Exploitation Unveiled: The Sexual Exploitation of Enslaved African American Women in the Upper South in Nineteenth-Century America

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Celia threw Robert's body in the fireplace after she knew he was dead. She had rejected his advances countless times, but this time she would win. Celia told him not to come to her cabin that night. She warned him, but he ignored her as always. Once Celia burned his body, leaving only bones, she placed his bones under the floorboards of her cabin and sprinkled his ashes around the plantation.[1] Celia, along with many other enslaved African American women, experienced sexual abuse at the hands of their masters, and her story represents the horrors enslaved women faced daily. After the abolishment of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in 1808, the white men in power focused on what the enslaved women in the country could provide for their owners and the economy. Enslaved African American women were vital to sustaining slavery in the United States, especially in the Upper South. Places of violence contributed to the direct sexual exploitation of enslaved African American women and allowed for the creation of designated spaces for sexual abuse where ideological falsities remained present.

Historians have written about the sexual exploitation of enslaved African American women in different capacities. There is a strong focus on a shared universal experience, but some historians focus on specific histories and experiences of enslaved women. Deidre Cooper Owens concentrates on the medical history of gynecology in her book *Medical Bondage: Race, Gender, and the Origins of Gynecology*. Owens argues that doctors viewed enslaved women as

disposable bodies to use for both personal and professional gain.[2] On the other hand, Wilma King's article, "'Prematurely Knowing of Evil Things': The Sexual Abuse of African American Girls and Young Women in Slavery and Freedom," explores the sexual abuse enslaved girls and women experienced and how that violence is rooted in the evolution of slavery.[3] Another article written by King, "'Mad' Enough to Kill: Enslaved Women, Murder, and Southern Courts," follows the legal history of enslaved women and the factors that led to specific trials and outcomes.[4] These authors discuss the topic of sexual exploitation and how it affected the lives of enslaved women. This essay addresses the sexual exploitation of enslaved African American women and how sexual abuse depended on ideological falsities, legal control over the enslaved, and spatial violence. These dependencies highlight the dehumanization of enslaved African American women and Black bodies.

I. Enslaved Women and Ideological Falsities

Prior to the nineteenth century, the Transatlantic Slave Trade flourished and brought new shipments of enslaved persons from Africa to the New World for nearly four centuries. Slave catchers took Africans from their home countries against their will and forced highly vulnerable African men, women, and children onto slave cargo ships. Slave catchers forced newly enslaved Africans onto ships with skewed sex ratios and left enslaved African women at the mercy of both free and enslaved men, where they rarely retained any autonomy.[5]

Records conclude that nearly eleven million Africans survived the arduous journey of the Middle Passage and arrived in the New World. As slavery expanded in the New World, enslaved men and women experienced generations of dehumanization and abuse from white Americans. The abolishment of the Transatlantic Slave Trade occurred in 1808 and placed a focus on the enslaved population already in the country. White people sexually exploited and abused enslaved women to sustain slavery within the United States. Slave owners of the Upper South forced enslaved women into violent situations where punishment came often and almost always benefitted the owner. These slave owners and other white Americans physically and sexually abused enslaved women in almost all the spaces they occupied.

Ideological falsities are ideological beliefs that rely on false understandings such as those about enslaved women. Ideological falsities relating to enslaved women shaped the views of white people in the nineteenth-century United States, and they justified their actions toward enslaved persons based on these ideological falsities. Enslaved women experienced gruesome abuse by white individuals who viewed these ideologies as true. The most prominent ideological falsities that shaped the lives of enslaved women were hypersexuality, pain tolerance, and idea of property.

Legislation regarding the status of enslaved persons gives insight into the centuries-long narrative and ideology that declared enslaved persons as property. Owners regarded enslaved persons as chattel and preserved their enslaved status through their mother's status, establishing a multi-generational heritage. Laws and political statements argued the importance of generational slave status and its importance to the country. The leaders of America solidified this ideological falsity for centuries to sustain their economy and wealth. Enslaved women were the targets of laws and political statements as they were essential to keeping the economy and slavery alive, allowing the ideology of property to be rooted in legislation.

In late seventeenth-century Virginia, new laws came out every decade concerning enslaved persons and slavery; there were often multiple new laws within one decade. The Virginia law of 1662 was a predecessor to most laws regarding slavery, and it determined the outcome of children's lives. The law states that a mother's status determines her child's future. If a mother were a free woman, she would birth a free child; if a mother were an enslaved woman, she would birth an enslaved child:

> Whereas some doubts have arisen whether children got by any Englishman upon a Negro woman should be a slave or free, be therefore enacted and declared by this present Grand Assembly, that all children born in this country shall be held in bond or free only according to the condition of the mother.[6]

The father of the child had no relevance to the child's status as enslaved or free. This law created a vicious cycle of generational slave status and established the ideology of property as preeminent in the slave economy.

Politician James H. Gholson gave a speech to the House of Delegates on January 12, 1832. Gholson's speech provides evidence of the ideology that enslaved persons are property and enslaved women are essential to the economy:

> It has always (perhaps seriously) been considered by that steady and old-fashioned people, that the owner of the land had a reasonable right to its annual profits; the owner of orchards, to their annual fruits; the owner of brood mares, to their product; and the owner of female slaves, to the increase… It is on the justice and inviolability of the maxim, that master forgoes the service of the female slaves; has her nursed and attended during the period of her gestation and raises the helpless infant offspring. The value of the property justifies the expenses; and I do not hesitate to say, that its increase consists much of our wealth.[7]

Gholson's speech emphasizes the concept that enslaved persons were property by using the analogy of an orchard and its owner keeping the harvest. Similarly, Gholson dehumanizes enslaved women's children as products. Concerning enslaved women's children, Gholson states the owner should take care of and aid pregnant enslaved women regardless of the cost, as the enslaved child born will be invaluable. Gholson acknowledges the importance of enslaved women's children as they made up most of the wealth in the country. This politician's statement solidifies the importance placed on maintaining the generational slave status and that the ideology of property, not people, was fundamental to legislature.

