

[46] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 3, 17-19.

of sexual liaisons between white men and female slaves. [47] One respondent who described sexual encounters between white men and slave women was Thomas Goodwater. He said that his master, Lias Winning, tried to rape his mother, a field worker, and testified that

> Lias 'inning wasn' a mean man. He couldn' lick pa cus dey grow up togedder or at least he didn' try. But he liked his woman slave. One day ma wus in de field workin' alone an' he went there an' try to rape 'er. Ma pull his ears almos' off so he let 'er off an' gone an' tell pa he better talk to ma. Pa wus workin' in the salt pen an' w'en Mr. Winning tell him he jus laugh cus he know why ma did it. [48]

In this case we get a sense of both the resistance of the female slave in question, and the support she received from her husband. This again goes against the claim of bell hooks that the first instinct of male slaves was towards self-preservation, as well as providing evidence of the support between slave spouses within the confines set by the slave regime. [49]

Cureton Milling said that his master, Levi Bolicks, abused his female slaves. He stated: 'He take 'vantage of de young gal slaves. 'You go yonder and shell corn in de crib', he say to one of them. He's de marster so she have to go. Then he send de others to work some other place, then he go to de crib.'[50] Milling also said that one female slave had a mulatto boy, after having been 'sent to the crib'. It appears to have been the case, then, that most sexual contact between white men and slave women in antebellum South Carolina took the form of sexual abuse, as opposed to voluntary liaisons. This is significant, since it not only contradicts the image of Jezebel that was

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[47] These last two comments, on the impact of sexual liaisons between white men and female slaves upon slave mistresses, will be examined later in this chapter.

[48] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 167.

[49] See hooks, *Ain't I a Woman?*, 35.

[50] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 3, 194.

so prevalent in white minds, but it also shows us that the lives of male and female slaves had the potential to differ significantly. Male slaves did not have to live under the threat of sexual abuse at the hands of their white owners, but females did. This makes the resilience of female slaves, their desire not only to survive slavery but to survive it through gaining the support and companionship of a spouse, all the more remarkable.

Another South Carolina W.P.A. respondent, Gus Feaster, commented on the sexual abuse of slave women at the hands of a white overseer. Interestingly, adding this incident on to the two respondents who said they were fathered by white overseers gives us only three incidents of sexual contact and abuse at the hands of white overseers. [51] This compares to four instances in the W.P.A. sample involving masters.[52] This is significant since owners tended to characterise the sexual abuse of slave women as something that occurred between slave women and 'lower class' white men, rather than themselves. Furthermore, by doing this, their benevolent self-image remained intact. These social class implications of sexual abuse can be seen in the following extract from a letter written by J. M. Wallace. He recognised that the overseer in question was abusing the slave women, but attributed this to his 'low' status. Wallace wrote: 'I have already had to turn off the man he [Mr. Rice] brought out, [as an overseer] who was drunk there all the time with a crowd of *low associates disturbing his negro women* and riding his mules. [italics added] [53]

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[51] The two respondents fathered by white overseers were Victoria Perry and Adeline Brown.

[52] Jack Johnson and Isiah Jeffries said that their masters were their fathers. Thomas Goodwater and Lias Winning mentioned that their masters sexually abused female slaves.

[53] Letter to Ben H. Rice from J. M. Wallace, 17 February 1855, Wallace-Rice-Duncan Family Papers, S.C.L.

Evidence obtained from the South Carolina narratives, however, disputes the assertion that it was lower-class white men who tended to be the sexual abusers of slave women. Gus Feaster even explicitly mentioned the social status of his white overseer, denying that he was of a low social class. Feaster said: 'Mr. Evans wasn't no po' white trash, but he was kinder midlin' like.' [54] He then went on to say:

> It was like dis. Ole man Wash Evans was a wicked man. He take 'vantage of all de slaves when he git half chance....[He later related an incident when he was picking berries with his friend John, his mother, and another female slave. Wash Evans rode up and]...he argued wid both mammy and ole lady Lucy and dey kept telling him dat de missus want her berries and dat dey was 'ligious wimmins anyhow and didn't practice no life o' sin and vile wickedness. Finally he got down off'n his hoss and pull out his whip and low if dey didn't submit to him he gwine to beat dem half to death. At that me and John took to de woods. But we peep. My mammy and old lady Lucy start to crying and axing him not to whip dem. Finally dey act like dey gwine to indulge in de wickedness wid dat ole man. But when he tuck off his whip and some other garments, my mammy and ole lady Lucy grab him by his goatee and further down and hist him over in de middle of dem blackberry bushes. [Feaster's mother then went and told her mistress, who fired the overseer]. [55]

Issues of sexual contact and sexual abuse at the hands of masters and overseers are also worth investigating at a wider level. For this purpose, the entire collection of W.P.A. slave narratives (including the supplementary volumes) was examined using the *Index to the American Slave*. [56] All index entries for 'miscegenation' were

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54 Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 57.

55 Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 65-66.

56 See Donald M. Jacobs, *Index to the American Slave* .

consulted in order to establish the relativity of master versus overseer as sexual abusers. Twenty-one cases were found where respondents expressed direct knowledge of sexual contact or abuse occurring between either their master or their overseer and slave women.[57] Of these, seven involved overseers and fourteen (or two-thirds) involved owners.

Interestingly, of the fourteen cases involving masters, six specified that the contact was with house servants and only one specified a field worker. Of the seven cases involving overseers, two specified that contact was with house servants, whilst only one said that their overseer liaised with a field worker. This results, then, suggest that, firstly, masters were more likely to abuse female slaves than were overseers -- the sexual abuse of female slaves was not something that could be attributed to lower-class whites. Secondly, it seems that house servants were much more at risk of sexual abuse than field slaves. These findings broadly correlate with the claims of Crawford, who argues that female slaves employed in house-related tasks were twice as likely to bear a child by a white man than those who worked in the field.[58] It was also found in the sample of South Carolina W.P.A. narratives, that of the eight respondents who were fathered by white men, only two gave the occupation of their mothers and both of these performed housework. [59] Furthermore, within the sample of full-length narratives

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[57] This sample includes those who had a direct knowledge of sexual contact between masters or overseers and female slaves. Those who simply expressed anecdotes on this subject -- for example by stating that 'some masters abused their female slaves' -- were not included in the sample. Interestingly, of the twenty-one respondents in this sample, eight were the children of their masters, and four were the children of their white overseers.

[58] Crawford, "Quantified Memory", 161.

[59] These were Thomas Dixon and Alexander Robertson.

three narrators said that they had a white fathers and two of the three said that their mothers were cooks. [60]

The evidence found within the sample of full-length narratives therefore supports the broad trends that have been established from the W.P.A. narratives. Whilst, in the full-length narratives, no direct evidence on sexual relationships between slave men and white women was found (with the exception of the anecdote made by Jacobs), issues of sexual contact and abuse between white men and slave women loomed large. In the small sample of full-length narratives, no mention was made of the sexual abuse of slave women by white overseers, which again supports the proposition that slave women were more at risk from masters than overseers. Three narrators wrote that they were the children of slave women and white men. It would seem that Moses Roper was the son of his master, since he stated that he 'resembled Mr. Roper very much.' [61] Similarly, Annie L. Burton was the daughter of a white man, a planter she claimed. Burton wrote:

> My mistress often told me that my father was a planter who owned a plantation about two miles from ours....I will venture to say that I only saw my father a dozen times, when I was about four years old; and those times I saw him only from a distance, as he was driving by the great house of our plantation. Whenever my mistress saw him going by, she would take me by the hand and run out upon the piazza, and exclaim, "Stop there, I say! Don't you want to see and speak to and caress your darling child"....My mistress's action was, of course, intended to humble and shame my father. I never spoke to him, and

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[60] See Griffiths, *Autobiography*, 10; Burton, *Memories*, 7. Roper, in *A Narrative*, did not state the occupation of his mother.

[61] Roper, *A Narrative*, 2.

> cannot remember that he ever noticed me, or in any way acknowledged me to be his child. [62]

Mattie Griffiths also had a white father, whom she did not name. Griffiths merely stated: 'My mother was a very bright mulatto woman, and my father, I suppose, was a white man, though I know nothing of him; for, with the most unpaternal feeling, he deserted me.' [63]

Two of the full-length narrators, both house servants, also described instances of sexual abuse. One of the main themes within Harriet Jacobs' autobiography was that of the sexual abuse she received at the hands of her master, Dr. Flint. As Jacobs wrote:

> But I now entered on my fifteenth year -- a sad epoch in the life of a slave girl. My master began to whisper foul words in my year. Young as I was, I could not remain ignorant of their import....He was a crafty man, and resorted to many means to accomplish his purposes. Sometimes he had stormy, terrific ways, that made his victims tremble; sometimes he assumed a gentleness that he though must surely subdue. of the two, I preferred his stormy moods, although they left me trembling....I turned from him with disgust and hatred. But he was my master. [64]

Mattie Griffiths also nearly became the victim of sexual abuse when Bill Tompkins attempted to buy her from her owner, Mr. Peterkin. Griffiths wrote that Tompkins said to her: "'Wal, you is devilish likely. Put out yer foot. Wal, it is nice enuff to belong to a white 'ooman. You is a bright-colored mulatto. I must have you."'[65] Luckily for Griffiths, however, she was not sold to Tompkins.

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[62]'Burton, *Memories*, 7-8.

[63] Griffiths, *Autobiography*, 9-10.

[64] Jacobs, *Incidents*, 44

[65] Griffiths, *Autobiography*, 170.

