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Wealth, Desire, and Consequences of the Antebellum Slaveholder

In the United States' Declaration of Independence it articulates, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Walter Johnson's book *Soul by Soul* delves deep into the "*Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*." The enslaved female's life was lived as the purchased property of a white slaveholding male. Several questions were raised in this book. What happened to the slaveholder and the female slave after purchase? What conflicted thoughts and actions grew out of the proprietary claims of the slaveholder and his enslaved African American female? Was there ever intimacy between the slaveholder and his enslaved female? This essay explores the conflicted thoughts and actions of the white slaveholding male and his black female slave.

The slave market's business, as viewed by Walter Johnson, was all about "turning people into prices." The slave trader "packaged them for sale, gave attention to their presentation with dresses, shoes, stocking, and head coverings for the women."¹ The slave traders dressed, calculated a dollar price and sold his "wares" to buyers whose self-interests directed their purchases. The purchase of slaves held many possibilities in the slaveholder's mind. "Johnson expands upon these possibilities, "fields full of productive hands and a slave quarter that reproduced itself, of well-ordered households and of mansions where service was swift and polished." The slaveholder dreamed of beating, healing, and sleeping with the slaves; perhaps they imagined that their slaves loved them. Finally, Johnson proposed they "imagined who they

¹ Walter Johnson, *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 118, 120.

could be by thinking about whom they could buy.”² A non-slaveholder could purchase slaves to increase his standing in society with the hopes of becoming a member of the South’s upper class. Owning slaves suggested that he was doing well financially; and that he and his family were not bound to the hard work that his slaves endured.

At the slave market, traders packaged for sale, “Fancy Maids, or Fancy Girls.” Such light skinned women and girls, (usually mixed race) were promoted as polite, young and pretty. Historian Brenda Stevenson estimates that light skin color added over 5.3 percent to the female’s price, but less than half as much to the price of enslaved males.”³ That white slaveholders were willing to pay much more for a light skinned female gives some understanding of the slaveholder’s thoughts. The slaveholder’s purchase “showed that they had the power to purchase what was forbidden, the audacity to show it off and they publicly flirted with the boundaries of acceptable sociability.”⁴ Slaveholder could purchase high-priced females to satisfy their sexual desires. If this impregnated her, the child would be even lighter skinned and more valuable monetarily as slave property. A female child would bring even a higher price.⁵ The purchase of a “Fancy Maid” drew lots of attention at the slave market but at home it was kept secret.

The slaveholder purchased his enslaved female as consumable property but also as a person. Kimberly Brown suggests “Willing or not, aggressive or submissive, the female slave *is* a sexual body.”⁶ It was an investment that led to numerous choices and also presented contradictions to the slaveholder’s thoughts and feelings about his female slave. In historian Neal Katyal’s

² Johnson, *Soul By Soul*, 79.

³ Brenda Stevenson, “WHAT’S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT? CONCUBINAGE AND ENSLAVED WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE ANTEBELLUM SOUTH.” *The Journal of African American History* 98, no. 1 (2013): 105.

⁴ Johnson, *Soul By Soul*, 114.

⁵ Stevenson, “WHAT’S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?” 125.

⁶ Kimberly Juanita Brown, “Black Rapture: Sally Hemings, Chica Da Silva, and the Slave Body of Sexual Supremacy.” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 1/2 (2007): 45.

opinion, he views sexual exploitation of a female slave “First, when she was being sold, potential purchasers could fondle and harass her. Second, her master could molest or rape her. Third, she could be forced to have sexual intercourse with family or friends of the master, or with other slaves.”⁷ The sons and friends of the slaveholder were often given the right to demand sex from the female slave, in other words “rape.” That friends and heirs expected sex, was a tradition passed down from one generation of slaveholders to the next.⁸

Women and girls were often raped and involuntarily forced to give birth to the babies of their rapist, who was often the slaveholder. Her reproductive capacities were used to re-populate slave laborers. Historian Darlene Clark Hine argues that once “slaveholders realized that the reproductive function of the female slave could yield a profit, the manipulation of the procreative sexual relations became an integral part of the sexual exploitation of the female slave.”⁹ Sexual relationships, between the slaveholder and his enslaved female, were forced and viewed as the powerful against the powerless.