Furthermore, in nineteenth-century Mississippi, legislation did not consider the rape of an enslaved woman illegal. Unfortunately, this was also the case for young, enslaved girls. A trial in 1859 regarding the rape of an enslaved girl, George v. State, brought attention to the legality of the rape of enslaved girls; the trial concluded that the rape of an enslaved girl under the age of ten was not illegal because enslaved persons were property and had no rights.[8] The ideology held by white Americans that enslaved persons were property, not people, is evident in the conclusion of this trial. The only victims of rape that mattered to the legal system were white women. Enslaved women and children had no protection when it came to the courtroom, nor would they get the justice they deserved.

The legislation founded by the leaders of the country fueled the notion that enslaved persons had no protection in the legal system. Laws from Virginia and Mississippi show the lack of protection and justice for enslaved persons by subjecting children to a life of slavery based on their mother's status and the legality of raping enslaved girls. The political speech from Gholson acknowledges that masters had a right to enslaved children born on their plantations and that the inherited generational slave status sustained the wealth of the economy. The ideology of property, not people, created a foundation for legislature and the treatment of enslaved persons.

The supposed hypersexuality of enslaved women was an ideology that focused on the perceived sexual urges and overtly sexual nature of enslaved women. This ideology originated when Europeans first visited Africa. Europeans observed African women wearing minimal clothing and viewed this as an invitation for sexual advances. Although Europeans scrutinized the way Africans appeared and dressed, they still engaged in sexual relationships with them.[9] The ideology of hypersexual enslaved women present in the minds of early Europeans extended into the minds of white individuals in nineteenth-century America.

Many visuals form the antebellum era, mainly photographs or illustrations, depict enslaved women wearing limited clothing. The lack of clothing created a heightened sense of vulnerability and allowed the ideology of hypersexuality to flourish in the minds of white communities. The exposed genitals of enslaved men, women, and children created a sense of vulnerability and exposure. Enslaved people were not underclad by choice; it was all their owners gave them. The exposure of enslaved persons did not only occur on the plantation but also at slave markets. Potential owners often groped and violated naked enslaved persons who were for sale. For both enslaved men and women, their bodies and abilities dictated their worth.[10]

As enslaved persons were often seen with little to no clothing, some white individuals created objects for their own amusement that highlighted the ideology of hypersexuality. "Jezebels" are objects that prominently feature the ideology of hypersexuality. Certain white people deemed younger enslaved women they categorized as promiscuous and overtly sexual to be "Jezebels."[11] White individuals

created figurines to represent the derogatory name and image; they used "Jezebel" figurines for amusement, decoration, and as boot spurs. The figurines had extremely dark-colored skin and abnormally large breasts and hips; the figurines were often in compromising or sexual positions (see figure 1). "Jezebel" figurines exemplify the white view of enslaved women as overtly sexual. This view relied on the lack of clothing worn and left enslaved women with little bodily autonomy. Such exposure prompted unwanted sexual advances.

Pain tolerance related to slavery and enslaved women culminated in the ideology that enslaved women felt little to no pain. As with the ideology of hypersexuality, the ideology of pain tolerance emerged when Europeans first visited Africa. Europeans and white settlers noted the ability of African women to complete hard agricultural labor daily as well as shortly after giving birth. African women typically specialized in agricultural labor, which white settlers exploited when they returned to the New World.[12] Similarly, the skewed relationships between doctors and their enslaved patients highlight the ideology of pain tolerance; because of this ideology, doctors exploited the notion that enslaved women felt little to no pain and conducted experimental surgeries and tests on them.[13]

Plantation owners exploited the ideology of pain tolerance by asserting authority over the roles enslaved women completed. Unlike enslaved men, plantation owners confined enslaved women to specific roles that lacked mobility. Enslaved men often completed specialized tasks that involved operating heavy machinery and taking care of livestock, while enslaved women primarily completed fieldwork and acted as midwives, wet nurses, and caregivers to children and adults.[14] Owners acted upon the ideology of pain tolerance by confining enslaved women to strenuous labor, often without breaks or medical aid. Frances Ann Kemble, in her *Journal of a Residence of a Georgian Plantation 1838-1839*, recognized the labor and pain of enslaved women but also the decision to ignore it:

> She held my hands and stroked them in the most appealing way, while she exclaimed 'Oh my misses! my misses! Me neber sleep till day for de pain', and with the day her labor must be resumed. I gave her flannel and sal volatile [a chemical compound used to restore consciousness after fainting] to rub her poor swelled

limbs with; rest I could not give her—rest from her labor and pain—this mother of fifteen children.[15]

Plantation owners' exploitation of enslaved women paralleled with medical professionals' sexual exploitation of enslaved women. Medical professionals exploited the pain tolerance of enslaved women and forced them to be test subjects at their disposal. Doctors considered enslaved women to be stronger and able to handle pain more effectively than white women, which meant, most times, enslaved women underwent surgeries with no pain relief, during or after.[16] Doctors often performed the same surgeries multiple times on enslaved women without providing knowledge of the treatment or outcome. Doctors viewed enslaved women's bodies as disposable and used them for personal and professional gain, while these women suffered and died.

II. Enslaved Women in the Courts

Spaces of violence are places where white individuals asserted authority over enslaved women, specifically through sexual exploitation. The sexual exploitation of enslaved African American women relied on designated spaces where enslaved women existed and experienced violence. Ideological falsities presented themselves through the actions of white Americans in the spaces where they enacted sexual violence. The legal system, plantation owners, and doctors used designated spaces to violate and harm enslaved women. These specific spaces of violence include the courtroom, the plantation, and the doctor's quarters.

In the courtroom, enslaved persons had no legal protection regardless of their gender or age. Enslaved persons, who faced illegal practices at the hands of their owners, often had their cases dismissed and their concerns ignored. Legislation legally declared enslaved persons as property and targeted enslaved African American women. Enslaved African American women occupied a space of violence when in the courtroom that often resulted in punishment rather than justice. The lack of protection offered to enslaved women emphasized the ideology of property, not people, in the courtroom. The courtroom was a place enslaved women occupied under extreme circumstances and where legislation controlled them and their bodies; cases related to sexual exploitation punished enslaved women regardless of their owners' actions. In the courtroom, the legal

system viewed and treated enslaved women as disposable bodies that deserved punishment.