The W.P.A. evidence (being black evidence on the black experience) is probably the only available primary source for developing useful quantitative estimates on sexual contact and sexual abuse. It was found that small, but significant percentages of slaves (around three-six per cent) would have had white fathers. Several other trends have also been found, though. My sample has suggested that slaves were twice as likely to be raped by masters than by overseers or other white men. My work (and that of Crawford) has also argued that domestic slaves were particularly at risk of rape, and Crawford found that slaves on smaller units (under 50 slaves) were particularly at risk. The overall patterns therefore suggest that a significant minority of owners sexually abused their slave women. Looked at from the slave community's point of view, the threat of abuse was real but the percentage of slaves abused would not have been high enough to have dislodged the slaves' sense of family. Female slaves sought to overcome this unique form of oppression through gaining the love and support of a spouse.

The impact of sexual contact and sexual abuse upon slave mistresses

Sexual contact between masters and slave women impacted upon relationships between females slaves and their white mistresses. It has been suggested that the master's sexual abuse of slave women provided mistresses and their female slaves with an opportunity to bond along gendered lines, across the divisions created by race and class. For example, Catherine Clinton argues that 'Wives and daughters would often plead with planters for the humane treatment of slaves. Slaves understood this role of white women and would often appeal directly to the mistress to intercede with the master on his or her behalf.'[66] In contrast, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has emphasised the fact that racism created a gulf between mistresses and their female slaves. She writes:

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66 Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 187

> That southern women complained about slavery and sometimes about men does not mean that they opposed slavery as a social system or even the prerogatives with which its class and race relations endowed men. Slaveholding women did not accept bourgeois feminism's claims to universality.[67]

However, both female slaves and their mistresses, to varying degrees, can be seen as *victims* in the realms of sexual contact and sexual abuse.

Within the sample of South Carolina W.P.A. narratives, two respondents mentioned the effect that sexual contact between masters and female slaves had upon their mistresses. In addition to these, Gus Feaster's comments on a white overseer trying sexually to abuse his mother are revealing, since he said that his mistress fired the overseer in question. [68] However, when the sexual attacker was her own husband, the mistress tended to react in a different way. Certainly, it does appear that sexual contact between owners and their female slaves caused mistresses great anguish. Evidence from the South Carolina W.P.A. narratives suggests that, whilst mistresses were undoubtedly distressed by such occurrences, they also felt angry towards either the female slave victims of the abuse, or the offspring of such abuse. As the respondent Ryer Emmanuel said:

> Like I speak to you, my white folks was blessed wid a heap of black chillun, but den dere been an odd one in de crowd what wasn' noways like dem others. all de other chillun was black skin wid dis here kinky hair en she was yellow skin wid straight black hair. My Lord, old Missus been mighty proud of her black chillun, but she sho been touches [touchy] bout dat yellow one. I remember, all us chillun was playin round bout de step one day whe' Miss Ross was settin en she ax dat yellow child, say 'Who your papa?' De child never know no better en she tell her right out exactly de one her mammy had

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[67] Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 338.

[68] See Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 65-66.

tell her was her papa. Lord, Miss Ross, she say, 'Well, get off my step. Get off en stay off dere cause you don' noways belong to me'. [69]

Similarly, Savilla Burrell stated:

> Old Marse was de daddy of some mulatto chillun. De 'lations wid de mothers of dose chillun is what give so much grief to mistress. De neighbours would talk 'bout it and he would sell all dem chillun away from dey mothers to a trader. My mistress would cry 'bout dat.'[70]

Within the sample of full-length narratives, reference was also made to the anguish felt by mistresses. Moses Roper, who was the son of his master, related how his mistress tried to attack his mother, upon finding out that she had borne her master's child. Roper wrote:

> She [his mistress] got a large club-stick and knife, and hastened to place in which my mother was confined. She went into my mother's room with full intention to murder me with her knife and club, but as she was going to stick the knife into me, my grandmother happened to come in, caught the knife and saved my life. But...from what my mother told me, my father sold her and myself, soon after her confinement. [71]

Harriet Jacobs, too, spoke of the persecution she faced from her own 'jealous mistress'. She stated: 'The mistress, who ought to protect the helpless victim, has no other feelings towards her but those of jealousy and rage.' Later she wrote:

> I had entered my sixteenth year, and every day it became more apparent that my presence was intolerable to Mrs. Flint. angry words frequently passed between her and her husband. He had never punished me himself, and he would not

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[69] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 14.

[70] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 150.

[71] Roper, *A Narrative*, 2.

allow any one body else to punish me. In that respect she was never satisfied; but, in her angry moods, no terms were too vile for her to bestow upon me.[72]

Annie L. Burton, on the other hand, appears to have had a mistress who supported her, despite the fact that she had a white father. Significantly, though in this case, the father was not her present owner. [73] When the master was the father, mistresses usually seem to have seen themselves as the primary *victims* in the process of sexual abuse. This attitude, and resentment against the abused slave women and their children diminished the opportunities for mistresses to bond with their female slaves along gendered lines. [74]

Sexual contact and manumissions

It has been suggested that sexual contact between slave women and white men meant that slave women had a better chance of freedom than did slave men. Indeed, females were a substantial majority among manumitted slaves. Paul Finkelman has said that

> Some slave women had meaningful and loving relations with their owners. Women in these relationships, and the children they had, were more likely to be manumitted than any other slaves in the South. For this reason slave women as a group, probably had a better chance of gaining freedom than slave men.[75]

Thus sexual contact had the potential to constitute yet another major difference in the lives of male and female slaves. This section will therefore assess the relationship

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[72] Jacobs, *Incidents*, 51.

[73] see Burton, *Memories*, 7-8.

[74] See Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, Chapter Seven. Fox-Genovese argues here that mistresses who expressed anti-slavery sentiments, such as Mary Boykin Chesnut, were not representative of the majority of Southern women.

[75] See the 'Introduction' to Paul Finkelman, (ed.), *Women and the Family in a Slave Society* (New York: Garland Publishing 1989). Finkelman does acknowledge, however, that the slave women manumitted by their owners through sexual relationships, were 'the lucky few'.

between sexual contact and manumissions through an investigation into the extent to which female slaves were manumitted following sexual liaisons with white men. It will also consider whether female slaves were tempted to seek their freedom through engaging in sexual relationships with white men. If they were, this would have had implications for slave family and community life.

The notion that sexual liaisons between white men and slave women led to loving and meaningful relationships has contributed to the ideology of benevolent paternalism in the slave holding South, since, by assuming that most sexual liaisons between white men and slave women took the form of loving relationships, the brutality of the sexual abuse of female slaves is minimized. For example, Genovese's belief in the essentially paternalist nature of master-slave relationships also led him to conclude that 'Many white men who began by taking a slave girl in an act of sexual exploitation ended by loving her and the children she bore.' [76] Furthermore, the records left by owners wishing to free their slave mistresses (and sometimes their offspring too) have sometimes been used as testimony to the benevolence of owners. James Hugo Johnston claimed in 1937 that

> Fathers of such [mulatto] children would have been inhuman had they not sought to lighten the burden on their children. On examination of the wills of deceased slave owners it frequently appears that the deceased master is the father of certain slaves and seeks to make provision for his children.[77]

The will of Philipe Noisette is an example. Noisette petitioned to the South Carolina State Assembly, requesting the manumission of his slave mistress and the children he bore by her. His will recorded:

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[76] Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 415.

[77] James Hugo Johnston, *Race Relations in Virginia and Miscegenation in the South* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press 1970), 220-221. This work was originally a doctoral dissertation of 1937.

> I do hereby recognise and declare that the issue of my slave and housekeeper Celestine are my children and I will order and direct that my Executors here in named or such person or persons as may qualify on this will shall and as soon after my death as is convenient send the said woman Celestine and all her said issue, my children out of this state to some other state territory of county where they can there be made free.[78]

However, whilst instances of white men wishing to manumit their female slaves with whom they were having sexual liaisons can be found, it is their typicality that needs to be questioned. Indeed, from an examination of various source materials pertaining to slavery in antebellum South Carolina, it would appear that those such as Philipe Noisette were in a small minority. From an investigation into the records of white owners, little reference is made to sexual liaisons at all, let alone to white men actually freeing their female slaves with whom they were having sexual relationships.[79] Sometimes, possible reference was made to interracial sexual contact

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[78] Extract from the will of Philip Noisette, Noisette Family Papers, 1841-1858, S.C.L. A copy of the will is also stored in the S.C.D.A.H., along with Noisette's petition to the State Assembly requesting the emancipation of his slaves.

[79] The major exceptions to this are the nineteenth-century petitions made to the South Carolina State Assembly, whereby slave owners wished to manumit certain slaves. Many of these petitions came about after an Act of 1820, which forbid all emancipation except for those granted by act of the legislature. An Act of 1841 then imposed even more restrictions upon those wishing to free their slaves. It stated that slaves had to be carried out of the state of South Carolina in order to secure their freedom. Hence petitions written after 1841 had to state that the slaves in question would be taken elsewhere. Many of these petitions appear to have been written by male owners wishing to manumit their female slaves, suggesting that sexual contact was a major reason as to why male owners petitioned the State Assembly requesting the manumission of their slaves.

by slave owners in their letters and diaries, but these references were often indirect. For example, Mary Esther Huger wrote in her reminiscences:

> All my father's babies were taken care of by a mulatto -- very proud of being half Indian -- named Maum Harriet - whom I remember from the time I was a little girl, living with some of the family in Charleston, supported by my father, and doing nothing for about thirty years, because she had been a faithful nurse. [80]

It seems curious that a female slave would be allowed not to work for her master for 30 years simply because she had been a faithful nurse. Possibly Huger's father was having a relationship with the slave woman, and therefore kept her in Charleston as his mistress. Other references to sexual contact can be found within the diaries written by male slave owners, although, again, such references are unusual. Carol Bleser, in her edited collection of the diaries of James Henry Hammond, writes:

> It is most surprising that Hammond's personal papers contain proof of Hammond's illicit and long-term relationships with two slave women and that this documentation survived the natural instinct of heirs and executors to prettify their family history. Hammond records that he took eighteen-year-old Sally Johnson as his mistress and that he eventually became enamoured of her twelve-year-old daughter Louisa. [81]

Within the sample of full-length narratives, a case of a slave woman seeking a relationship with a white man in the hope of gaining her freedom has been provided by Harriet Jacobs in her autobiography. Jacobs took a white lover, Mr. Sands, to prevent her master (Dr. Flint) from forcing her to live in a lonely cottage, where he would be free sexually to abuse her. She also hoped that Mr. Sands would buy her and manumit her. The desperation faced by Jacobs is illustrated in the following passage:

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[80] Mary Esther Huger, Reminiscences, 1890-1892, .24. S.C.L.

