

Julia Ott

Slaves: The Capital that Made Capitalism

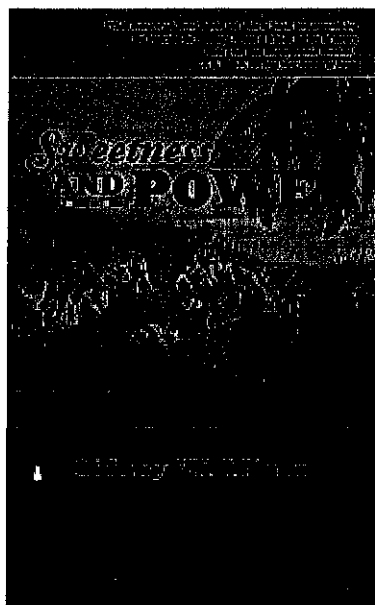
In Vol. 1, Iss. 2 — Second Semester/Summer 2014

April 9th, 2014

Racialized chattel slaves were *the* capital that made *capitalism*. While most theories of capitalism set slavery apart, as something utterly distinct, because under slavery, workers do not labor for a wage, new historical research reveals that for centuries, a single economic system encompassed both the plantation and the factory.

At the dawn of the industrial age commentators like Rev. Thomas Malthus could not envision that capital — an asset that is used but not consumed in the production of goods and services — could compound and diversify its forms, increasing productivity and engendering economic growth. Yet, ironically, when Malthus penned his Essay on the Principle of Population in 1798, the economies of Western Europe already had crawled their way out of the so-called “Malthusian trap.” The New World yielded vast quantities of “drug foods” like tobacco, tea, coffee, chocolate, and sugar for world markets. Europeans worked a little bit harder to satiate their hunger for these “drug foods.” The luxury-commodities of the seventeenth century became integrated into the new middle-class rituals like tea-drinking in the eighteenth century. By the nineteenth century, these commodities became a caloric and stimulative necessity for the denizens of the dark satanic mills. The New World yielded food for proletarians and fiber for factories at reasonable (even falling) prices. The “industrious revolution” that began in the sixteenth century set the stage for the Industrial Revolution of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

But the “demand-side” tells only part of the story. A new form of capital, racialized chattel slaves, proved essential for the industrious revolution — and for the industrial one that followed.



Book cover of *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* by Sidney W. Mintz © Penguin Books | Amazon.com

The systematic application of African slaves in staple export crop production began in the sixteenth century, with sugar in Brazil. The African slave trade populated the plantations of the Caribbean, landing on the shores of the Chesapeake at the end of the seventeenth century. African slaves held the legal status of chattel: moveable, alienable property. When owners hold living creatures as chattel, they gain additional property rights: the ownership of the offspring of any chattel, and the ownership of their offspring, and so on and so forth. Chattel becomes self-augmenting capital.

While slavery existed in human societies since prehistoric times, chattel status had never been applied so thoroughly to human beings as it would be to Africans and African-Americans beginning in the sixteenth century. But this was not done easily, especially in those New World regions where African slaves survived, worked alongside European indentured servants and landless “free” men and women, and bore offspring — as they did in Britain’s mainland colonies in North America.

In the seventeenth century, African slaves and European indentured servants worked together to build what Ira Berlin characterizes as a “society with slaves” along the Chesapeake Bay. These Africans were slaves, but before the end of the seventeenth century, these Africans were not chattel, not fully. Planters and overseers didn’t use them that differently than their indentured servants. Slaves and servants alike were subject to routine corporeal punishment. Slaves occupied the furthest point along a continuum of unequal and coercive labor relations. (Also, see here and here.) Even so, 20% of the Africans brought into the Chesapeake before 1675 became free, and some of those freed even received the head-right — a plot of land — promised to European

indentures. Some of those free Africans would command white indentures and own African slaves.