The case of Nelly, an enslaved woman, began in 1845 when she lived on a plantation owned by Henry Edwards in Warren County, Missouri. The first record of Nelly was on September 16, 1845, while records noted Edwards passed away a few months prior. On September 16, 1845, a request to search for a missing infant was issued. Dr. Henry C. Wright began the search and received information about a mother murdering her infant. Wright and officials located the fourteen-year-old Nelly and proved her to be the mother of the missing infant. Officials discovered the infant died right after birth. Although the father was unnamed, it was likely Edwards. After the discovery, officials convicted Nelly and tried her for the murder of the dead infant.[17]

During the time of Nelly's trial, medical professionals knew little about the postpartum effects birth could have on women. The trial showed that Nelly was likely not in her right mind after giving birth and experiencing extreme psychological distress; records note that when Nelly spoke of what happened, she often seemed detached from the baby and her memory itself. There are many possibilities as to why Nelly murdered her baby, such as resenting the idea that Edwards was the father or as an act of resistance. However, Nelly likely experienced postpartum psychosis or depression. During her trial, Nelly's defense relied on a claim of insanity due to this psychosis.[18]

Nelly escaped a death sentence, and her claim of insanity proved beneficial for her case, but she was likely still undergoing psychological distress. When Nelly's trial concluded, the court sentenced her to banishment from the town and sold her to another plantation. Nelly received no medical assistance after the birth and death of her baby or during the court trial.[19]

Though Nelly did not receive a death sentence, the outcome of her trial represents the lack of protection for enslaved women in the courtroom. Enslaved women who occupied the courtroom experienced violence before entering and while physically there. The legal system offered enslaved women no protection during cases of sexual exploitation, which was almost certainly the case for Nelly, and punished enslaved women and their bodies. Nelly likely became pregnant by her owner at only fourteen years old and had no support

system. The aftermath of birthing a child to an owner was different for every enslaved woman, but Nelly's case represents the emotional turmoil enslaved women experienced in these situations. The mindsets and actions of white individuals represent the ideology that enslaved persons were property, not people. The outcome of Nelly's trial heightened the maltreatment Nelly received, as the community viewed her as a disposable body that they could banish and move away.

Reflecting a similar situation, an enslaved woman named Margaret Garner, who passed away in 1858, murdered two of her four children to spare them from a life of slavery. An engraving titled *The Modern Medea* by Thomas Satterwhite Nobel depicts the moment after Margaret murdered her children and four members of the white community then found her (see figure 2).[20] The engraving illustrates two of Margaret's children lying on the floor dead while the other two cling to her dress. The emotions on Margaret's face depict a look of exclamation, almost blaming the men for what they made her do. The men in the engraving stand back, bewildered by the scene before them. The engraving of Margaret represents the difficulties enslaved women experienced and the type of life their children were subjected to. Margaret attempted to spare her children from slavery by murdering them. The legal control over enslaved women is evident through the actions Margaret took to spare her children.

Akin to Nelly's case, the case of an enslaved woman named Celia began in 1855. Residing on a Missouri farm, Robert Newsom owned 1,800 acres of land, various livestock, and several slaves. Newsom purchased Celia when she was fourteen years old, and she gave birth to her first child to Newsom within a year of living on his farm. Four years after her arrival on Newsom's farm in 1850, Celia gave birth to two more children, both fathered by Newsom.[21] During her time on the plantation, Newsom often sexually exploited Celia and stayed in her cabin, though it is likely she resisted.

Newsom committed acts of sexual violence against Celia for years for his pleasure and benefit. Newsom and his family ignored Celia's pleas for him to stop, and at one point, she begged Newsom's daughters to stop their father from forcing himself on her. As Newsom disregarded Celia's resistance, Celia's anger amplified. On the night of his death, Celia told Newsom that if he came to her cabin that night, she would hurt him. Newsom ignored Celia's warning and

went to her cabin to have intercourse with her. Before Newsom came to the cabin, Celia found a stick and placed it in her room in preparation for Newsom's arrival. When Newsom arrived and advanced toward Celia, she grabbed the stick and began to beat him. When Celia was positive Newsom was dead, she discarded his body into the fireplace. Throughout the night, Celia waited for Newsom's body to burn until only his bones and ashes remained. Then, she gathered the bones from the fireplace and placed them under the floorboards of her cabin.[22] Celia scattered the ashes throughout the plantation but adamantly denied having help, even though officials speculated Celia enlisted the help of Newsom's grandson, Coffee Waynescot. When Newsom's daughters grew worried about his whereabouts, they enlisted the help of a search party that narrowed Celia down as the murderer.[23]

In the courtroom, Celia fell victim to the ideology that legally deemed her as property. When Celia's trial began, the court appointed John Jameson to her case and later appointed Isaac Boulware and Nathan Kouns.[24] Even though the court appointed Celia three lawyers, her death sentence was sealed before the trial even started. The judge, William Hall, appointed Celia's three lawyers for specific reasons: the community knew Jameson for his lack of involvement in slavery debates despite owning slaves, and Boulware and Kouns were young with little experience as lawyers. Although Celia had a team of lawyers, they could do little to aid in her defense. The hand-selected jury of married white men with children, ages thirty-four to seventy-five, did not feel any sympathy for Celia. In the end, the court sentenced Celia to death, and she passed away at only nineteen years old on December 21, 1855, at 2:30 p.m.[25]

The trial of Celia represents the connection between ideological falsities and spaces of violence. Celia occupied the space of the courtroom that offered enslaved women little to no protection and emphasized the ideology of property through legislation. Celia was fortunate to be appointed lawyers and have a trial, but the outcome of Celia's trial was evident before it began. The judge of Celia's trial appointed three lawyers solely for their lack of involvement in slavery debates and their lack of experience. The hand-selected jury for Celia's trial ensured she would receive no sympathy nor a sentence less than death. Because of the nature of Celia's case, her life sat in the hands of white men and their

ideological falsities which dictated Celia as less than a person; she was property who had no legal rights.