[81] See Carol Bleser, (ed.), *Secret and Sacred: The Diaries of James Henry Hammond, a Southern Slaveholder* (New York: Oxford University Press 1988), 18-19.

> When I found out that my master had actually begun to build the lonely cottage....I knew nothing would enrage Dr. Flint so much as to know that I favored another; and it was something to triumph over my tyrant even in that small way. I thought he would revenge himself by selling me, and I was sure my friend, Mr. Sands, would buy me. He was a man of more generosity and feeling than my master, and I thought my freedom could be easily obtained from him. [82]

Mr. Sands, however, did not buy or manumit Jacobs, despite her having two children by him. This incident therefore supports the proposition made by Deborah White, that even if some slave women did enter relationships with white men in the hope of obtaining their freedom, they were taking a large risk. White states:

> While some women remained the concubines of their white lovers and eventually obtained freedom for themselves and their children, just as many, if not more, were sold off to plantations where they shared the misery of all slaves. Sometimes their lovers married and settled into a stable family life with a white woman. Sometimes a jealous wife put an end to her husband's carousing by insisting that the slave woman be sold away. Occasionally the black woman who had been treated like a family member since childhood became the rival of a jealous wife. Whatever the reason, there were enough 'fallen women' to demonstrate how risky it was to expect liberation from one's enslavers. [83]

From an examination into the South Carolina W.P.A. slave narratives, too, it would certainly seem that slave women who gained their freedom or who gained quasi-freedom though entering sexual relationships with white men were rare in the extreme. This W.P.A. sample contains no instances of slave women seeking or gaining their freedom through relationships with white men. Females were persistently in the

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[82] Jacobs, *Incidents*, 85.

[83] White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 35.

majority among manumitted slaves, but rates of manumission (especially after 1820) were so low that sex did not provide a route to freedom. [84] Exceptionally, slave women might have gained protection and rewards short of freedom, but the whole tenor of the evidence from slave sources suggests that sexual contact with whites was much more likely to involve abuse than mutual affection.

Conclusions

The evidence of this chapter has suggested quite high levels of sexual abuse of slaves, especially of domestic slaves by masters. Rather than seeking their freedom or special favours through sexual relationships with white men, however, the vast majority of slave women chose to try and cope with their oppression through their relationships with their male spouses. The extent and nature of the sexual abuse of slave women meant that, in this respect, the lives of female slaves were more traumatic than those of males. But, the fact that male slaves tried to protect their spouses against sexual abuse (as detailed in Chapter Two), and the general condemnation of such abuse, illustrates the strength of the relationships between slave couples.

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[84] On rates of manumission and its characteristics, see Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Pantheon 1974), 138-157, and Peter D. McClelland and Richard J. Zeckhauser, *Demographic Dimensions of the New Republic: American Interregional Migration, Vital Statistics, and Manumission, 1800-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1982), 16-17, 80-81.

Chapter Six

The Forced Separation of Slaves

> This man came up to me, and, seizing me by the collar, shook me violently, saying I was his property, and must go with him to Georgia. At the sound of these words, the thoughts of my wife and children rushed across my mind, and my heart beat away within me. I saw and knew that my case was hopeless, and that resistance was vain, as there were near twenty persons present, all of whom were ready to assist the man by whom I was kidnapped....I asked if I could not be allowed to go to see my wife and children, or if this could not be permitted, if they might not have leave to come to see me, but I was told I would be able to get another wife in Georgia. [1]

Introduction

In the above extract from his autobiography, Charles Ball poignantly described being forcibly separated from his wife and children in a chain-gang that was headed for South Carolina and Georgia. He was then sold in Columbia, South Carolina. The impact of forced separations upon slaves was undoubtedly immense, since they had to live under the constant threat, if not the reality, of being separated from their loved ones. This chapter will attempt to investigate the impact of this threat upon the relationships between slaves, and also upon the relationships between slaves and their owners, in antebellum South Carolina. Through an investigation into the post-1807 domestic slave trade, it will offer new insights into some of the implications that forced separations had for the slave community. [2]

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[1] Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 28.

[2] In January 1808 the African slave trade to the United States officially ended. However, the internal slave trade had been significant from at least the 1780s.

This chapter focuses on the pressures which owners arbitrarily imposed on slaves through the forcible separation of families. Such separations could be caused in various ways -- especially through sale to long-distance slave traders who would carry family members out of South Carolina, through local sales within South Carolina, through family members being transferred as gifts, and through (non-sale) divisions of slaveholdings between the heirs of an estate. Theoretically, this combination of pressures could have been devastating to any sense of family, and there has recently been some tendency to suggest that Herbert Gutman was too optimistic about the resilience of slave families. [3] This chapter argues, however, that through cross-plantation family ties, slaves managed to resist many of the potential threats to family and to marriage viability. Local sales, gifts, and divisions of estates between heirs did mean, though, that family patterns were often multi-dimensional, with some family members belonging to the same owner, while others might belong to more or less distant neighbours. Significantly in this chapter it is slave (rather than white) evidence which is most important in revealing aspects of the complexity of family experience -- aspects which have previously been little explored by historians. A pattern emerges of essentially nuclear families which sometimes saw all members living on the same slaveholding, but which sometimes showed spouses, siblings, children, and other relatives dispersed across a more complex residential network.

Herbert Gutman, as has been noted at other points in this thesis, emphasised the resilience of the slave family despite the considerable pressures of sale. [4] Michael Tadman, in a specialist study of the antebellum inter-state slave trade, catalogued the extent of long-distance sales and separations. He argues that one-third of marriages of slaves born in the slave-selling states were broken by the inter-state trade, and that one-fifth of children were separated from one or both parents by that trade. [5] Nevertheless,

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[3] See Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 137.

[4] See Gutman, *The Black Family.*

[5] See Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 211-212.

Tadman argued that family life was the normal slave experience, that most marriages survived, most children had many years of life with their parents, and most slaves feared the forcible separation of their families. Recently, Thomas Russell has claimed that local (as well as long-distance) sales caused a high rate of family separations. [6] If he is right, and if we add to this the potential impact of family dispersal by gift and by the non-sale division of estates between heirs, we could again begin to doubt the viability of the family. I shall suggest, however, first that Russell's sample probably exaggerates the extent of separations through local sale. Second, I shall suggest that cross-plantation family networks (involving not just spouses but other family members too) allowed slaves to cope with many of the pressures of local dispersal and separation.

Using the W.P.A. narratives, this chapter will begin by investigating the extent of forced separations of South Carolina slave family members. Whilst the W.P.A. narratives are likely to underestimate the actual extent of slave sales, the comments made by the respondents on the forcible separations of themselves and their family members can provide a useful quantitative estimate of the threat of being separated from loved ones. [7] Quantifying comments on slave sales can also reveal much about gender differences and forced separations, especially for young slaves. I shall then explore local sales, gifts, and estate divisions, and shall emphasise the dominating fear of the

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[6] See Thomas Russell, "Sale Day in Antebellum South Carolina: Slavery, Law, Economy and Court-Supervised Sales" (PhD: Stanford University 1993). Also 'South Carolina's Largest Slave Auctioneering Firm' *Chicago Kent Law Review* **68** 3 (1993), and 'Articles Sell Best Singly: The Disruption of Slave Families at Court Sales' *Utah Law Review* **4** (1996).

[7] Some of the respondents may have had a knowledge of sales, but might not have mentioned this to their interviewer. Many were very young during slavery times (and teenagers and young adults were far more at risk of being sold to traders). Many did not report being sold, but did give information on separations affecting the lives of their parents.

slave trader and of long-distance separation. Finally, this chapter will examine sales from the perspective of owners. It will be suggested that owners protected a minority of 'key slaves' from buying and selling and in this way owners could maintain a benevolent self-image. An examination of the manuscript materials left by owners supports this proposition.

The separation of the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents and their family members

Using the W.P.A. narratives, this section will offer quantitative information on separations through sale or gift. The respondents' comments will be used to hint at some gender differences in sales, as well as to provide an estimate of the minimum number of slave sales in antebellum South Carolina. Some of the specific results (because of small sample size) are suggestive only, but the overall result, showing a high rate of sale and separation, seems to be representative. Slave separations mentioned by the female respondents will be examined first. A total of 39 female respondents mentioned the separation of themselves or another family member through sale or gift, representing 27.1 per cent of all 144 females. However, the total number of sales that they mentioned stands at 40, since one respondent mentioned more than one sale. These results have been summarised in Table 6:1. More females mentioned sales of family members than gifts being made of family members, although, interestingly, more females themselves had been given away than had been sold. The pattern relating to gifts is possibly a reflection of the fact that young female house servants were often given away to the sons or daughters of slave owners on marriage. [8] A significant percentage of these females also mentioned the sale of their mothers.