Slaves knew that the slaveholder could punish them physically, at any time, for not following through on his demands. The female slave knew that to resist his sexual advances would be met with some kind of retaliation. She could be beaten, whipped, sent back to field work or raped. The powerless female was deemed the slaveholder’s property to do with as he wished. Female slaves had no legal restitution against rape or an attempt of rape. If rape occurred by another white man, not by the slaveholder, the trespass was against the slave’s master, not the woman. Sexual exploitation, as historian Peter Bardaglio suggests “allowed slaveholders to

⁷ Neal Kumar Katyal, “Men Who Own Women: A Thirteenth Amendment Critique of Forced Prostitution.” *The Yale Law Journal* 103, no. 3 (1993): 797.

⁸ Stevenson, “WHAT’S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?” 109.

⁹ Darlene Clark Hine, “‘Ar’n’t I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South’: Twenty Years After.” *The Journal of African American History* 92, no. 1 (2007): 17.

further their social control over the slave community and served to increase the supply of labor, since they became the owners of any offspring resulting from these encounters.”¹⁰

A concubine submitted to the slaveholders illicit and sustained sexual contact because she had no freedom or choice to resist his sexual encounters. Slaveholders desired concubines, who were physically and intellectually superior with light skin-tone and straight hair. They wanted them to look like white women in how they dressed and spoke. This concubine could be the “Fancy Maid” that he purchased at market. Concubines were often young girls, who were already the slaveholder’s property, who had recently reached puberty. “The cost of concubinage—monetary, social and moral--was high. When slaveholder, David Cook, needed quick cash to pay off his gambling debts, he rented his concubine and her children out for sex.¹¹ Stevenson adds that if the slaveholder was single, wealthy or socially unnoticed the concubinage relationship was not as problematic. Concubinage became more of a problem if the slaveholder was married and had social standing in the community.¹² Socially, the slaveholder lost standing when he kept a concubine. It went against morality for a slaveholder to have sex and/or a lasting relationship with anyone other than his wife.

These miscegenetic relationships were condoned if they were kept secret. This allowed the slaveholder’s family to be kept from scandal and from the news that his sexual relations with his female slave would cause. The relationship between the slaveholder and his female slave was not supposed to exist or transform into an affectionate relationship, but it sometimes did.

Slaveholders could treat their concubines with care and concern. His feelings bypassed his need

¹⁰ Peter W. Bardaglio, “Rape and the Law in the Old South: ‘Calculated to Excite Indignation in Every Heart.’” *The Journal of Southern History* 60, no. 4 (1994): 757.

¹¹ Louisa Picquet and Hiram Mattison, *The Octoroon: Or Inside Views of Southern Domestic Life*, electronic edition, Manuscripts, Archives & Rare Books Division, (accessed 13 January 2011): 10.

¹² Stevenson, “WHAT’S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?” 109-110.

for control and intimacy developed. Historian Eugene Genovese suggests that relationships were often consensual and based on mutual affection between master and slave.¹³ These affectionate relationships frequently led to long-term “quasi-marriage” relationships. The 9th US vice president, Richard Johnson, kept a common-law wife who was born an octoroon slave in Scott County, Kentucky.¹⁴

The concubine who had the slaveholder’s affection, often felt superior to the other slaves. These feelings distanced herself from the slaves and allowed her to have a more personal relationship with the slaveholder. “Some concubinage relationships obviously developed over time and could even imitate a marriage. The enslaved female could make significant gains with her slaveholder if she exhibited emotional attachment. She could gain financial support, better food, clothing, furnishings, and sometimes freedom for herself and her children.”¹⁵ Sometimes the slaveholder granted freedom to his concubine but there were legal restrictions. Historian Judith Schafer considers the view of the Louisiana Supreme Court. It adhered to the law in cases involving freedom to slave concubines. Freedom could be granted if the concubine and her children, if any, did not exceed one-tenth or one-fourth respectively of the slaveholder’s total estate.¹⁶

The concubine could somewhat control sexual desires in the slaveholder and make room for intimacy in that relationship. No first-hand quotes were found in reference to the intimate feelings he may have felt for his concubine. But what the slaveholder materially offered his

¹³ Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 85.