Enslaved women like Nelly and Celia represent the control of enslaved persons by the legal system and the connection of ideological falsities and spatial violence. The legal system treated enslaved women as property and disposable bodies. Nelly and Celia's cases represent the ideology of enslaved women as property, not people, and how the space they occupied dictated the outcomes of their trials. In Nelly's case, the court banished her from town and sold her to another plantation. The court sentenced Celia to death for defending herself. While Nelly and Celia had legal teams to aid them, there was little protection or justice for them and many others in the courtroom.

Young, enslaved girls were often the most vulnerable individuals on plantations and in the courtroom. On plantations, pedophiles targeted enslaved girls and subjected them to extreme sexual abuse and trauma. Enslaved girls not only lacked protection on the plantation but also in the courtroom. Pedophiles were not uncommon in enslaved communities, and they often targeted young, enslaved girls. Betty Gordon, a six-year-old enslaved girl on a plantation in Virginia, had a relationship with an enslaved man nicknamed "Uncle Ned." In 1859, Ned continuously lured Betty away from the protection of her family and peers and raped her on multiple occasions. Ned warned Betty if she told anybody of what happened, he would cut her head off, bury her, and let the worms eat her. While the events were highly traumatic for Betty, she was fortunate that another girl had been with her, Eunice Thompson. Eunice Thompson was a nine-year-old white girl who lived on the same plantation, whom Ned also raped on multiple occasions, sometimes alone and sometimes with Betty.

When the accusations against Ned came out, Betty and Eunice attended court together and supported each other's statements. The trial did not advance without complications. As Betty was an enslaved girl, it was not considered illegal for Ned to rape her. Ultimately, Betty's testimony was of little worth besides helping to support Eunice's. In the end, the trial advanced because Eunice was white and experienced abuse from an enslaved man. Ned was hanged on August 5, 1859, sparing the girls and any more children from harm.[26]

The age of consent is crucial to note in nineteenth-century America, as it prevented many enslaved women and girls from getting the justice they deserved. Although many states had an age of consent, it often did not matter as those in power viewed enslaved women and girls as both property and overtly sexual. The legal system did not consider the rape of enslaved girls and women illegal nor the age of consent important. During the nineteenth century, the age of consent for enslaved girls in most states was twelve years old, but there were four states where the age of consent was ten. The youngest age of consent for enslaved girls was in Delaware, at only seven years old.[27]

The legal system offered no protection to young, enslaved girls from the predators they encountered on plantations. Victims of abuse, like Betty Gordon, were fortunate if authorities held their abusers accountable in any way. Though it was an unfortunate situation, Betty was lucky Eunice had been with her. Without Eunice, it is doubtful Betty's accusation and testimony would have led to Ned's conviction. Additionally, Betty, being only six, was likely below the age of consent for enslaved girls in her state. When enslaved girls occupied the courtroom for cases of sexual exploitation, the legal system explicitly exemplified the ideologies of property and hypersexuality. The ideology of property dictated that enslaved girls had no right to their bodies, regardless of the situation. The ideology of hypersexuality contributed to the low age of consent for enslaved girls and the mishandling of cases of sexual exploitation.

In the courtroom, enslaved women encountered a space of violence that drastically shaped their lives. Enslaved women on trial received sentences that caused them suffering or death and were offered no aid or justice in the process. Predetermined laws and the age of consent rarely put an end to the abuse of enslaved girls. The legal system operated on the ideologies of property and hypersexuality, especially in the courtroom. Members of the white people in power abused authority while in the courtroom and felt little sympathy for enslaved women and children and the experiences they endured.

III. Reproductive Labor and Resistance on the Plantation

Laws enacted before the nineteenth century declared enslaved persons as property and not people; the ideological falsity of property

in regard to the treatment of African Americans continued well into the nineteenth century and even after the abolishment of slavery. After the abolishment of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in 1808, the ideology of property heightened within the minds of white Americans. On the plantation, owners sexually exploited enslaved African American women through the act of reproductive labor, while enslaved women found unique ways to resist. Plantation owners who acknowledged enslaved women for their fecundity referred to them as "brood mares." Some enslaved women categorized as "brood mares" birthed up to twenty children in their lifetime. John Smith, interviewed by the Works Progress Association, recalled an enslaved woman named Long Peggy. Smith recalled that the owners valued Long Peggy for her fertility and freed her after she gave birth to twenty-five children on the plantation.[28] Long Peggy's owners deemed her a "brood mare" and forced her to have intercourse with enslaved men on the plantation and birth their children. Plantation owners often paired enslaved men and women together, forcing them to establish intimate relationships.[29] Plantation owners often expected there to be resistance from both parties forced into intimate relationships; owners often threatened punishment and acted upon it to eliminate resistance.[30]

As a result of forced reproduction, enslaved women needed practical ways to resist the sexual advances and abuse from people on the plantation. Enslaved women often found and used natural remedies to act as birth control and tracked their menstrual cycles accordingly.[31] Some enslaved women, such as Harriet A. Jacobs, found other means of resistance. In her autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Jacobs tells the story of her relationship with Dr. Flint and how she escaped his sexual advances. Dr. Flint began making advances toward Jacobs when she was only fifteen years old. Flint shared his intentions of giving Jacobs a house, secluded from everyone, and "making a woman of her." Though Flint had a wife who was jealous of Jacobs, it did not stop his advances. To protect herself, Jacobs became pregnant by Mr. Sands, a single white man who was a lawyer. By becoming pregnant with another man's child, Jacobs believed that the advances and abuse from Flint would lessen.[32] Jacobs' story sheds light on the lengths that enslaved women went to in an effort to resist unwanted sexual advances.