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[8] Unfortunately, the sample size was too small to undertake an investigation into the occupation of those respondents who mentioned slave sales.

Table 6:1:

Separations of Female Respondents and their Family Members

Person(s) sold	Sale	Gift	Total
Respondent:	5 (12.5%)	6 (15.0%)	11(27.5%)
Respondent with mother:	4 (10.0%)	1 (2.5%)	5 (12.5%)
Whole Family:	2 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (5.0%)
Parents Together:	2 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (5.0%)
Mother:	9 (22.5%)	1 (2.5%)	10(25.0%)
Father:	1 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.5%)
Other:	9 (22.5%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (22.5%)
Totals:	32 (80.0%)	8 (20.0%)	40 (100%)

Source and note: Rawick, *The American Slave.*

The 'Other' row includes grandparents, aunts, uncles and siblings. All percentages in this table are for the 40 sales mentioned by the female South Carolina W.P.A. respondents.

These results can now be compared with those for the 46 male respondents who commented on slave separations. This represented 24.2 per cent of all 190 males included in the South Carolina sample. However, the total number of separations mentioned stood at 47, since some respondents mentioned more than one type of separation. These results have been summarised in Table 6:2.

Table: 6:2:

Separations of Male Respondents and their Family Members

Person(s) sold	Sale	Gift	Total
Respondent	8 (17.0%)	7 (14.9%)	15(31.9%)
Respondent with mother:	2 (4.2%)	2 (4.2%)	4 (8.5%)
Whole Family:	2 (4.2%)	1 (2.1%)	3 (6.4%)
Parents Together:	5 (10.6%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (10.6%)
Mother:	8 (17.0%)	1 (2.1%)	9 (19.1%)
Father:	9 (19.1%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (19.1%)
Other:	1 (2.1%)	1 (2.1%)	2 (4.2%)
Totals:	35 (74.5%)	12 (25.5%)	47 (100%)

Source and note: Rawick, *The American Slave.*

The 'Other' row includes grandparents, aunts, uncles and siblings. All percentages in this table are for the 47 sales mentioned by the male South Carolina W.P.A. respondents.

In the W.P.A. samples, sales were mentioned more frequently than gifts by the male respondents, as was the case with females. More males were sold than females, however, and slightly fewer males were given away than were females. Females were also more likely to be sold with their mother than were males, who were therefore more likely to be sold alone. Transactions involving parents were also frequently mentioned by males, whereas females were less likely to speak of transactions involving their fathers, and more likely to speak of transactions involving their mothers. By analysing the sales of these respondents and their family members, then, it is possible to suggest that the buying and selling patterns of owners affected young male and female slaves in somewhat different ways. Males were more likely to suffer from isolation and loneliness on being separated from their family members, whereas female slaves -- more likely to be sold with their mothers -- had a greater degree of stability in their

lives. This pattern has also been noted by Cheryll Ann Cody, who, in her study of the slaves belonging to the Ball family of South Carolina, stated that

> Once they had become young adults [at around age fifteen], enslaved sons were far more likely than daughters to be separated from their parents and siblings. The greater "stability" of parent-daughter and female sibling ties appears to be the result of two practices. Young women remained members of the "inseparable" unit of their family of origin until they married and became "inseparable" members of their family of procreation, and elderly parents more frequently were defined as members of their daughters' household than that of their sons. [9]

Also significant in the South Carolina W.P.A. sample is the fact that more females than males mentioned separations involving their mothers (25.0 and 19.1 per cent respectively), and many more males than females mentioned separations involving their fathers (19.1 per cent and 2.5 per cent respectively). This does not mean that more fathers of the male respondents, and more mothers of the female respondents, were sold, but that these separations impacted on young males and females in somewhat different ways. Young males may have attached more significance to being separated from their fathers whilst young females may have been more affected by being separated from their mothers. Thus family ties within the slave community may have operated, to some degree, along gender lines, with young females being closer to their mothers and young males being closer to their fathers. A summary of all separations as related by the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents is presented in Table 6:3.

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[9] Cheryll Ann Cody, 'Sale and Separation: Four Crises for Enslaved Women on the Ball Plantations, 1764-1854', in Hudson, *Working Toward Freedom:*, 121.

Table: 6:3:

Separations of All Respondents and their Family Members

Person(s) sold	Sale	Gift	Total
Respondent	13 (14.9%)	13 (14.9%)	26(29.9%)
Respondent with mother:	6 (6.9%)	3 (3.4%)	9 (10.3%)
Whole Family:	4 (4.6%)	1 (1.1%)	5 (5.7%)
Parents Together:	7 (8.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (8.0%)
Mother:	17 (19.5%)	2 (2.3%)	19(21.8%)
Father:	10 (11.5%)	0 (0.0%)	10(11.5%)
Other:	10 (11.5%)	1 (1.1%)	11(12.6%)
Totals:	67 (77.0%)	20 (23.0%)	87 (100%)

Source and note: Rawick, *The American Slave.*

The 'Other' row includes grandparents, aunts, uncles and siblings. All percentages in this table are for the 87 comments on separations of themselves or family members made by the respondents. This represents 26 per cent of all 334 respondents.

Other respondents made more general comments on the forced separation of slaves. They did not mention transactions involving themselves or their family members, but instead they said that, for instance, their master sold slaves, or that they saw slaves being sold. There were 31 respondents who commented in this category, (representing 9.3 per cent of all respondents). Adding these 31 comments on to the total of those who mentioned the separation of family members, then, means it is possible to provide a total estimate of forced separations, as illustrated in Table 6:4.

Table 6:4:

Total slave transactions	
Separations of respondents or family members:	87 (26.0%)
Other comments on separations:	31 (9.3%)
Total number of separations:	118 (35.3%)

Source and note: Rawick, *The American Slave.*

All Percentages in this table are for all 334 respondents.

The detailed evidence in tables 6:1, 6:2, and 6:3 has suggested significant gender-specific patterns. Table 6:4 indicates something of the overall scale of separations. The chance of being separated from one's family was very real for antebellum South Carolina slaves, with a minimum of 35 per cent of all slaves knowing someone who had been subjected to a forced separation. Interestingly, the 26 per cent of respondents who were either sold themselves or had a family member sold represents a slightly higher figure than the findings of Paul Escott in his study of the W.P.A. narratives throughout the South. He found that around one fifth of all the ex-slaves interviewed had experienced at least a partial break up of their families during slavery.[10] The difference between Escott's 20 per cent and my 26 per cent appears to lie in the fact that during the period covered by the W.P.A. respondents' reminiscences, South Carolina was a slave-exporting state. [11] South Carolina slaves were therefore more likely to be sold away than slaves residing in the American South as a whole, since slaves tended to be sold from the Upper-South to the Lower South or Westwards.

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[10] Escott, *Slavery Remembered*, 46. Crawford estimates that approximately 23 per cent of slave families were broken by sale. See Crawford, "Quantified Memory", 163.

[11] Tadman argues that by the 1820s, the state of South Carolina had become a net exporter of slaves. See Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 12, and also 31-41.

The fear of long-distance sales

A minimum of 35 per cent of the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents had either been sold or given away, or knew of slaves who had been subjected to forced separations. Indeed, it is this knowledge of forced separations that is of immense significance when investigating sales, since it would have created an unquantifiable fear of separation within the slave community. Herbert Gutman, for example, emphasised the potential impact of forced separations upon the slave community when he stated:

> What percentage of slave marriages...had to be ended by force or sale to make slaves understand owners' power?....The breakup of a marriage had a 'geometric' impact upon the slaves involved. It directly affected a particular husband and wife, their children,their parents, and other kin nearby. [12]

This fear of separations that was instilled into slaves, then, must undoubtedly have contributed to the 'social space' between the lives of slaves and slaves owners, by increasing the hostility felt towards owners by slaves.

Furthermore, it is a fear of long-distance sales rather than local sales that becomes apparent upon an examination of slave source materials. Whilst local sales could severely disrupt slave family life, long-distance sales often meant the permanent separation of families. Within both the W.P.A. and full-length slave narratives, frequent reference was made to the fear of long-distance sales, especially those to Louisiana and Texas, where the treatment of slaves allegedly was worse. Jacob Stroyer, for example, had two sisters, Violet and Priscilla, who were married to men belonging to the brother of Stroyer's master. They lived on his plantation with their husbands. However, when their owner came into debt, he sold many of his slaves, including Stroyer's sisters, who were bought by a slave trader named Mr. Manning. Stroyer described this sale in some detail:

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[12] See Gutman, *The Black Family*, 145-148.

> He [Mr. Manning] was to take them into the state of Louisiana for sale, but some of the men did not want to go with him, and he put those in prison until he was start....Those who did not show any unwillingness to go were allowed to visit their relatives and friends for the last time. So my sisters, with the rest of their unfortunate companions, came to master's place to visit us. When the day came for them to leave, some, who seemed to have been willing to go at first, refused, and were handcuffed together and guarded on their way to the cars by white men....The excitement was so great that the overseer and driver could not control the relatives and friends of those that were going away, as a large crowd of both young and old went to the depot to see them off. Louisiana was considered by the slaves as a place of slaughter, so those who were going did not expect to see their friends again....As the cars moved away we heard weeping and wailing from the slaves as far as the human voice could be heard; and from that time to the present I have neither seen nor heard from my two sisters, nor any of those who left the Clarkson depot on that memorable day. [13]

The South Carolina W.P.A. respondent William Oliver also expressed fear of being sold to the Southwest, where he believed slaves were treated more cruelly. He said:

> The cruellest treatment I know of in the United States and all the other states was done in the Southwestern states. Take New Orleans....Texas beat the country for cruelty. They tell me when your Master and Missus in this country want to make you do your task, they threaten to sell you to Texas. Had a regular 'Vander Range' in New Orleans. Place they keep the slaves and auction them off. [14]

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[13] Stroyer, *My Life in the South*, 39-42.