¹⁴ M. Maillard (2014, February 03) *Julia Ann Chinn* (ca. 1790-1833). BlackPast.org. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/chinn-julia-ann-ca-1790-1833/>.

¹⁵ Stevenson, “WHAT’S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?” 117.

¹⁶ Judith K. Schafer, “‘Open and Notorious Concubinage’: The Emancipation of Slave Mistresses by Will and the Supreme Court in Antebellum Louisiana.” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 28, no. 2 (1987): 182.

concubine is somewhat telling of his affectionate feelings. This emotional attachments sometimes led to monetary allowances, better food, clothing, a little house of her own with furnishings. Historian Libra Hilde adds “While many white men in such unions developed affection for their enslaved concubines and children, these relationships started in and were based on a fundamental imbalance of power.”¹⁷ Slaveholders, at times, did not want the increased intimacy that his concubine tried to manipulate. To remedy this situation the slaveholder could sell her and the children. Affectionate relationships sporadically occurred, but they were always under the umbrella of coercion.

Slavery’s continuation depended upon the slave population to sustain itself through the reproduction capacities of the enslaved female. Tamara Lomax’s historical view is that “It was the white woman’s job to populate the world as well as it was the slave breeder’s job to maintain the slave system.”¹⁸ It was cheaper to have female slaves give birth to slaves than to buy slaves at market. Women were viewed as a way to breed and grow a productive slave labor force. Sex went beyond satisfying sexual desires to satisfying the desire for financial gains. “This created the incentive to produce, raise, and sell enslaved children.”¹⁹ Slaveholders knew the consequences of siring illegitimate children with his concubine, and sometimes they were even willing to sell their own mixed-race children at market. There seems to be little affection between the slaveholder and his concubine when he believed it was appropriate to sell his own children. Mixed-race children meant big profits for the slaveholder. The purchase of mixed-race

¹⁷ Libra R. Hilde, “Mortifications Peculiarly Their Own,” In *Slavery, Fatherhood, and Paternal Duty in African American Communities over the Long Nineteenth Century*, Chapter 6, (2020): 197.

¹⁸ Tamara Lomax, “BLACK VENUS AND JEZEBEL SLUTS: Writing Race, Sex, and Gender in Religion and Culture.” In *Jezebel Unhinged: Loosing the Black Female Body in Religion and Culture*. Duke University Press, (2018): 22.

¹⁹ Hilde, “Mortifications Peculiarly Their Own,” 205.

female children kept sexual exploitation alive and thriving whether at the slave market or as a trade of slaves between plantations.

The intentions of the slaveholder, after he brought his light skinned enslaved female home, affected his family dynamics. These sexual relationships were known to the slaveholder's wife and caused her emotional distress. The wife might physically punish the concubine, have violent arguments with their husband and sometimes asked for a divorce. Most often though, she kept quiet because, in the gendered decorum of the antebellum South, this was the proper thing to do. Stevenson's opinion is that "the slaveholder's relationship brought on humiliation and shame to his family and most likely a loss in their place in society. She could not defy her husband and it was also her duty to obey her husband. The code of silence prevailed."²⁰

It was the slaveholder's eventual decision in regard to which slave could marry whom. The slaveholder was economically dependent upon slave marriages and the offspring that they could produce. Speculation is that slaves were often forced to marry each other in order to produce children. In some cases, if a female slave could not produce children and/or could not raise them through infancy she was forced to have sex with another male slave, a male slave who was known to produce children. In Lomax's article, she quotes an enslaved woman, Fannie Norman's words, "Twas de rule on many plantations in slave times dat de women can't have any regular husband. Dey an fo'ced to live wid de one Marster tells dem to an' m'ybe dey live first wid one an' tudder man." Lomax's findings suggest that the enslaved woman was forced to share and have multiple husbands.²¹ The slave-husband was powerless to go against the slaveholder and suffered humiliation knowing that the slaveholder could use his wife sexually. Any subsequent children were raised to bring economic profit to the slaveholder either by sale or increasing his

²⁰ Stevenson, "WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?" 112.