For enslaved women, punishment varied but ultimately led to humiliation. Owners and overseers stripped enslaved persons and physically abused them in front of their peers or in private, and in some cases, raped them.[33] Though many enslaved women and persons wanted to resist, and maintain their autonomy, the threat of punishment was often intimidating enough. The illustration by George Bourne, *Torturing American Citizens*, in his book *Picture of Slavery in the United States of America*, exemplifies the vulnerability and exposure enslaved persons experienced when punished by their masters (see figure 3). Bourne was an abolitionist whose book was considered incredibly radical at the time, even among other abolitionists. In his book, Bourne called attention to the Declaration of Independence and the Church while criticizing slaveholders for their wrongdoings; Bourne not only referred to enslaved African Americans as "fellow citizens" but also called for immediate emancipation.[34] In his illustration, *Torturing American Citizen*s, Bourne depicts an enslaved man naked and tied to a tree while his master whips him.[35] The title of the graphic illustration connects to Bourne's abolitionist beliefs and creates a sense of equality among enslaved persons and readers.

Similarly, an illustration from Henry Bibb's autobiography, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave*, portrays the public and private abuse of enslaved women. Henry Bibb was born to a state senator and an enslaved woman from whom he inherited his slave status. Upon escaping slavery, Bibb became a well-known abolitionist who advocated for emancipation. Bibb's illustration provides a powerful image to align with the stories told in his autobiography (see figure 4). On the left side of the illustration, a white man whips a topless enslaved woman against a tree as Bibb watches. On the right side, a plantation mistress beats an enslaved woman with a broom as she falls onto a bed behind her. In relation to this illustration, Bibb notes that the plantation owner forced him to rub the enslaved woman's back with salts after she received 200 lashes, as depicted in the image.[36] The connection between the private and public abuse of enslaved women is highlighted as one enslaved woman is exposed and whipped outside in front of Bibb, while the other is clothed and privately beaten inside. Bibb models the vulnerability and solitude of the enslaved women in the illustration when recalling his early years:

> But here, in light of these truths, I was a slave, a prisoner for life; I could possess nothing, nor acquire anything but what must belong to my keeper. No one can imagine my feelings in my reflecting moments, but he who has himself been a slave. Oh! I have often wept over my condition, while sauntering through the forest, to escape cruel punishment.
>
> "No arm to protect me from tyrants aggression;
> No parents to cheer me when laden with grief.
> Man may picture the bands of the rocks and rivers,
> The hills and the valleys, the lakes and the ocean,
> But the horrors of slavery, he can never trace."[37]

Bibb not only models the feelings of vulnerability and solitude but also exemplifies the legal control over enslaved people when stating his lack of possessions, as he, too, belonged to his master. The feeling of solitude Bibb experienced could only be understood by those who had been enslaved themselves. Bibb experienced vulnerability when he had no one to protect him or help in situations of danger or emotional turmoil. The quote and illustration from Bibb powerfully demonstrate the punishment enacted by plantation owners and the ideology of property that fueled these acts of punishment.

Enslaved women occupied various spaces on plantations and experienced abuse from multiple individuals, including masters, doctors, and plantation mistresses. Reproductive labor dehumanized enslaved men and women alike but specifically categorized some enslaved women as "brood mares." The actions of owners highlight the ideologies of hypersexuality and property as they targeted enslaved women for their fecundity and perceived hypersexuality. Enslaved women needed ways to resist sexual exploitation and often found unconventional ways to escape abuse, forced exposure, and punishment. White individuals asserted authority over enslaved persons on the plantation and forced them into highly vulnerable positions and locations that repeatedly resulted in harm.

Reproductive labor was a prominent form of sexual exploitation on most plantations, and some masters designated specific spaces to force enslaved persons into intimate relationships. Plantation owners frequently facilitated intimate relationships between enslaved persons and coerced them to have intercourse and give birth to children. Several owners, or masters, designated barns

for prostitution or group sexual activities where they forced enslaved women to remain and become victims of rape and sexual exploitation.[38] Enslaved women suffered in these spaces of violence while their owners profited.

Some plantation wives or mistresses kept "Negro lodges" and chose a group of enslaved workers to remain there. Male owners were not the only ones who punished enslaved persons on plantations. An illustration created by George Bourne, *Ladies Whipping Girls*, depicts a plantation mistress punishing an enslaved woman (see figure 5). The illustration displays the enslaved woman tied to a fence post as the plantation mistress arches her arm back to whip her.[39] Bourne's illustration provides crucial evidence that plantation mistresses were not blind to abuse and punishment but instead enacted it themselves. In Negro lodges, plantation mistresses prostituted and punished enslaved women for their benefit while the enslaved women suffered. The women kept in lodges were often victims of rape at the hands of predominantly white men. Rachel A. Feinstein's book, *When Rape was Legal: The Untold History of Sexual Violence During Slavery*, notes that a significant portion of southern white men lost their virginity to enslaved women at Negro lodges or brothels. Most doctors and fathers viewed a man losing his virginity as an important action in his life and urged younger men to visit brothels to gain experience.[40] Additionally, Feinstein comments:

> Moreover, light-skinned black women could be fetishized as exotic. Their rare beauty offered an excuse for white men's sexual appetites and subsequent sexual violence. By preferring light-skinned black women, white men did not need to disrupt their white racial framing of blacks in order to continue their routine sexual violence against enslaved black women.[41]

Feinstein argues that many white men visited brothels, leading to deeply harmful ideologies. This ideology allowed white men to view it as their lawful right to engage in forced sexual relationships with enslaved women. White men viewed it as acceptable to engage in sexual relationships with enslaved women at brothels because the ideology of property modeled the legal declaration of enslaved persons as property. White men's views toward enslaved women and their actions in attending Negro lodges also modeled the principal beliefs of the ideology of hypersexuality. Similarly, the flawed

ideology allowed white men to consider an enslaved woman "white enough" to have intercourse with if she was light-skinned. This disconnected ideological falsity inappropriately enabled the acceptance of sexual exploitation and violation of enslaved African American women in Negro lodges.