[14] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 3, 219.

Other ex-slaves spoke more of the fear of familial separations that were created by long distance sales. Sena Moore told her interviewer how her parents, who had resided in a cross-plantation marriage, were separated forever when her father's owner decided to sell him away to Arkansas. She said: 'My mammy weep 'bout dat but what could her do? Just nothin'.[15] Indeed, it was the fear of the separation of husbands and wives -- along with the fear of the separation of parents and children -- that came out very strongly in both the W.P.A. and the full-length narratives. This lends support to the claim that spousal relationships were of vital importance to slaves. Tom Jones, for example, stated in his autobiography that he married a slave, Lucilla, who belonged a Mrs. Moore. They resided in a cross-plantation marriage, until Mrs. Moore moved away. Jones wrote:

> I had a constant dread that Mrs. Moore, her mistress, would be in want of money and sell my dear wife. We constantly dreaded a final separation....These fears were well-founded....[since] Mrs. Moore left Wilmington, and moved to Newburn. She carried away with her my beloved Lucilla, and my three children, Annie, four years old; Lizzie, two and a half years; and our sweet little babe Charlie. She remained there eighteen months. And, Oh, how lonely and dreary and desponding were those months of lonely life to my crushed heart! My dear wife and my precious children were seventy-four miles distant from me, carried away from me in utter scorn of my beseeching words. [16]

Jones only saw his wife once more, when she passed through Wilmington on her way to Alabama, with her mistress. [17]

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[15] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 3, 209.

[16] Tom Jones, *Experience and Personal Narrative*, 24.

[17] Tom Jones, *Experience and Personal Narrative*, 24. See Chapter One for the anguish that Jones felt at being separated from his wife forever.

Many of the W.P.A. respondents also expressed a knowledge of family separations created by long-distance sales. Sylvia Durant said to her interviewer:

> Den dey'ud hab sale en sell some uv de colored peoples offen to annuder plantation hundred mile 'way some uv de time. 'Vide man en he wife. Dey sho' done it. I hear pa tell 'bout dat. Make em stand up on uh stump en bid em offen dere jes lak dey wuz hoss. Pa say de sell he brother Elic wife 'way wid de onlyest child dey hab. Ne'er didn't see dat wife en child no more. [18]

Similarly, Susan Hamlin said:

> All time, night an' day, you could hear men an' women screamin' to de tip of dere voices as either ma, pa, sister, or brother wus take without any warnin' an' sell. Some time mother who had only one chile was separated fur life. People wus always dying' frum a broken heart. [19]

Also, Hector Godbold stated:

> Dey sho sell de colored peoples way plenty times cause I see dat done right here to Marion. Stand em up on a block en sell em to a speculator dere. I hear em bid off a 'oman en her baby dere en den dey bid off my auntie en uncle way down to de country. [20]

The comments made by the W.P.A. respondents and full-length narrators highlight just how greatly they feared being separated from their loved ones through long-distance sale. Their comments also cast doubt on the validity of the claims made by Fogel and Engerman on the nature of the interregional slave trade. Fogel and Engerman claimed that sales did not result in the destruction of many slave marriages. They used data contained in sales records in New Orleans to argue that

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18 Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 339.

19 Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 235.

20 Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 145.

> It is likely that 13 per cent, or less, of interregional sales resulted in the destruction of marriages. And since sales were only 16 per cent of the total interregional movement [the rest they attribute to planter migration], it is probable that about 2 percent of the marriages of slaves involved in the Westward trek were destroyed by the process of migration. [21]

If Fogel and Engerman's claims were true, then one would not expect to find much fear of forced separations due to long-distance sales on the part of the slave community. However, this does not hold true upon a textual reading of slave source materials, where long-distance sales appear to have been immensely feared. [22]

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21 Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, 49.

22 Fogel and Engerman's calculations were based on the New Orleans trade, whose demographic composition they took to be typical of the internal slave trade as a whole. Michael Tadman has shown, however, that the composition of the New Orleans trade (because of the demands of Louisiana's sugar crop) was quite unlike that of the rest of the trade. Fogel and Engerman took as their 'indicators' of family separations cases where mothers and children were sold without fathers and cases where children were sold without parents. Tadman showed, however, that the New Orleans trade (unlike the trade generally) specialised in 'adult-male slaves', and carried exceptionally low proportions of mother-and-child units and of child-without-parents units. Unlike Fogel and Engerman, he also points out that many of the 'single' adult males (sold without family) would also in fact have been separated from wives and children. Tadman used the lists, letters, bills of sale and accounts of slave traders to argue that the number of first marriages of slaves destroyed by forcible separations stood at around one in three. He also claims that the slave trade accounted for about 60 per cent of interregional movements, compared to Fogel and Engerman's sixteen per cent. Tadman's claims, then, unlike those of Fogel and Engerman, would seem to correlate with the qualitative comments obtained from slave source materials on the fear of long-distance sales and the subsequent separations that they caused. See Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 134, 170-171, 178.

The horror of this internal slave trade has been vividly described by the South Carolina W.P.A. respondent George Fleming, who stated:

> Some men, like old Joe Crews, was reg'lar nigger traders. Dey bought niggers, stole 'em frum Virginia and places and drove 'em through de country like a bunch of hogs. Dey come in great gangs. In town dey have big nigger sellings, and all de marsters frum all over de countryside be dar to bid on 'em. Dey put 'em up on de block and holler 'bout dis and dat dey could do and how strong dey was. 'Six hundred - Yip, yip, make it six-fifty'. I heard 'em call many times when I be dar wid marse. Some of dem throw a thousand dollars quick as dey would ten at a purty gal. Some traders stop a drove of niggers at de plantation and swap or sell some. [23]

The nature of local sales

In his work on slave sales, Michael Tadman focused mainly on long-distance sale, but also gave significant attention to local sales. Such sales could either be private commercial transactions, or could arise through the process of the law (for example in Sheriff's sales for debt, or in probate sales following the death of an owner). Tadman suggested that local sales were probably even more numerous than long-distance sales,[24] and he suggested that some 60 per cent of local sales were court sales (arising through the agency of sheriffs, probate judges and the like), while the remaining 40 per cent were private commercial transactions. [25] Local sales of various types clearly had the potential for considerable family disruption. Tadman suggests, however, that private sales of individual slaves and sales of small lots of slaves were likely to be more disruptive than when whole substantial estates were sold off. He writes that

> With local sales (especially of substantial gangs that included significant numbers who were of very limited labor value), there was a strong tendency to

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[23] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 11, 133.

[24] Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 112.

[25] Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 120, *n.18*.

sell in lots of mixed ages; the effects were to keep quite a high proportion of families together, but also to allow the disposal of individuals who otherwise would have been difficult to sell. [26]

Overall, Tadman suggested that the inter-state slave trade caused a far higher rate of family disruption than did local sales. This was because the inter-state traffic was highly selective (specialising in teenagers and young adults), and so was biased against family units. [27] Recently, however, Thomas Russell has claimed that local sales, too, were highly disruptive. From an investigation of South Carolina court sales between 1823 and 1861, he argues that 52 per cent of slaves sold at court sales were sold individually. [28] Tadman has suggested, however, that Russell's sample might not be representative. He claims that Russell's sample was probably skewed towards the sale of small lots of slaves to pay off debts (at sheriff's sales and at Master in Equity sales). [29] This study will not offer a detailed analysis of the structure of sales, but will emphasise the broad context of local sales. It will suggest that the family devastation which Russell's results imply was not in fact experienced -- this was because of the resilience of cross-plantation marriages and more widely of cross-plantation family networks. Significantly, as has been noted earlier from the W.P.A. evidence and from slave autobiographies, the great dread of slaves was not local but long-distance sale. Sale of any kind was rarely welcomed, but nearly all long-distance sales meant irreparable loss.

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26 Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 136.

27 On the age-structure of the inter-state slave trade, see Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 25-31

28 Thomas Russell, 'Articles Sell Best Singly', 1167, *n.33.*

29 Private letter of Michael Tadman.

An indication of common patterns in the local sale of a large gang of slaves appears in the Manigault Papers. The Savannah River planter Charles Manigault wrote in a letter to his son that, if one wanted good workers, it was important to buy slaves from one gang:

> I went yesterday to see Carson's negroes. They are indeed a most inferior gang, more than half old, and scarcely a single prime field hand, so that I would not even attend the sale this morning, but heard that they were nevertheless going at high rates. Where one buys 15 or 20 negroes it is of great importance to select them all from one gang. They then in a strange place have ties to bind them all together. But when you buy several small parcels and throw them all together among strangers they don't assimilate, and they ponder over former ties of family &c and all goes wrong with them. [30]

Furthermore, he was also prepared to take on elderly slaves in order to maintain family groupings, as the following extract illustrates:

> I have just returned from purchasing 19 negroes from the sale of Brisbane's gang....There are 13 or 14 prime field hands, 6 men and 8 women price $623.70...the rest promising children from 5 to 10....There is and old man and an old women thrown in for nothing, as they wish to go with their family, making 21 in all. [31]

The following extract from a bill of sale for slaves sold to the South Carolina planter James Henry Hammond also shows how, at local sales, one could get rid of elderly or disabled slaves who would otherwise be difficult to sell. Both are represented in the following bill:

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[30] Letter to Louis Manigault from Charles Manigault, 8 January 1857, in James M. Clifton, *Life and Labor*, 239.