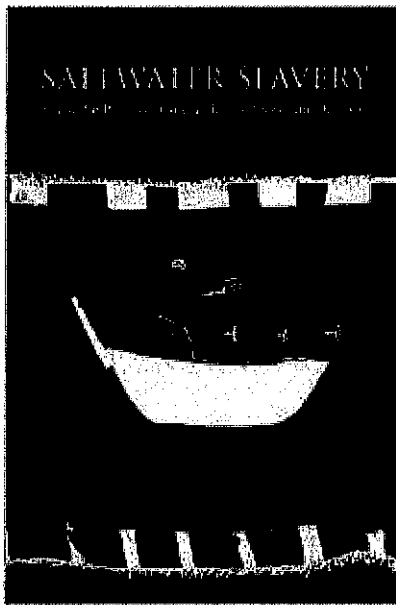
To the British inhabitants of the Chesapeake, Africans looked different. They sounded different. They acted different. But that was true of the Irish, as well. Africans were pagans, but the kind of people who wound up indentured in the Chesapeake weren't exactly model Christians. European and African laborers worked, fornicated, fought, wept, birthed, ate, died, drank, danced, traded with one another, and with the indigenous population. Neither laws nor customs set them apart.

And this would become a problem.

By the 1670s, large landowners — some local planters, some absentees — began to consolidate plantations. This pushed the head-rights out to the least-productive lands on the frontier. In 1676, poor whites joined forces with those of African descent under the leadership of Nathaniel Bacon. They torched Jamestown, the colony's capital. It took British troops several *years* to bring the Chesapeake under control.

Ultimately, planter elites thwarted class conflict by writing laws and by modeling and encouraging social practices that persuaded those with white skin to imagine that tremendous social significance — inherent difference and inferiority — lay underneath black skin. (Also, see [here](#) and [here](#).) New laws regulated social relations — sex, marriage, sociability, trade, assembly, religion — between the “races” that those very laws, in fact, helped to create.

The law of chattel applied to African and African-descended slaves to the fullest extent on eighteenth century plantations. Under racialized chattel slavery, master-enslavers possessed the right to torture and maim, the right to kill, the right to rape, the right to alienate, and the right to own offspring — specifically, the offspring of the *female* slave. The exploitation of enslaved women's reproductive labor became a prerogative that masters shared with other white men. Any offspring resulting from rape increased the master's stock of capital.



Book cover of *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* by Stephanie E. Smallwood © Harvard University Press | Amazon.com

Global commerce in slaves and the commodities they produced gave rise to modern finance, to new industries, and to wage-labor in the eighteenth century. Anchored in London, complex trans-Atlantic networks of trading partnerships, insurers, and banks financed the trade in slaves and slave-produced commodities. (Also, see [here](#).)

Merchant-financiers located in the seaports all around the Atlantic world provided a form of international currency by discounting the bills of exchange generated in the “triangle trade.” These merchant-financiers connected British creditors to colonial planter-debtors. Some of the world’s first financial derivatives — cotton futures contracts — traded on the Cotton Exchange in Liverpool. British industry blossomed. According to Eric Williams, the capital accumulated from the transatlantic trade in slaves and slave-produced commodities financed British sugar refining, rum distillation, metal-working, gun-making, cotton manufacture, transportation infrastructure, and even James Watt’s steam engine.

After the American Revolution, racialized chattel slavery appeared — to some — as inconsistent with the natural rights and liberties of man. Northern states emancipated their few enslaved residents. But more often, racialized chattel slavery served as the negative referent that affirmed the freedom of white males. (Also, see [here](#).) In *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), Thomas Jefferson — who never freed his enslaved sister-in-law, the mother of his own children — postulated that skin color signaled immutable, inheritable inferiority:

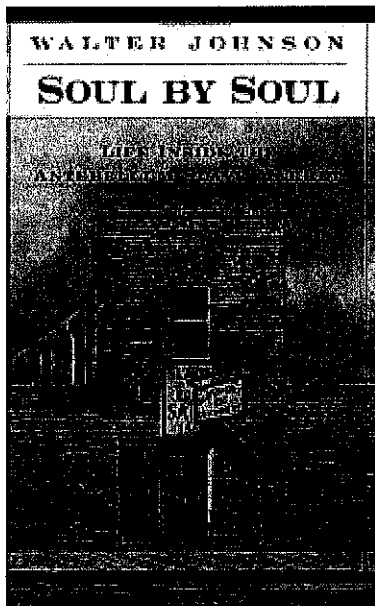
It is not their condition then, but nature, which has produced the distinction... blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are

inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind ... This unfortunate difference of colour, and perhaps of faculty, is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people.