In addition, to facilitate intimate relationships between enslaved persons, masters established designated spaces for intercourse, in the hope of gaining children who would become property. To facilitate intimate relationships, masters occasionally dedicated nights to group sexual activities. At times, masters participated in these group sexual activities with enslaved persons and invited other white community members.[42] This strategy of promoting relationships created an extreme sense of vulnerability for all enslaved persons involved. Plantation owners forced enslaved persons to occupy a space that resulted in sexual exploitation, extreme vulnerability, and suffering. Masters eliminated enslaved people's bodily autonomy in spaces rooted in violence that allowed for ideological falsities, including those of property and hypersexuality, to flourish in white minds and allow for the assertion of authority over enslaved persons.

By designating spaces for intercourse, plantation owners forced enslaved women and persons into intimate relationships. On some plantations, plantation mistresses established Negro lodges to prostitute enslaved women kept there against their will. Spaces designated for the sexual exploitation of enslaved women paralleled the ideologies of hypersexuality and property. Plantation owners designated spaces and nights for group sexual activities and forced enslaved persons to participate. In designated spaces for intercourse and violence, owners eliminated the bodily autonomy of enslaved women and subjected them to sexual exploitation and violence. Thus, slaveowners acted upon the ideologies of hypersexuality and property to establish spaces of violence on the plantation from which they profited.

IV. In the Doctor's Quarters

In the doctor's quarters, enslaved African American women experienced sexual violence at the hands of their doctors. In addition, the medical history of gynecology was a form of sexual exploitation enslaved women experienced. Gynecology was a quickly advancing

field in other countries, and American gynecologists and physicians were eager to catch up. As a result, doctors needed women's bodies to study and experiment on; they regarded enslaved women's bodies as necessary to further the study of gynecology, both alive and post-mortem. Gynecologists viewed enslaved African American women as test subjects and as disposable bodies to use for their professional and personal gain. Early gynecologists of the United States deprived enslaved women of their bodily autonomy and embraced the ideological falsities of hypersexuality, property, and, above all, pain tolerance.

Enslaved women often experienced malpractice by the early gynecologists and physicians of the United States. As doctors often regarded enslaved women as expendable, they also lacked the urgency to perform life-saving treatment. In the doctor's quarters, enslaved women possessed little knowledge of the treatment they received. Enslaved women and their bodies were at the mercy of doctors whose fundamental beliefs skewed their ability to operate as medical professionals.

In 1811, an unnamed enslaved woman injured herself while Dr. Thomas Wright was on the scene. The enslaved woman was pregnant and near her due date when she attempted to climb a fence and injured herself. The woman began to bleed from her vaginal canal and experienced extreme blood loss. Upon seeing her state, Dr. Wright instructed the surrounding enslaved people to drag her to the kitchen and strip her. By this time, the enslaved woman lost an estimated two pounds of blood. Dr. Wright assistance consisted of hitting her genitals to stimulate more bleeding and administering ten grains of prussiate, which contains cyanide in a non-toxic form, to halt the bleeding. When the bleeding subsided, the enslaved woman lost an estimated total of six pounds of blood.[43] Fortunately, the woman survived but experienced humiliation and dehumanization in front of her peers as they dragged and stripped her.

Doctors viewed enslaved women and their bodies as expendable. Doctors regarded them as test subjects and altered their methods of life-saving treatment with the ideology of pain tolerance. During treatment, doctors left enslaved women vulnerable and exposed. In the doctor's quarters, they forced these women into a space of violence where they experienced malpractice and delays in life-saving treatment.

Doctors sexually exploited and violated enslaved women even in death. Gynecologists harvested post-mortem organs from enslaved women's bodies and used them to conduct experiments and display them for others to see. Most of these women did not consent to the experimentation of their bodies and organs after they passed away. Doctors typically sought permission from slave owners to experiment on the women's bodies and organs. The ideology of property and control over the enslaved population contributed to sexual exploitation and a lack of bodily autonomy for enslaved women when occupying the doctor's quarters.

Georgian physician Dr. Raymond Harris treated an unnamed enslaved woman in the mid-nineteenth century for what he believed to be an "ovarian pregnancy." The woman had not had menses for over two years, experienced constipation for months, and had uncommon symptoms during pregnancy; Dr. Harris discovered the cause to be a "large irregular tumor." Dr. Harris operated on the woman and claimed immediate improvement, but the enslaved woman's symptoms reappeared, and she passed away shortly after. After her death, Dr. Harris requested permission from her owner to open the woman's body.[44] Though Dr. Harris did not preserve her organs for observation or study, his immediate request to open the body conveyed the belief that the value of enslaved women relied solely on their bodies, which doctors believed to be expendable.

In a similar manner, Dr. John Douglass confirmed the perceived value of enslaved women and the ideologies of hypersexuality and property in the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal of 1852*. Dr. Douglass introduced the case of a patient from 1848 with the opening statement: "The subject of the following case was a negro (slave), the property of Mr. S.C., of Fairfield Dis., S.C. She was about 30 years of age—had never borne children, and was said to have been rather notorious for *sexual* indulgence."[45] Dr. Douglass pointedly referred to his patient as property, along with explaining her sexual history and the fact that she did not have children. Following the opening statement, Dr. Douglass then explains the medical details of the case and the successful treatment he provided to his patient. Dr. Douglass operated on the ideological falsity of hypersexuality by describing his patient in the previous manner and noting the legal control over the enslaved patient as the property of Mr. S.C.

Additionally, Mississippi doctor Dr. T. R. L. purchased an eighteen-year-old enslaved woman in 1844. This enslaved woman was pregnant and described as "sound" by her previous owners. Upon purchasing the woman, however, Dr. L. noticed she had a cough. Three days after Dr. L. purchased the enslaved woman, she gave birth to a healthy baby and passed away. After the woman passed, Dr. L. completed a post-mortem examination and located a tumor in her thorax.[46] Though records do not indicate if Dr. L. harvested the woman's post-mortem organs, he considered her body a viable test subject to open immediately after death.