[31] Letter to Louis Manigault from Charles Manigault, 13 January 1857, in James M. Clifton, *Life and Labor*, 240.

Adam about 27 years old and Mary his wife about 35, their son Hector about 12; Georgiana, 16, and her child; Faith, 22; Billy, 14; Black Henry, 20; Washington, 22; Jim, 10; Justina, 16; Steven, 14; Dymass, 28 (club footed); Dinah, 40; Harry, 27; Major, 50 (sore leg); Sue, 48; Monday, 50; Jenny, 60; Bungy, 50; Patience, 65; Hector, 65.' [32]

But let us turn to the slave's perspective, and to the resilience of most slave family networks when faced with local sales. Charles Ball, for example, who lived in a cross-plantation marriage, was sold locally to another owner. He explicitly stated, however, that this did not inconvenience his marriage. Ball wrote:

> Some short time after my wife became chambermaid to her mistress [Mrs. Symmes], it was my misfortune to change masters once more. Levin Ballard, who, as before stated, had purchased me of the children of my former master, Jack Cox, was successful in his law suit with Mr. Gibson, the object of which was to determine the right of property in me; and one day, whilst I was at work in the corn-field, Mr. Ballard came and told me I was his property....I accordingly went with him, determining to serve him obediently and faithfully. I remained in his service almost three years, and *as he lived near the residence of my wife's master, my former mode of life was not materially changed by this change of home.* [italics added] [33]

Similarly, Mattie Jackson, in her autobiography, wrote that her parents, who also resided in a cross-plantation marriage, still managed to maintain their relationship despite her mother being sold twenty miles away. However, their situation was to change for the worse when Jackson's father was subjected to a long-distance sale, after which Jackson never saw her father again. She wrote that following the local sale: 'My

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[32] Bill of sale for slaves sold to James Henry Hammond, 6 September 1842, Hammond-Bryan-Cumming Family Papers, S.C.L.

[33] Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 25.

father, thereafter, visited my mother once a week, walking the distance every Saturday evening and returning on Sunday evening....Two years after this separation my father was sold and separated from us.' [34] The marriage of Jackson's parents was inconvenienced by local sale much more than the marriage of Charles Ball, then, but still the strength of the relationship meant that they strove to preserve their marriage ties.

The W.P.A. respondents appear to have had similar experiences to the full-length narrators with regard to local slave slaves. Sylvia Cannon, who was herself sold locally, illustrates well how familial relationships could be maintained despite disruption accompanying sales. She stated:

> Father en mother belong to old Bill Greggs en dat whe' Miss Earlie Hatchel buy me from. After dat, I didn' never live wid my parents any more, but I went back to see dem every two weeks. Got a note en go on a Sunday evenin en come back to Miss Hatchel on Monday.[35]

Cannon's arrangement with her new owner seems to have worked rather like a cross-plantation marriage, with her using a pass in order to visit her parents.

In other cases, the sale of a parent meant that those residing in nuclear families became cross-plantation families. Mack Taylor, for example, said that his father was sold away from the Clark family on the Wateree river, where he had resided with his wife and children, to Tom Taylor of Columbia. However, he remained in contact with his family despite this move. [36] Similarly, Lucinda Miller and her mother were sold leaving Lucinda's father behind. But, since the new owner was the brother of their former master and lived only 'two or three plantations away', they kept up family ties

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[34] Jackson, *The Story of Mattie J. Jackson*, 7.

[35] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 1, 188.

[36] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 4, 158.

with Lucinda's father. [37] Other W.P.A. respondents had parents who resided in cross-plantation marriages both before and after local sales, in a similar manner to Charles Ball. Lucretia Heyward was sold with her mother to an overseer of her master, Joe Eddings. She stated:

> Muh pa name Tony MacKnight and he b'long to Mr. Stephen Elliot. My ma name Venus MacKnight and she b'long to Mr. Joe Eddings....De overseer been Edward Blunt. He been poor white trash, but he wuk haa'd and save he money and buy slave. He buy my ma. [38]

Lucretia and her mother, however, appear to have maintained contact with Lucretia's father, providing evidence that this cross-plantation marriage survived the local sale. [39]

Slaves therefore appear not to have feared local sales as much as long-distance sales, since there was a possibility that, despite local sales, spousal (as well as broader familial) ties could be preserved. This was not the case so far as long-distance sales were concerned, where family disruption was nearly always permanent. The fact that slaves desired to continue their relationships with their spouses despite local sales, provides yet more evidence of the strength of the relationships between spouses, since slave couples strove to stay together despite often being plunged into increased familial adversity by their owners.

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37 Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 3, 191

38 Rawick., *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 279-280.

39 Rawick., *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 279-280.

Gifts and estate division

Slaves also had to contend with family disruption through being the subjects of gift between whites or of the division of estates between the heirs of a deceased owner. One could suggest that the cumulative pressures on the slave family were overwhelming. Again, however, evidence obtained from the W.P.A. and full-length narratives suggests that the slave family was flexible enough to absorb such pressures. It was relatively common for young slaves to be given to family members upon the marriage of an owner's son or daughter, or upon the death of an owner. Cheryll Ann Cody, for example, has noted how

> the dispersal of slave property came at two "transitions" in the life cycle of planter families, when children married and at death. Wealthy planters commonly presented large gifts of slaves and land at a child's marriage and additional legacies at death.[40]

Similarly, Jane Turner Censer, in her study of North Carolina planters in the antebellum period, shows that planters often made presents of slaves to newly-married children, both sons and daughters. Furthermore, she claims that this could considerably disrupt slave family and community ties. She writes:

> A wedding called for gifts to the new couple. Planters' presents of slaves to newly married children, especially those who lived elsewhere in North Carolina, or even outside the state, could wrench blacks from close relations and their kinship network. Even a planter who recognised a black's unwillingness to leave gave precedence to his own arrangements. [41]

Gifts of slaves and estate divisions between heirs made arbitrary disruptions to slave families, but the family network could usually survive. Most gifts to family

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[40] Cody, 'Sale and Separation', in Hudson, *Working Toward Freedom*, 120.

[41] Jane Turner Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press 1884), 138-139.

members on marriage were local in nature, since many white families tended to reside relatively near to each other. This meant that the giving away of slaves need not have impinged upon the slave family as much as long-distance sales, because the strength and resilience of slave families enabled them to cope with separations at the local level. In the South Carolina W.P.A. narratives, twenty respondents mentioned the giving away of slaves, compared to 67 respondents who mentioned slave sales. [42] Of these twenty respondents, ten said that they had been given to their master's daughter and five said that they had been given to their master's son. Five of these fifteen respondents also specified that they had been given to the son or daughter upon marriage.

Of course some slaves would undoubtedly have lost their links with their family members after being given away, especially if they were forced to move some distance. Others, however, would have been able to maintain their links with their families, especially when they resided within close proximity to their old owners. White familial ties would inevitably have facilitated contact between slave family members who were owned within the same extended white family. For example, the W.P.A. respondent Bill McNeil was given, along with his mother and brother, to his master's daughter on marriage. McNeil's father, however, got a pass so that , by visiting, he could keep the family together. [43] As was the case with local slave sales, then, the giving away of slaves need not have impinged too severely upon family life. The strength of the relationship between slave couples meant that even when these couples were forced into a cross-plantation marriage, or when a couple in a cross-plantation marriage had a partner move elsewhere after being given away (provided the distances involved were not too great), spousal and familial links could be maintained.

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[42] See earlier in this chapter for the full quantitative analysis on slave separations as obtained from the South Carolina W.P.A. narratives.

[43] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 3, 1-2.

Other respondents, too, since they expressed a familiarity with their surroundings, appear to have moved within the local area after being given away. Adeline Jackson, for example, said:

> When my younges' mistress, name Marion Rebecca, married her second cousin, marster Edward P. Mobely, I was give to her and went wid then to de June place. It was called dat because old Doctor June built it and sold it to Marster Ed.[44]

It would seem from her comments, then, that the 'June place' was not too far away from Jackson's previous residence. Some respondents, but probably a minority of those who were given away, would have lost all contact with their family. Henry Gladney, for example, stated: 'Little Marse John's mother was another daughter of old Marster John. Her name was Dorcas. They live in Florida. I was took 'way down dere, cried pow'ful to leave my mammy.'[45]

Estate divisions again followed the interests of white, and not black families. But, being divided among heirs often meant dispersal within the local area. Furthermore, as Michael Tadman noted (see earlier in this chapter), when an estate was sold or divided at the death of an owner, the lots in which slaves were divided tended to include slaves of all ages. As such, probate sales and non-sale divisions between heirs often enabled families to stay together.[46] Moses Roper, who was the son of 'young master' and a female slave, for example, wrote that when his 'old master' died:

> All his slaves had to be divided among the children. I have mentioned before of my father ['young master'] disposing of me. I am not sure whether he exchanged me and my mother for another slave or not, but I think it very likely he did exchange me with one [a slave] of his wife's brothers or sisters, because I remember when my mother's old master died, I was living with my father's

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[44] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 3, Part 3, 164.

[45] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 130.

[46] See Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 136.