Even so, the former plantation colonies of the Upper South stood in a sorry state after Independence, beset by plummeting commodity prices and depleted soils. After the introduction of the cotton gin in 1791, these master-enslavers found a market for their surplus slave-capital.

The expanding cotton frontier needed capital and the Upper South provided it. Racialized chattel slavery proved itself the most efficient way to produce the world's most important crop. The U.S. produced no cotton for export in 1790. In the antebellum period, the United States supplied most of the world's most traded commodity, the key raw ingredient of the Industrial Revolution. Thanks to cotton, the United States ranked as the world's largest economy on the eve of the Civil War.

From about 1790 until the Civil War, slave-traders and enslavers chained 1 million Americans of African descent into coffles and marched or shipped them down to southeast and southwest states and territories. They were sold at auction houses located in every city in the greater Mississippi Valley.



Book cover of *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* by Walter Johnson
© Harvard University Press | Amazon.com

Capital and capitalist constituted one another at auction. At auction, slaves were stripped and assaulted to judge their strength and their capacity to produce more capital or to gratify the sexual appetites of masters. Perceived markers of docility or defiance informed the imaginative, deeply social practice of valuing slave-capital. In this capital

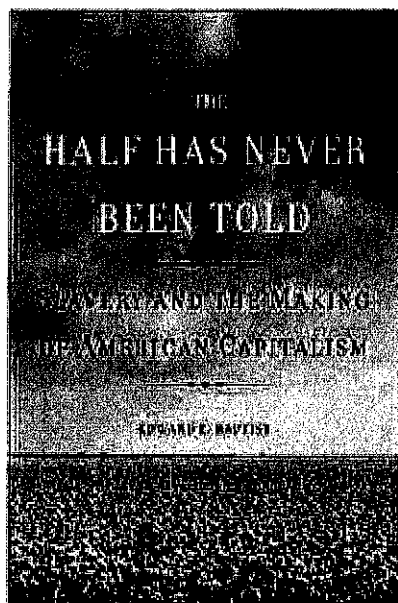
market, Walter Johnson reveals, slaves shaped their sale and masters bought their own selves.

After auction, reconstituted coffles traveled ever deeper into the dark heart of the Cotton Kingdom (also, see here) and after 1836, into the new Republic of Texas. Five times more slaves lived in the United States in 1861 than in 1790, despite the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in 1808 and despite the high levels of infant mortality in the Cotton Kingdom. Slavery was no dying institution.

By 1820, the slave-labor camps that stretched west from South Carolina to Arkansas and south to the Gulf Coast allowed the United States to achieve dominance in the world market for cotton, the most crucial commodity of the Industrial Revolution. At that date, U.S. cotton was the world's most widely traded commodity. Without those exports, the national economy as a whole could not acquire the goods and the credit it required from abroad.

And the Industrial Revolution that produced those goods depended absolutely on what Kenneth Pomeranz identifies as the “ghost acres” of the New World: those acres seeded, tended, and harvested by slaves of African descent. Pomeranz estimates that if, in 1830, Great Britain had to grow *for itself, on its own soil* the calories that its workers consumed as sugar, or if it had to raise enough sheep to replace the cotton it imported from the United States, this would have required no less than an additional 25 million acres of land.

In New England and (mostly) Manchester, waged-workers spun cotton thread which steam-powered mills spun into cloth. Once a luxury good, cotton cloth now radically transformed the way human beings across the globe outfitted themselves and their surroundings. Manchester and Lowell discovered an enormous market in the same African-American slaves that grew, tended and cleaned raw cotton, along with the same workers who operated the machines that spun and wove that cotton into cloth. According to Seth Rockman's forthcoming book, *Plantation Goods and the National Economy of Slavery*, the ready-made clothing industry emerged in response to the demand from planters for cheap garments to clothe their slaves.