Dr. L.'s brother practiced medicine in Virginia during the nineteenth century and collected fees to perform "soundness" checks and post-mortem examinations, for which he acquired a well-known reputation. Initially, Dr. L.'s brother only collected fees for "soundness" checks that ensured the condition of enslaved people. "Soundness" checks typically cost between ten and fifty dollars, roughly 2,000 USD today. When post-mortem examinations became fully legal, they typically included legal investigations and cost twenty-five dollars, roughly 1,000 USD today.[47] Though records do not indicate precisely what Dr. L.' s brother checked enslaved bodies for, living and post-mortem, he profited greatly from this practice.

Medical professionals viewed enslaved women and their bodies as disposable, even in death. Doctors disregarded enslaved women's bodily autonomy and obtained permission from their owners to complete post-mortem examinations. Doctors of the nineteenth century used enslaved women's bodies for personal and professional gain by seeking advancement in the medical field and profiting monetarily from post-mortem examinations and "soundness" checks. In the doctor's quarters, enslaved women occupied a space of violence in death as doctors sexually exploited them by disregarding their bodily autonomy and aligning their medical examinations with profit and the ideology of property.

Gynecologists who performed experimental gynecological treatments used enslaved women's bodies to further their studies. Gynecologists often left enslaved women unaware of the effects and outcomes of these experimental treatments. Gynecologists of the nineteenth century exemplified the ideology of a heightened pain tolerance for the enslaved population based on the treatment of their patients. Doctors often regarded their enslaved patients as test

subjects and did not provide pain relief during or after procedures. The ideologies of hypersexuality and pain tolerance present in the minds of doctors contributed to the use of enslaved women's bodies in experimental studies, and founding gynecologists and physicians lacked concern for their enslaved patients.

Enslaved women underwent a variety of surgeries; the most notable procedures include cesarean sections, oophorectomies, and fistulates. A cesarean section is a procedure that delivers a baby "through a cut made in the mother's abdominal wall and uterus."[48] Oophorectomies refer to the surgical removal of either one or both diseased ovaries.[49] The lack of gynecological advancements in the nineteenth century created an inability to aid or prevent the potential blood loss commonly associated with cesarean sections and ovariectomies. On the other hand, vesicovaginal fistulate surgeries that repair an opening formed between the bladder and wall of the vagina did not result in as much blood loss.[50] Many enslaved women experienced vesicovaginal fistulate surgery multiple times to repair this opening. This surgery did not yield successful results despite doctors' multiple attempts. An illustration titled *Disease of the Ovaries*, created by Thomas Spencer Wells in 1872, represented the look of patients' rooms when undergoing surgeries (see figure 6).[51] In the doctor's quarters, enslaved female patients were left vulnerable and exposed during surgeries while additional staff often observed, including other doctors, nurses, and midwives.

Doctors recorded cases in medical journals and described the treatment of enslaved female patients. One such doctor, Dr. John Peter Mettauer, commonly regarded as one of the fathers of gynecology, practiced gynecology in Virginia when the medical industry flourished. Dr. Mettauer opened a hospital in 1837 and completed experimental surgeries on enslaved women.[52] Dr. Mettauer conducted surgeries on numerous enslaved women but wrote explicitly about the treatment of a twenty-year-old enslaved woman in the *American Journal of Medical Sciences* in 1847. Dr. Mettauer provided an explicit description of the surgeries performed on the unnamed enslaved woman:

> I continued, however, to repeat the operation twice a year, after the second trial, for eight times, and finally, had to relinquish the case, not, though, without having reduced the opening considerably, and proportionally

> relieved the woman of her incontinence. I believe this case, nevertheless, could have been cured in process of time, more especially, if sexual intercourse could have been prevented, which intercourse, I have no doubt, defeated several of the operations.[53]

Dr. Mettauer repeated the operation numerous times, but ultimately blamed intercourse for the enslaved woman's vaginal tears reopening and not healing. The ideology of hypersexuality present in Dr. Mettauer's description and medical reasoning exhibits the space of violence enslaved women experienced when in the doctor's quarters. Dr. Mettauer specifically blamed intercourse for the woman's inability to heal, when this was likely a case of forced sexual abuse. Dr. Mettauer's repeated attempts to repair the vaginal tears also align with the ideology of pain tolerance, and he completed the procedure roughly ten times.

Illustrations and photographs of enslaved women in medical journals dehumanized and sexualized them and their bodies; physicians and gynecologists photographed or illustrated enslaved women's sexual organs and typically used them to describe treatments or surgeries. An enslaved woman named Drana experienced sexual exploitation when Louis Agassiz, a natural scientist, commissioned photographs of her in 1852.[54] Agassiz commissioned photographs of Drana topless for observational and educational purposes.[55] The photographs of Drana support the ideologies of hypersexuality and property, as doctors believed enslaved women to be overtly sexual and viable test subjects to view and study. The ideology of pain tolerance modeled doctors' belief in the need for enslaved women's bodies. Early American physicians and gynecologists asserted authority over enslaved women in the doctor's quarters. Enslaved women also endured unethical practices that rarely aided in their recovery, occasionally undergoing the same procedure multiple times. Overall, physicians and gynecologists viewed enslaved women as objects for observation rather than patients.

In the doctor's quarters, enslaved women occupied a space of violence where doctors viewed and used their bodies for personal and professional gain. Doctors and gynecologists of the nineteenth century sexually exploited their enslaved female patients, often viewing them as test subjects or expendable bodies in not only life

but also death. Experimental treatments and surgeries endured by enslaved women often left them in the same or worse condition as before. Physicians and gynecologists viewed enslaved women as hypersexual and as property, which altered their medical practices, creating a space of violence and suffering for these women.