> wife's brother-in-law, whose name was Mr. Durham. My mother was drawn with the other slaves. The way they divide their slaves is this: they write the names of different slaves on a small piece of paper, and put it into a box, and let them all draw. I think that Mr. Durham drew my mother, and Mr. Fowler drew me, so we were separated a considerable distance, I cannot say how far.[47]

Roper illustrates well the ties that bound the white slave-owning family together. For the slave community, too, these ties were important, since they often facilitated the maintenance of their own family and community ties. Frequent contact between whites would increase the opportunities for contact between blacks. Roper, however, was eventually to lose touch with his family when he was being sold to a trader and taken South.[48]

Key slaves and compassionate sales

The final part of this chapter will examine the forced separation of slaves from the perspective of slave owners. Separating slaves from their family members was undoubtedly cruel. Therefore, owners would have had to find a way of rationalizing these separations in order to maintain their ideology of benevolent paternalism. They achieved this aim by treating their slaves in different ways. By defining a minority of their slaves as 'key' slaves and exempting them from their buying and selling practices (unless such practices were of a 'compassionate' nature), slave owners maintained a belief in themselves as benevolent paternalists. [49]

Sometimes, then, owners favoured the sale of a particular slave, or particular slaves, believing that such sales were of a 'compassionate' nature. In particular, within

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47 Roper, *A Narrative*, 2-3.

48 Roper, *A Narrative*, 4.

49 For a fuller discussion of the key slave concept, see Tadman, 'Introduction' to *Speculators and Slaves*. Also Tadman, 'The Persistent Myth of Paternalism'.

the letters and diaries of slave owners, references can be found expressing the desire to improve the marital arrangements of their favoured slaves. For example, Lambert Jefferson Jones desired to keep the slaves Jim and Chaney together through sale. He stated:

> As to parting Jim and Chaney, I will relieve myself from any responsibility on this head by making you the following offer. I will either take one thousand dollars for Jim or I will give you for Chaney and Elizabeth what you was to give for them and Charlotte. In other words I will give you Charlotte who sold for $250 to keep your parting Jim and Chaney. [50]

It is likely that slaves were aware of the fact that if they were favoured by their owners, they had more of a chance of persuading them to buy their spouses. In the following case Stephen tried to persuade his owner, John Guignard, to buy his wife by describing her good household capabilities. Guignard wrote, in a letter to his father:

> Barber's Charlotte I found sick over at Davis's where she has been for a few days. I think her of little or no account in the field and would like to swap her for a better. (Perhaps you could trade her for Stephen's wife whom I have not seen, but Stephen describes her as a good cook and house wench). [51]

We can also see from this extract that whilst Stephen was a favoured slave, Charlotte most likely was not. She crops up again in the letters of Guignard, when he was still anxious to sell her. He wrote:

> Jack informs me that Mr. Faust's boy Daniel has asked his consent to be married to Judy which Jack withholds until he knows whether you intend to trade for Daniel. I think if it were merely to rid the plantation of Kate and

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[50] Letter to 'my dear cousins' from Lambert Jefferson Jones, 8 November 1849, Lambert Jefferson Jones Papers, S.C.L.

[51] Letter to James S. Guignard from John Guignard [son], 20 Oct 1828, Guignard Family Papers, S.C.L.

> Charlotte you would do well to get them off at any price. Perhaps Mr. Faust will take them both for Daniel. [52]

Owners therefore expressed concern for their more favoured slaves by involving such slaves and their families in 'compassionate' buying and selling practices. In the following letter to her husband, Elizabeth Franklin Perry expressed the desire for her mother to purchase the slave George. This slave appears to have belonged to Judge Earle, since Mrs. Perry was anxious that George and his wife would not be separated through long-distance sale. Perry wrote:

> Judge Earle, the morning he left, authorised Mr. Chase to give George a ticket to look out for an owner for himself at 300 dollars until Tuesday. Mamma is strongly inclined to purchase him and I have advised her to, but she does not like to take so important a step without consulting you....He [George] is very anxious Mamma should purchase him, he dislikes leaving Greenville and his wife....If Judge Earle has a kind heart he will certainly consent, [to mother purchasing George] if only on account of George's wife, but not being himself a husband perhaps he will have no sympathy on that point; but I usually think it is cruel to treat a man at George's time of life in this way, now that he is settled in Greenville and formed connections, he ought to be allowed to remain for the rest of his life, and not for a hundred dollars carried to a strange place, separated from his wife, and perhaps be unhappy for the rest of his existence.[53]

The following letter written by H.H. Townes also illustrates the belief on the part of owners that they were acting compassionately in desiring that their slaves be sold locally. Townes stated:

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[52] Letter to James S. Guignard from John Guignard [son], 13 May 1829, Guignard Family Papers, S.C.L.

[53] Letter to Benjamin Franklin Perry from Elizabeth Perry [wife], 27 November 1842, Benjamin Franklin Perry Papers, S.C.L.

> I would prefer that you sell Maisie to some good man in the district, Dr. Buller for instance...rather than...any other man who would take her off, or who lived at a distance from her family and relations. I am perfectly wiling to serve the cause of Humanity and of feeling. [54]

The following case is also interesting since Team (a slave) did not appear to appreciate the 'compassionate' nature of his owner (David Gavin). Team ran away despite the fact that he had been bought from Florida to be with his family. This made Gavin, his owner, angry, as is apparent from the tone of his comments in his diary. He stated: 'Returned home from Mrs. E. Moore's and found Mr. J. W. Clark, Mr. Rumph,and Mr. R. B. F. West here. They had been hunting Team who has been runaway now two weeks, but they did not find him.' [55] Later he wrote:

> Sent one letter to C. Gavin and one to Robert Austin Broker, Charleston, about buying my man Team, who has run away from me twice this last fall and winter after I sent to Florida and bought him to keep him with his wife, owning also his mother, brothers and sisters. I think the scoundrel has used me mean. [56]

How owners defined their slaves therefore influenced their buying and selling practices, with key slaves being most likely to reap the benefits of owners' paternalistic ideological framework. The slave Dinah, in contrast, was defined as promiscuous by her owners (the Harfords), which then 'justified' her separation from her husband. Maria Bryan Harford wrote:

> Mr. Bryan has always been determined to have Dinah, when he found out there was no longer any reason or excuse for detaining her, he sent her to Mr. Parker, who has written to me, as he says, at the request of Dinah to beg that

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[54] Letter to George F. Townes from H. H. Townes, 1 March 1832, Townes Family Papers, S.C.L.

[55] David Gavin, Diary, 3 December 1855, S.H.C.

[56] David Gavin, Diary, 14 March 1856, S.H.C.

she might be permitted to stay as she had married and did not like to leave her husband. Mr. Bryan I suppose thought this plea would be effectual...but Dinah has a husband every few months and I conceive it is far more for her good to bring her back than to leave her to the uncertainty she would always be in there from changing owners. [57]

Because Harford expressed the belief that Dinah was promiscuous, she therefore trivialised Dinah's marriage by not allowing her to remain with her husband. However, this did not prevent Harford from writing in another letter: 'Pa said that he dislikes selling his negroes out of the family.'[58] Paternalism existed in theory, if not in reality, for slave owners.

From an investigation into slave source materials, however, instances of 'compassionate' slave sales appear to be in a minority. The W.P.A. respondent Rebecca Jane Grant did tell her interviewer that

My mother and four of us children were sold to Mr. Robert Oswald in Beaufort....My father belong to Marse Tom Willingham; but my mother belong to another white man. Marse Tom was always trying to buy us so we could all be together, but de man wouldn't sell us to *him. Marse Tom was a Christian* gentleman. [59]

Similarly, Peter Clifton also mentioned how he had been bought, along with his mother and siblings, by 'Master Biggers'. He said: 'Then he turn 'round and buy my pappy dere, 'cause my mammy and sister Lizzie was cryin' 'bout him have to leave them.' [60] These examples, however, appear to have been the exception rather than the rule, and

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[57] Letter to Julia A. B. Cumming from Maria Bryan Harford, 1 May 1838, Hammond-Bryan-Cumming Family Papers, S.C.L.

[58] Letter to Julia A. B. Cumming from Maria Harford, 13 March 1842, Hammond-Bryan-Cumming Family Papers, S.C.L.

[59] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 178.

[60] Rawick, *The American Slave*, Vol. 2, Part 1. 206.

slave owners' buying and selling practices generally appear to have been motivated by self-interest.

Conclusions

The anguish of being forcibly separated from loved ones has been expressed by Charles Ball. Having escaped from the South, he arrived in Baltimore to find that his wife and children were not in their home. He later found out that they had all been taken by a slave trader. Ball wrote:

> This intelligence almost deprived me of life; it was the most dreadful of all the misfortunes that I had ever suffered. It was now clear that some slave-dealer had come in my absence and seized my wife and children as slaves, and sold them to such men as I had served in the South. They had now passed into hopeless bondage, and were gone forever beyond my reach. I myself was advertised as a fugitive slave, and was liable to be arrested at each moment, and dragged back to Georgia. I rushed out of my own house in despair, and returned to Pennsylvania with a broken heart. [61]

Despite the huge impact that anguish such as this must have had upon slaves, however, the positive accomplishments of the slave community in the face of forced separations cannot be overlooked. In particular, the decision taken by slaves to marry off their place of residence, and furthermore, to sustain these cross-plantation marriages despite the impact of forced separations, represents a significant achievement on the part of slave couples. The threat of forced separations that owners imposed upon their slaves also provided them with an incentive mentally to distance themselves from their owners and to strive for their own, autonomous community life.

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61 Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 430.

When assessing the impact of the forced separation of slaves upon slave community life, then, it is important to remember that the implications of such separations would vary depending on the geographical distance between the family members following the forced separation. If the newly separated slaves still all resided within the same geographical district, the strength of the ties between spouses (and the community at large) would mean that family members were still able to see each other. The family networks that existed across plantations, especially cross-plantation marriages, facilitated this contact. Whilst all slaves must have feared being forcibly separated from their families, these networks meant that such separations (especially when local in nature) generally had a lesser impact upon family and community ties than did long-distance sales.