²¹ Lomax, "BLACK VENUS AND JEZEBEL SLUTS," 27. (The article has no footnotes.)

slave labor force. The slaveholder treated his slave-breeding female as if she were an “animal” with no respect to her humanity. Lomax comments about the slaveholder’s sexual politics which included black enslaved men who functioned as “circuit riders.” They were males who were known to be good breeders and were sent from plantation to plantation to have sex with multiple enslaved women and girls.²²

The slaveholder’s enslaved females were used and exploited as objects to bring economic gain. A commodity is an object, or a person, meant for trade who has monetary value. The commodified enslaved woman’s value was the price that a slaveholder was willing to pay. Josh Cole’s article expands upon Southern economy “Slavery was a major economic contributor to slaveholders in the antebellum South. Their livelihood depended on it, and slaves were exploited as much as possible in order to benefit their white masters.”²³

Slavery reached beyond physical labor in the fields to the reproductive labor of enslaved females. The slaveholder envisioned and purchased her for sexual labor. He used her to satisfy his sexual urges, to supply the slave market or to continue his slave system. Historian Edward Baptist states that “The enslaved woman was a standardized object, a unit of trade, transparent in history, and ready for sale and use.” The slave, or her offspring, were valuable in proportion to the amount of money they could bring at sale. “Slaves were treated by whites as “deanimated” commodities.” that the purchase and commodification of a human being was purely represented by price and imagined as the self-controlled consumption of sexual pleasure.²⁴ Intimacy had no place in a society where a woman was bought as a commodity for sexual labor and was looked upon as chattel.

²² Lomax, “BLACK VENUS AND JEZEBEL SLUTS,” 28. (This article has no footnotes.)

²³ Josh Cole, “The Excuse of Paternalism in the Antebellum South: Ideology or Practice?” *Historia*, issue 2006: 31.

²⁴ Edward E. Baptist, “‘Cuffy,’ ‘Fancy Maids,’ and ‘One-Eyed Men’: Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States.” *The American Historical Review* 106, no 5 (2001): 1622, 1634, 1647.

What we might call intimacy seems unlikely where a slaveholder sells his own children to equip the slave market with a new generation of commodities and sexual fantasies. For the slaveholder, “every enslaved man, woman, and child was a repository of reproductive capital and a source of production.”²⁵ The slaveholder’s own personal desires mattered more than any of his chattel. Slaves were a commodity to bring profit. Genovese views the slaveholder’s other costs. He paid for medical treatment to keep his female “property” healthy. He often bought insurance policies that insured against early death, for the recapture or replacement of runaways and care for the old and feeble slave.²⁶ Financial stability was placed above the enslaved population.

A society’s character is often shaped through social values. The ability to treat human beings as property, the racist beliefs about color differences and racial hierarchies were widespread and supported by the social institutions of the antebellum South.²⁷ Rich men and large plantation owners occupied the highest social plateau. Blacks were members of the lowest-low-class of southern society and scorned by the poor and those who didn’t own property. Slaves were entirely without status. Wealth appears to have been the surest sign of social, and economic position in the antebellum South. White landowners thought that it was necessary to own slaves to increase their wealth and to demonstrate that they had a good social standing.

The South’s agricultural crops were tobacco, rice, sugarcane, and cotton. According to historian Edward Pessen, he estimates that the expanding walls of the world cotton market mainly determined the limits of the slave’s exploitation.²⁸ To increase productivity of slave labor, more land was needed which, in turn, enabled the slaveholder to accumulate more wealth.