V. Conclusion

To conclude, almost all physical spaces in the lives of enslaved women allowed for sexual exploitation. In the Upper South of nineteenth-century America, white individuals relied on enslaved women and their bodies to sustain the country and slavery. These women felt the confines and harsh reality of slavery daily. In the courtroom, the legal system offered enslaved women and children no protection. Legislation and trials solidified the ideology of enslaved persons as property. On the plantation, owners forced enslaved women into designated roles and spaces that allowed for sexual exploitation by white and enslaved men. Reproductive labor and these designated spaces for sexual exploitation exemplified that white individuals considered enslaved women to be hypersexual beings and property. In the doctor's quarters, gynecologists and physicians used enslaved women for experimental treatments and surgeries; doctors sexually violated enslaved women in life and death. The malpractice, post-mortem experiments, and procedures performed by doctors on enslaved women reveal that the ideology of pain tolerance established a foundation for the treatment of enslaved persons by medical professionals. Doctors viewed enslaved women's bodies as test subjects. The actions of white residents in the Upper South of nineteenth-century America confirm that the sexual exploitation of enslaved African American women depended on ideological falsities, the legal control of enslaved persons, and spatial violence. Ideological falsities subjected enslaved women to extreme abuse by the legal system, their owners, and doctors. The legal control over enslaved persons in general dictated the lives of enslaved women and children. The spaces of violence designated by white people in power allowed for the humiliation, dehumanization, and sexual exploitation of enslaved African American women. Ideological falsities, legal control over the enslaved, and spatial violence subjected and confined these enslaved women to a life of horror.

Figure 1. Jim Crow Museum
https://jimcrowmuseum.ferris.edu

Figure 2. Thomas Satterwhite Nobel,
The Modern Medea, 1867, The Library of Congress

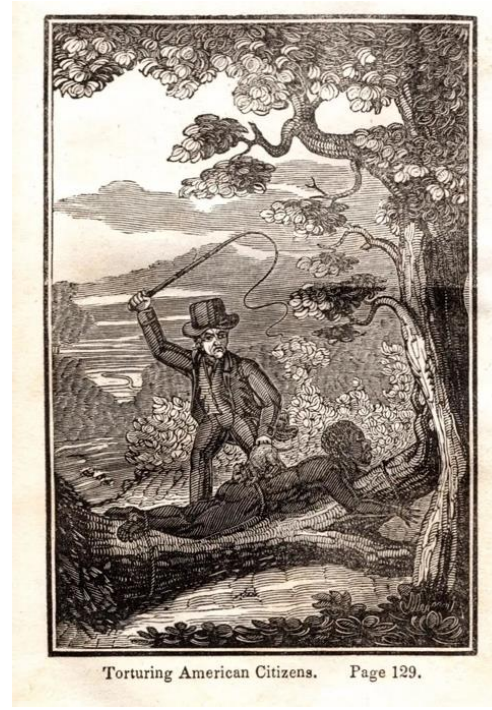

Figure 3. George Bourne,
Torturing American Citizens,
1834, in *Picture of Slavery in the United States of America*

Figure 4. Henry Bibb and Lucius C. Matlack, 1849, in *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave*

Figure 5. George Bourne, *Ladies Whipping Girls*, 1834, in *Picture of Slavery in the United States of America*

Figure 6. Thomas Spencer Wells, *Diseases of the Ovaries*, 1872, in *Diseases of the Ovaries: Their Diagnosis and Treatment*

Notes

[1] King, "'Mad' Enough to Kill," 47-48.
[2] Owens, *Medical Bondage.*
[3] King, "Prematurely Knowing of Evil Things," 173-196.
[4] King, "'Mad' Enough to Kill."
[5] Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 14-17.
[6] *Laws of Virginia*, ACT XII (1662).
[7] Gholson, *Debate on Slavery in Virginia* (1832).
[8] George v. State, Supreme Court of Mississippi (1859).
[9] Morgan, *Laboring Women.*
[10] Foster, *Rethinking Rufus*, 18-19.
[11] King, "'Mad' Enough to Kill," 39.
[12] Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 14-17.
[13] Owens, *Medical Bondage*, 21.
[14] Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 146-51, 154; Owens, *Medical Bondage*, 71.
[15] Kemble and Scott, *Journal of a Residence*, 240.
[16] Owens, *Medical Bondage*, 20-22.
[17] King, "'Mad' Enough to Kill," 38.
[18] Ibid, 43-44.
[19] Ibid, 47-48.
[20] Nobel, *The Modern Medea.*
[21] King, "'Mad' Enough to Kill," 38-39.
[22] State of Missouri v. Celia, a Slave (1855).
[23] King, "'Mad' Enough to Kill," 48.
[24] State of Missouri v Celia.
[25] King, "'Mad' Enough to Kill, 52.
[26] Ibid, 40-41.
[27] Ibid, 40.
[28] *Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project* (1936), 274.
[29] Foster, *Rethinking Rufus*, 50-56.
[30] Ibid, 24.
[31] Owens, *Medical Bondage*, 70-71.
[32] Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life*, 66-72.
[33] Foster, *Rethinking Rufus*, 24.
[34] Bourne, *Picture of Slavery*, 52-59, 77.
[35] Bourne, *Torturing American Citizens.*
[36] Bibb and Matlack, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb,* 114.
[37] Foster, *Rethinking Rufus*, 32-33.

[38] Ibid, 75.
[39] Bourne, *Ladies Whipping Girls*.
[40] Feinstein, *When Rape was Legal*, 35.
[41] Ibid, 43.
[42] Foster, *Rethinking Rufus*, 50, 55.
[43] Owens, *Medical Bondage*, 28.
[44] Ibid, 47.
[45] Douglass, "Ovarian Dropsy," 240.
[46] Fisher, "Physicians and Slavery," 40-41.
[47] Ibid, 41.
[48] Better Health Channel, "Caesarean Section."
[49] HealthDirect, "Ovariectomy."
[50] Clevland Clinic, "Vesicovaginal Fistula."
[51] Wells, *Disease of the Ovaries*.
[52] Owens, *Medical Bondage*, 34.
[53] Mettauer, "On Vesico-Vaginal Fistula," 120.
[54] Zealy, *Daguerreotype of Drana.*
[55] Owens, *Medical Bondage,* 87-88.

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