Book cover of *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* by Edward E. Baptist © Basic Books | Amazon.com

The explosion in cotton supply did not occur simply because more land came under cultivation. It came from increased productivity, as new work by Ed Baptist illustrates. The Cotton Kings combined the bullwhip with new methods of surveilling, measuring, and accounting for the productivity of the enslaved, radically reorganizing patterns of plantation labor. Planter-enslavers compelled their slave-capital to invent ways to increase their productivity — think of bidexterous Patsey in Solomon Northrup's *Twelve Years a Slave*. At the end of every day, the overseer weighed the pickings of each individual, chalking up the numbers on a slate. Results were compared to each individual's quota. Shortfalls were “settled” in lashes. Later the master copied those picking totals into his ledger and erased the slate (both mass-produced by burgeoning new industries up North). Then he set new quotas. And the quotas *always increased*. Between 1800 and 1860, productivity increases on established plantations matched the productivity increases of the workers that tended to the spinning machines in Manchester in the same period, according to Ed Baptist.

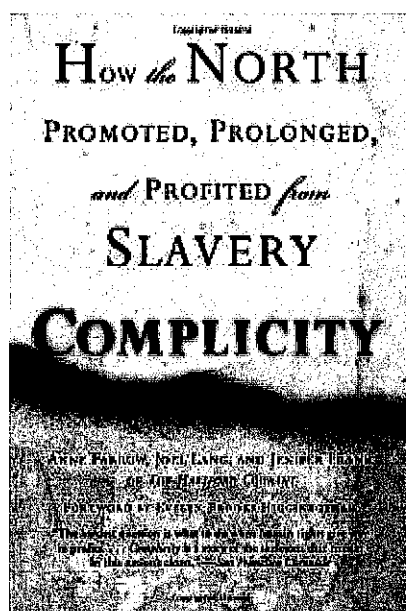
Slavery proved crucial in the emergence of American finance. Profits from commerce, finance, and insurance related to cotton and to slaves flowed to merchant-financiers located in New Orleans and mid-Atlantic port cities, including New York City, where a global financial center grew up on Wall Street.

Cotton Kings themselves devised financial innovations that channeled the savings of investors across the nation and Western Europe to the Mississippi Valley. Cotton Kings, slave traders, and cotton merchants demanded vast amounts of credit to fund their ceaseless speculation and expansion. Planter-enslavers held valuable, liquid collateral: 2

million slaves worth \$2 billion, a third of the wealth owned by all U.S. citizens, according to Ed Baptist. With the help of firms like Baring Brothers, Brown Brothers, and Rothschilds, the Cotton Kings sold bonds to capitalize new banks from which they secured loans (pledging their slaves and land for collateral). These bonds were secured by the full faith and credit of the state that chartered the bank. Even as northern states and European empires emancipated their own slaves, investors from these regions shared in the profits of the slave-labor camps in the Cotton Kingdom.

The Cotton Kings did something that neither Freddy, nor Fannie, nor any of “too big to fail” banks managed to do. They secured an *explicit and total* government guarantee for their banks, placing taxpayers on the hook for interest and principal.

It all ended in the Panic of 1837, when the bubble in southeastern land and slaves burst. Southern taxpayers refused to pay the debts of the planter-banks. Southern States defaulted on those bonds, hampering the South’s ability to raise money through the securities markets for more than a century. Cotton Kings would become dependent *as individuals* on financial intermediaries tied to Wall Street, firms like Lehman Brothers (founded in Alabama).



Book cover of *Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery* by A. Farrow, J. Lang, and J. Frank © Ballantine Books | Amazon.com

It didn’t take very long for the flow of credit to resume. By mid-century, racialized chattel slavery had built not only a wealthy and powerful South. It had also given rise to an industrializing and diversifying North. In New England, where sharp Yankees once amassed profits by plying the transatlantic slave trade — and continued to profit by transporting slave-produced commodities and insuring the enslaved — new industries

rose up alongside the textile mills. High protective tariffs on foreign manufactures made the products of U.S. mills and factories competitive in domestic markets, especially in markets supplying plantations.

After the Erie Canal opened in 1824, the North slowly began to reorient towards timber and coal extraction, grain production, livestock, transportation construction, and the manufacture of a vast array of commodities for all manner of domestic and international markets. Chicago supplanted New Orleans. By the 1850s, industrial and agricultural capitalists above the Mason-Dixon line no longer needed cotton to the same extent that they once did. With the notable exception of Wall Street interests in New York City, Northerners began to resist the political power — and the territorial ambitions — of the Cotton Kings. Sectional animosity set the stage for the Civil War.