²⁵ Baptist, “‘Cuffy,’ ‘Fancy Maids,’ and ‘One-Eyed Men,’” 1647.

²⁶ Eugene D. Genovese, “The Medical and Insurance Costs of Slaveholding in the Cotton Belt.” *The Journal of Negro History* 45, no. 3 (1960): 141.

²⁷ Stevenson, “WHAT’S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?” 103.

²⁸ Edward Pessen, “How Different from Each Other Were the Antebellum North and South?” *The American Historical Review* 85, no. 5 (1980): 1147.

Pessen adds statistics that before the Civil War, there were four million blacks in the South and they constituted one-third of the Southern population. And almost 95 percent of Southern blacks were slaves.²⁹

To get a glimpse into the thinking of a slaveholder and his actions, it is fascinating to see how history viewed the antebellum Southern slaveholder. One idea was that Southern gentlemen dueled, fought “tooth and nail” and whipped their slaves for discipline. Steven Hahn’s view is “They viewed slaveholding gentry, as a breed apart; genteel and tyrannical, gracious and quick tempered, conscious of lineage and rank, jealous of their independence and prerogatives, perhaps overwhelmingly proud, and, above all, acutely sensitive to matters of personal and family honor.”³⁰ This “rule of honor” had been around for centuries and seemed to be stable over time. Along with these characteristics, it remained that slaves were treated as property and that the interests of slaveholder was paramount, protected and socially accepted.

Two societal traditions surfaced. The Christian tradition stressed gentility, being charitable and being of one mind about Christian beliefs. The other tradition stressed the ability to arrange and maintain relationships among people, groups, and the community. This enabled the rich slaveholders to preserve feelings of self-worth, prominence, and authority over others and the public. This led to acts of domination which fit right into the treatment of enslaved people by slaveholders. As Hahn suggests “White man’s honor and black man’s slavery became in the public mind of the South practically indistinguishable.”³¹

Two ideologies might have influenced the slaveholder’s thoughts and actions. Patriarchy emphasizes lineage and leaving a legacy to heirs. The male is the head-of-the-household, has the

²⁹ Pessen, “How Different from Each Other Were the Antebellum North and South?” 1121.

³⁰ Steven Hahn, Review of *Honor and Patriarchy in the Old South*, by Bertram Wyatt-Brown. *American Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (1984): 145.

³¹ Hahn, Review of *Honor and Patriarchy in the Old South*: 146, 147.

power, and family lineage is passed down through him. Dominance was exercised by patriarchal control and power. His wife was subservient to him as well as his enslaved females. The slaveholder's "family," as seen through the eyes of patriarchy, included the enslaved. "Patriarchal authority, along with wealth, served as the bases of status and prestige."³² It is easy to see how the slaveholder got visions of grandeur, the power to buy and control others to his advantage, and to treat his enslaved females as human property and not as human beings.

The second ideology that might have influenced the slaveholder was paternalism. This suggests that the slaveholder took care of his slaves and that he acted in their best interest. He took total responsibility to feed them, clothe them, discipline them and even played a part in their Christian upbringing. The slaveholder often thought that it was his duty to lead his slaves on the "correct" path. Eugene Genovese introduced the concept of slaveholder paternalism in his 1975 book, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*. Paternalistic slaveholders took personal interest in the lives of their slaves and often became personally attached to them.³³ "Paternalism is a way of life that can involve harshness and may even involve cruelty so long as it is within the context of a strong sense of duty and responsibility toward those in dependent status."³⁴ As the slaveholder's land and the number of slaves under his "paternalistic" control increased, it was difficult to maintain the feelings and actions of the benevolent "father-figure." The concept of "father and family," ultimately, did not spill over to the enslaved, especially the females. It often eroded into forced sex between the powerful master and the powerless female slave. As sexual assault increased the system of paternalism ruptured. Paternalism no longer applied in situations where the slave felt forced to act on the desires of their master. Paternalism was an ideology where slaves were to be

³² Hahn, *Review of Honor and Patriarchy in the Old South*, 146.