Conclusions

This thesis has shown that members of the slave community desired a life that was independent of owners. Slaves therefore strove to distance themselves as much as possible from their owners by creating space between their own lives and the lives of their owners. In creating this space slaves enabled themselves to survive and to resist the oppression of slavery in various ways. Primarily, it was the strong, loving and affectionate relationships between slave couples that created both valuable cultural autonomy and systems of support in the face of adversity. We have seen how the majority of slaves wished to meet, court and marry a member of the opposite sex despite the imposition of rules and regulations upon courtship and marriage rituals by owners.

Whilst owners saw themselves as benevolent and paternalistic, in reality, the mass of slaves perceived their owners very differently. A gulf therefore existed between the world view of owners and their actual treatment of their slaves. Furthermore, it has been shown that this gulf was vital in allowing slaves to distance themselves from their owners. Owners' actions drove slave community activities underground, which then meant that slaves who liked to dance and flirt with those who belonged to another owner on a Saturday night, who celebrated the marriage of a young couple in love, who risked the wrath of owners and patrollers in visiting their wives and children, and who simply desired to live within a stable, loving, supportive partnership all displayed acts of community resistance to the attempts at control by owners.

In particular, the fact that South Carolina slave testimony shows strong slave attachment to cross-plantation marriages, highlights the immense desire on the part of slaves to live their lives according to their own cultural norms. The resilience and numerical importance of cross-plantation marriages shows that slaves strove to marry

someone of their own choosing and also that they were prepared to undergo great hardships in maintaining these marriages. This was particularly true for male slaves, who often took considerable risks visiting their wives, children and girlfriends. In evading the patrollers, then, slave husbands were likely to have been seen by their families as protectors. This contradicts the assertion that male slaves were emasculated by slavery.

Despite the existence of gender differences in their lives, then, male and female slaves went to great lengths in their desire to love, support and protect their spouses, their families, and their communities. Gender differences have been shown to be particularly pronounced in the realm of work. Evidence from owners' records has shown that owners would often segregate their slaves according to gender when assigning tasks. Slave source materials, however, suggest a high level of solidarity across the slave community as a whole, exemplified by the fact that an important minority of marriages brought field and house slaves together. Whilst female slaves were subjected to a 'triple burden' in having to work for their owners, work for their families, and carry most of the child-rearing responsibilities, male slaves also had their own familial duties and obligations. This meant that the work performed by slaves for their families was, by virtue of the strength of the relationships between slave spouses, a shared responsibility. This was especially true when families were able to work together as a unit, for example in tending their garden plots. The work lives of slaves, then, can be best characterised as different, but within a context of overall co-operation.

Differences in slave and white attitudes towards social status within the slave community have also been investigated. It was found that whites strove to rationalise slavery through their attitudes towards status and their 'key slaves'. Slaves themselves, on the other hand, awarded high status to those who contributed to the welfare of the slave community. Whilst the gendered nature of work impacted upon the chances of slave women being awarded a high status, some women, especially elderly midwives,

did play leading community roles. An investigation into the work lives of slaves has revealed, then, just how much child-bearing and rearing placed burdens on the lives of slave women and thus differentiated their lives from those of slave men.

The lives of slave men and women were further differentiated by the impact of sexual abuse upon slave women. It has been argued that levels of sexual abuse were quite high, especially of domestic slaves by masters. However, the strength of the relationships between slave men and women meant that most couples could survive this form of exploitation. Slave men tried to protect their women from potential abusers and provided love and comfort in the face of adversity. Another form of exploitation that slaves were subjected to was being forcibly separated from loved ones through sale or estate division. Forced separations, as slave testimony reveals, caused great anguish. Significantly, through, the system of cross-plantation marriages and familial networks, coupled with the strength of the relationships between slave spouses, meant that in cases of local sales, gifts of slaves and estate divisions (important areas that have not been sufficiently analysed by historians) the consequences of forced separations need not have been severe. Family members could often maintain contact with each other following local forced separations, albeit in an amended family form. Whilst it has been shown that all slaves feared being forcibly separated from their families, spousal and familial ties meant that separations that were local in nature generally had a lesser impact upon slave families and communities ties than did long-distance sales.

This thesis has emphasised resilience and autonomy on the part of male and female slaves in the face of adversity. Despite the exploitation of slaves by their owners through forced separations, sexual abuse or physical punishment, slaves strove to live their lives according to their own community norms, but within the context of these restraints imposed on their lives by owners. In particular, the relationships between slave spouses were vital for the existence of this desire for independence. Being a part of a loving, affectionate and supportive relationship, through being joined by marriage,

was desired by the great majority of slaves. Furthermore, the fact that most slaves managed to maintain their marriages despite interference in their lives by owners, represents an enormous achievement on the part of slave couples, especially those in cross-plantation marriages. Love and affection, despite exploitation, therefore characterises best the nature of slave community life in antebellum South Carolina.

Appendix One

The criteria used in the construction of a database on the comments of the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents

Preliminary Points

Respondent's name

Respondent's age

Date of interview

Respondent's age in 1865

Sex of respondent

Name of interviewer

Sex and race of interviewer

Location of respondent during slavery

Name of master

Name of mistress

Size of plantation or number of slaves owned

Family background of respondent

Name and race of father

Name and race of mother

Residence of father

Comments on father visiting

Names and number of siblings

Deaths of siblings under slavery

Knowledge of grandparents

Step-parents

African relations

Mulatto respondent or mulatto relations

Work patterns during slavery

Occupation of respondent as a child and adult during slavery

Age at which work began as a child and adult

Occupation of father and mother

Comments on hiring out

Child bearing and rearing

Treatment of pregnant women

Childbirth procedures or length of time off work

Childcare provision

Family structure and comments on family life

Comments on courtship rituals

Respondent married pre-war or post-war

How long was respondent married?

Location of spouse of respondent during slavery

Number of times married

Number of children

Theft or hunting to support family

Work for family after 'sundown' of respondent

Work for family after 'sundown' of other slaves -- garden or housework

Realms of exploitation and relations with owners

Comments on master

Comments on mistress

Sale of family member mentioned

Sale of other slaves mentioned

Comments on runaways

Punishment incidents of respondent

Punishment incidents of family or other slaves

Implementer of punishment

Reason for punishment

Comments on rape or sexual problems

General comments on slavery

Community life

Comments on female networks

Comments on friendship

Comments on free time - social Life

Comments on free time - producing goods

Comments on witch doctors or conjurers

Mentioning of strong female characters

Comments on religion

Comments on education

Appendix Two

The occupations of the South Carolina W.P.A. respondents and their parents

Table 1:

The Occupations of the South Carolina W.P.A. Respondents during Slavery

	A	B	C
	TOTAL	MALES	FEMALES
House or skilled work:	72 (49.3%)	26 (33.3%)	46(67.6%)
General servants:	51 (34.9%)	19 (24.4%)	32(47.1%)
Minding children:	15 (10.3%)	2 (2.5%)	13(19.1%)
Bodyguards:	2 (1.4%)	2 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)
Carriage drivers:	2 (1.4%)	2 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)
Carpenters:	1 (0.7%)	1 (1.3%)	0 (0.0%)
Midwives:	1 (0.7%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.5%)
Fieldwork:	50 (34.2%)	36 (46.2%)	14(20.6%)
Field hands:	35 (23.9%)	23 (29.5%)	12(17.6%)
Minding animals:	9 (6.2%)	8 (10.3%)	1 (1.5%)
Fetching water or wood:	3 (2.0%)	3 (3.8%)	0 (0.0%)
Scaring birds:	2 (1.4%)	1 (1.3%)	1 (1.5%)
Construction workers:	1 (0.7%)	1 (1.3%)	0 (0.0%)
No work	24 (16.4%)	16 (20.5%)	8 (11.8%)

Source and note: Rawick, *The American Slave.*

Percentages in column A are for the 146 respondents who commented on their occupation during slavery; percentages in column B are for the 78 males who commented on their occupation during slavery; and percentages in column C are for the 68 females who commented on their occupation during slavery.

Table 2:

The Occupations of the Fathers of the South Carolina W.P.A. Respondents

Occupation of Father:	Totals
House or Skilled jobs:	29 (78.4%)
Drivers:	5 (13.5%)
Blacksmiths:	4 (10.8%)
Coachmen/ Carriage drivers:	4 (10.8%)
Foremen:	4 (10.8%)
General servants:	4 (10.8%)
Carpenters:	3 (8.1%)
Headmen:	2 (5.4%)
Makers of leather goods:	2 (5.4%)
Overseers:	1 (2.7%)
Field jobs:	8 (21.6%)
Field hands:	6 (16.2%)
Minding animals:	2 (5.4%)
TOTALS:	37 (100%)

Source: Rawick, *The American Slave.*

Table 3:

The Occupations of the Mothers of the South Carolina W.P.A. Respondents

Occupation of Mother:	Totals
House or Skilled jobs:	40 (58.8%)
Cooks:	18 (26.5%)
General servants:	15 (22.1%)
Seamstresses:	4 (5.9%)
Midwives/ nurses:	2 (2.9%)
Laundresses:	1 (1.1%)
Field jobs:	28 (41.2%)
Field hands:	17 (25.0%)
Spinners:	9 (13.2%)
Minding animals:	2 (2.9%)
TOTALS:	68 (100%)

Source: Rawick, *The American Slave*.

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