But up to that point, slave-capital proved indispensable to the emergence of industrial capitalism and to the ascent of the United States as a global economic power. Indeed, the violent dispossession of racialized chattel slaves from their labor, their bodies, and their families — not the enclosure of the commons identified by Karl Marx — set capitalism in motion and sustained capital accumulation for three centuries.

Adapted from a lecture in the team-taught course “Rethinking Capitalism” at The New School for Social Research.

See Also

- [Top 10 List of Best American Historical Writing](#)
- [Human Trafficking](#)
- [Ferguson and Fatherhood: My Turn to Give The Talk](#)
- [How Capitalism Will End](#)
- [Why Obama is Responsible for the Debacle of his Presidency](#)
- [Cop Violence and the Order of Urban Terrorism](#)
- [Is This Still Capitalism?](#)

#2: How Slavery Led to Modern Capitalism: Echoes

3:22 PM EST

January 24, 2012



A slave being auctioned, 1861. Source: Sketch by Thomas R. Davis, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

By Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman

When the New York City banker James Brown tallied his wealth in 1842, he had to look far below Wall Street to trace its origins. His investments in the American South exceeded \$1.5 million, a quarter of which was directly bound up in the ownership of slave plantations.

Brown was among the world's most powerful dealers in raw cotton, and his family's firm, Brown Brothers & Co., served as one of the most important sources of capital and foreign exchange to the U.S. economy. Still, no small amount of his time was devoted to managing slaves from the study of his Leonard Street brownstone in Lower Manhattan.

Brown was hardly unusual among the capitalists of the North. Nicholas Biddle's United States Bank of Philadelphia funded banks in Mississippi to promote the expansion of plantation lands. Biddle recognized that slave-grown cotton was the only thing made in the U.S. that had the capacity to bring gold and silver into the vaults of the nation's banks. Likewise, the architects of New England's industrial revolution watched the price of cotton with rapt attention, for their textile mills would have been silent without the labor of slaves on distant plantations.

The story we tell about slavery is almost always regional, rather than national. We remember it as a cruel institution of the southern states that would later secede from the Union. Slavery, in this telling, appears limited in scope, an unfortunate detour on the nation's march to modernity, and certainly not the engine of American economic prosperity.

Yet to understand slavery's centrality to the rise of American capitalism, just consider the history of an antebellum Alabama dry-goods outfit called Lehman Brothers or a Rhode Island textile manufacturer that would become the antecedent firm of Berkshire Hathaway Inc.

Reparations lawsuits (since dismissed) generated evidence of slave insurance policies by Aetna and put Brown University and other elite educational institutions on notice that the slave-trade enterprises of their early benefactors were potential legal liabilities. Recent state and municipal disclosure ordinances have forced firms such as JPMorgan Chase & Co. and Wachovia Corp. to confront unsettling ancestors on their corporate family trees.

Such revelations are hardly surprising in light of slavery's role in spurring the nation's economic development. America's "take-off" in the 19th century wasn't in spite of slavery; it was largely thanks to it. And recent research in economic history goes further: It highlights the role that commodified human beings played in the emergence of modern capitalism itself.

The U.S. won its independence from Britain just as it was becoming possible to imagine a liberal alternative to the mercantilist policies of the colonial era. Those best situated to take advantage of these new opportunities -- those who would soon be called "capitalists" -- rarely started from scratch, but instead drew on wealth generated earlier in the robust Atlantic economy of slaves, sugar and tobacco. Fathers who made their fortunes outfitting ships for distant voyages begat sons who built factories, chartered banks, incorporated canal and railroad enterprises, invested in government securities, and speculated in new financial instruments.

This recognizably modern capitalist economy was no less reliant on slavery than the mercantilist economy of the preceding century. Rather, it offered a wider range of opportunities to profit from the remote labor of slaves, especially as cotton emerged as the indispensable commodity of the age of industry.

In the North, where slavery had been abolished and cotton failed to grow, the enterprising might transform slave-grown cotton into clothing; market other manufactured goods, such as hoes and hats, to plantation owners; or invest in securities tied to next year's crop prices in places such as Liverpool and Le Havre. This network linked Mississippi planters and Massachusetts manufacturers to the era's great financial firms: the Barings, Browns and Rothschilds.