³³ Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*. (New York: Pantheon, 1975), n.p.

³⁴ Genovese, "Roll, Jordan, Roll," 270.

treated fairly and as human beings. The way that the majority of masters treated their slaves did not reflect this mindset. “Paternalism allowed slaveholders to justify the sex exploitation of blacks in bondage.”³⁵ Historian Allan Galloway adds, “It could not be proven that slaves benefited from the slaveholder “father-like” control and that there was any type of mutual obligations, on both parties, which was necessary for the system to work.”³⁶ In reality, the slaveholder’s enslaved were his property, and his thoughts of taking care of them as a father often eroded into less than humane treatment.

Historian Andrew Fede suggests “Since slaves were both the most valuable and most coveted form of investment in the South, it was only natural that masters would also look to the law to protect their interests. Slave owners dominated politics and the economy of the antebellum South, and both the courts and legislatures were populated with individuals who were, at the least, sympathetic to the slave owning interests.”³⁷ Legislators, and executive officials knew about the sexual undertone of slavery. The United States’ president, Thomas Jefferson, kept a concubine. Jefferson’s had a long-lasting sexual relationship with Sally Hemings, and six children were born. Even though Jefferson kept their relationship a secret it was later revealed that he arranged Sally’s life so that he could have frequent, and intimate relations her. In this relationship, intimate feelings for her continued for four decades.³⁸

Female and male slaves were considered “chattel” and had no civil or legal rights over their bodies or protection from sexual exploitation. When a slaveholder raped his enslaved female, the law did hold him liable for his actions. Even though this belief was common throughout the

³⁵ Cole, “The Excuse of Paternalism,” 38, 45.

³⁶ Allan Galloway. “The Origins of Slaveholders’ Paternalism: George Whitefield, the Bryan Family, and the Great Awakening in the South.” *The Journal of Southern History* 53, no. 3 (1987): 370.

³⁷ Andrew Fede, “Legal Protection for Slave Buyers in the U. S. South: A Caveat Concerning Caveat Emptor.” *The American Journal of Legal History* 31, no. 4 (1987): 330, 356.

³⁸ Brown, “Black Rapture: Sally Hemings, Chica Da Silva, and the Slave Body of Sexual Supremacy,” 45-47.

south, the rape of a female slave by her slaveholder, was sometimes brought to court in order for “justice” to be served. Courtroom accounts were heard even though a slave could not testify against a white person. This practice placed the slaveholder’s rendition of events as truth with the enslaved having no chance at rebuttal. Wilma King expands upon the handling of rape, by the slaveholder, in the courts “It exposes the limitations of male thinking about the crime of rape and shows the slaveholder’s thinking about rape. The slaveholder did not take responsibility for the suffering he caused or the indignity his actions triggered in his enslaved female.”³⁹ Historian Peter Bardaglio suggests that “The relative silence of the law on the subject of female slaves who had been raped spoke volumes about the structure of power in southern society, dramatizing the double burden of race and gender that female slaves endured.”⁴⁰ The slaveholder’s property could be used at his discretion without legal action. “It remained the slaveholder’s legal right to decide the limits of the relationship between himself and his female slave.”⁴¹

The judicial system, in the South, held that slaveholders and slaves could not be governed by the same laws. Most often, the lawyers, judges and lawmakers defined slaves as personal property and they meant just that. This enabled them to justify slavery within the common law, so they did not have to acknowledge and pass legislation formulating “slave law.” “The laws were geared to the interests of the slave buyer and the southern lawmakers had no problem treating slaves as economic business, and as valuable chattel. The slave owner’s interests were dominate.”⁴²

³⁹ Wilma King, “‘Mad’ Enough to Kill: Enslaved Women, Murder, and Southern Courts.” *The Journal of African American History* 92, no. 1 (2007): 49.

⁴⁰ Peter W. Bardaglio, ‘Calculated to Excite Indignation in Every Heart.’” *The Journal of Southern History* 60, no. 4 (1994): 758.

⁴¹ King, “‘Mad’ Enough to Kill,” 49.

⁴² Andrew Fede, “Toward a Solution of the Slave Law Dilemma: A Critique of Tushnet’s ‘The American Law of Slavery.’” *Law and History Review* 2, no. 2 (1984): 315.

Lawmakers eventually made adaptations to the common law of crimes and created new property crime laws to better protect slaves, whom they called most valuable property. The slaveholder's complete control over his enslaved faded away. But different degrees of criminal liability was dependent upon a person's social class standing. A poor slaveholder was more likely, than a wealthy one, to be held liable for slave abuse, specifically sexual abuse.⁴³ The records of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the 1930s states, "Among the records are court cases that challenged the notion that the sexual exploitation of black females was not an offense punishable by law."⁴⁴ It is interesting to note that in 1863, President Abraham Lincoln, issued a military order that addressed rape that had no color boundaries. "Punishment for rape will be death, and any violence offered a female, white or colored, with evident intent or purpose to commit rape will be considered as one and punished accordingly,"⁴⁵

"They (slaves) were products of the long encounter between white exploiters of labor and black sources of labor, productive and reproductive. Their commodification reminded all that, in the South, every child of an enslaved mother was some form of slave laborer, an arrangement that enabled plantation slavery to function. Every enslaved man, woman, and child was a repository of reproductive capital and a source of production."⁴⁶ The slaveholder thoughts, feelings and actions were a large part of the system of slavery that encompassed the antebellum South. Research shows that exploitation and abuse described the circumstances of the enslaved female in the antebellum South. This research cannot be verified as 100% accurate since there

⁴³ Andrew Fede, "Legitimized Violent Slave Abuse in the American South, 1619-1865: A Case Study of Law and Social Change in Six Southern States." *The American Journal of Legal History* 29, no. 2 (1985): 96.

⁴⁴ Wilma King, "'PREMATURELY KNOWING OF EVIL THINGS': THE SEXUAL ABUSE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN IN SLAVERY AND FREEDOM." *The Journal of African American History* 99, no. 3 (2014): 174.

⁴⁵ *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, vol. 12 (16 May 1862), 52; Lincoln's General Orders No. 100: Instructions for the Government of Armies of the United States in the Field (April 24, 1863) at [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th century/lieber.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th%20century/lieber.asp) (accessed 7 June 2013): n.p.

⁴⁶ Baptist, "'Cuffy,' 'Fancy Maids,' and 'One-Eyed Men,'" 1647.

are almost no written comments from the slaveholder in reference to how he felt about his enslaved female. Since the slaveholder did not talk about his liaisons with his female slaves, conjectures have to be made as to his thoughts, feelings, and actions. How can his thoughts and actions be verified if he is not a primary source? Secondary information can be used in the form of slave narratives. This essay's "Works Projects Administration's (WPA) slave narratives are presented as transcribed by interviewers."⁴⁷ In these slave narratives, their comments are about poor treatment and sexual exploitation. It would seem unlikely that there would be many positive statements about slavery during the antebellum South.

To satisfy his sexual desires a slaveholder could demand sex from his enslaved female, in other words he could rape her at his discretion. Harriet Jacobs said, "He told me I was his property, that I must be subject to his will in all things. He would compel me to submit to him."⁴⁸ In another case, Ethel Mae a Georgia slave, said "They both raped her—father showing the son what it was all about—and she couldn't do anything about it."⁴⁹ Another form of rape, and a way to ensure a slave population, was to force slaves to have sexual intercourse, with another slave. A slave's marriage had no recourse in this "slave breeding." Locations for "slave breeding" were named "negro farms" and "breeding rooms." The marriage vows of a slave marriage was a sham. A female could not have a proper husband because the slaveholder told her who she should live with and have children with.⁵⁰ Confronting doubtful white northern audiences, Frederick Douglas proclaimed, "I am also prepared to prove that slave breeding is relied upon as one of the

⁴⁷ National Humanities Center Resource Toolbox. *The Making of African American Identity: Vol. I, 1500-1865*. "On Slaveholders' Sexual Abuse of Slaves. (Selections from 19th-& 20th-century Slave Narratives."): 1.

⁴⁸ National Humanities Center. (19th-& 20th-century Slave Narrative). Harriet Jacobs, "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl," (1861): 7.

⁴⁹ Charles L. Perdue Jr., Thomas E. Barden, and Robert K. Phillips, eds., *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves*, (1976): 301.

⁵⁰ Lomax, "BLACK VENUS AND JEZEBEL SLUTS," 27.

chief sources of wealth.”⁵¹ The slaveholder, as a slave breeder, was more concerned about his females having children who would grow up to keep the slave system running. Sarah Eiland’s historical findings suggest that the rise in the mixed-race slave population, and in southern households, is evidence that sexual exploitation occurred between the enslaved female and the white slaveholders who owned them.⁵²

The slaveholder was complicit in the continuation of this exploitation of his enslaved females. He could buy a “fancy maid” at market and then keep her as a concubine. This relationship could lead to intimacy and affection but most often did not. The ex-slave William J. Anderson states, “He always kept a colored Miss in the house with him. This is another curse of Slavery-- concubinage and illegitimate connections.”⁵³ It was the enslaved female who, most likely, played out the role of having an intimate relationship to get special treatment for herself and any children born from the union. “When he died, he willed her and al dem chillens a house, some land, and a little money.”⁵⁴ This slaveholder had some affectionate and/or intimate feelings and concern for his concubine.

The pursuit of happiness in the antebellum South produced no happiness for the enslaved African American. The slaveholder, who exploited his enslaved property, did not grant equality or equal rights. Slavery was a system used to make financial gains. The slaveholder’s enslaved, especially the enslaved female, was a commodity, a medium of exchange, a tool to be used. He could do what he wanted with his “human property” with little consequence of legal action. A

⁵¹ National Humanities Center. (19th-& 20th-century Slave Narrative). Frederick Douglas, “My Bondage and My Freedom,” (1855): 5. (Further research finds that he did not prove that slave breeding existed.)

⁵² Sarah W. Eiland, “The Unspoken Demands of Slavery: The Exploitation of Female Slaves in the Memphis Slave Trade,” *The Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War Era*: Vol. 10 , Article 6. (2020): From abstract.

⁵³ National Humanities Center, (19th-& 20th-century Slave Narrative). William J. Anderson, “Twenty-Four Years a Slave,” (1857): 4.

⁵⁴ Louisa Picquet and Hiram Mattison, *The Octoroon: Or Inside Views of Southern Domestic Life*, electronic edition, Manuscripts, Archives & Rare Books Division, (accessed 13 January 2011): 10.

slaveholder's major thoughts and actions were focused on making money, and not focused on the care and wellbeing of the enslaved. One way to preserve his wealth and maintain it was through slave breeding. His focus was money, but his sexual desires sometimes trumped this focus. He arranged a relationship with his enslaved female, he kept a concubine. Did he have intimate feelings for her? Care and concern was shown, not through his words, but through his material gifts. His social standing, his reputation and trust of his family were important to him. His trust was broken, though, when he had a relationship with an enslaved female. Secrecy was necessary in his relationships with his family and his social standing. The actions against his enslaved remained hidden and were not discussed. In ex-slave, Frederick Douglas' words, "The white man's happiness cannot be purchased by the black man's misery."⁵⁵ The slaveholder, tried to "balance" the aspects of trust with family, his financial well-being, his actions with his enslaved (especially his enslaved females), and societies approval. In reality his "unbalanced" thoughts and actions trapped him in a losing slavery culture. Slavery joined the slaveholder and enslaved in dangerous, unbalanced and degrading systems of human rights, finance, society and law.

⁵⁵ National Humanities Center. (19th-& 20th-century Slave Narrative). Frederick Douglas," My Bondage and My Freedom," (1855): n.p.

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