A major financial crisis in 1837 revealed the interdependence of cotton planters, manufacturers and investors, and their collective dependence on the labor of slaves. Leveraged cotton -- pledged but not yet picked -- led overseers to whip their slaves to

pick more, and prodded auctioneers to liquidate slave families to cover the debts of the overextended.

The plantation didn't just produce the commodities that fueled the broader economy, it also generated innovative business practices that would come to typify modern management. As some of the most heavily capitalized enterprises in antebellum America, plantations offered early examples of time-motion studies and regimentation through clocks and bells. Seeking ever-greater efficiencies in cotton picking, slaveholders reorganized their fields, regimented the workday, and implemented a system of vertical reporting that made overseers into managers answerable to those above for the labor of those below.

The perverse reality of a capitalized labor force led to new accounting methods that incorporated (human) property depreciation in the bottom line as slaves aged, as well as new actuarial techniques to indemnify slaveholders from loss or damage to the men and women they owned. Property rights in human beings also created a lengthy set of judicial opinions that would influence the broader sanctity of private property in U.S. law.

So important was slavery to the American economy that on the eve of the Civil War, many commentators predicted that the North would kill "its golden goose." That prediction didn't come to pass, and as a result, slavery's importance to American economic development has been obscured.

But as scholars delve deeper into corporate archives and think more critically about coerced labor and capitalism -- perhaps informed by the current scale of human trafficking -- the importance of slavery to American economic history will become inescapable.

(Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, historians at Harvard University and Brown University respectively, are co-editing "Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development," to be published by University of Pennsylvania Press in 2013. The opinions expressed are their own.)

To contact the writers of this post: Sven Beckert at beckert@fas.harvard.edu and Seth Rockman at Seth_Rockman@brown.edu.

To contact the editor responsible for this post: Timothy Lavin at tlavin1@bloomberg.net.

#3: American finance grew on the back of slaves

Posted: 03/06/2014, 06:32pm | BY Edward E. Baptist and Louis Hyman

Last weekend we watched the Oscars and, like most people, were pleased that “Twelve Years a Slave” won Best Picture. No previous film has so accurately captured the reality of enslaved people’s lives. Yet though Twelve Years shows us the labor of slavery, it omits the financial system — asset securitization — that made slavery possible.

Most people can see how slave labor, like the cotton-picking in “Twelve Years A Slave,” was pure exploitation. Few recognize that a financial system nearly as sophisticated as ours today helped Solomon Northup’s enslavers steal him, buy him, and market the cotton he made. The key patterns of that financial history continue to repeat themselves in our history. Again and again, African-American individuals and families have worked hard to produce wealth, but American finance, whether in the antebellum period or today, has snatched black wealth through bonds backed by asset securitization.

Recently, the assets behind these bonds were houses. In the antebellum period, the assets were slaves themselves.

Every year or two, somebody discovers that a famous bank on Wall Street profited from slavery. This discovery is always treated as if the relationship between slavery and the American financial system were some kind of odd accident, disconnected from the present. But it was not an accident. The cotton and slave trades were the biggest businesses in antebellum America, and then as now, American finance developed its most innovative products to finance the biggest businesses.

In the 1830s, powerful Southern slaveowners wanted to import capital into their states so they could buy more slaves. They came up with a new, two-part idea: mortgaging slaves; and then turning the mortgages into bonds that could be marketed all over the world.

First, American planters organized new banks, usually in new states like Mississippi and Louisiana. Drawing up lists of slaves for collateral, the planters then mortgaged them to the banks they had created, enabling themselves to buy additional slaves to expand cotton production. To provide capital for those loans, the banks sold bonds to investors from around the globe — London, New York, Amsterdam, Paris. The bond buyers, many of whom lived in countries where slavery was illegal, didn’t own individual slaves — just bonds backed by their value. Planters’ mortgage payments paid the interest and the principle on these bond payments. Enslaved human beings had been, in modern financial lingo, “securitized.”

As slave-backed mortgages became paper bonds, everybody profited — except, obviously, enslaved African Americans whose forced labor repaid owners’ mortgages.

But investors owed a piece of slave-earned income. Older slave states such as Maryland and Virginia sold slaves to the new cotton states, at securitization-inflated prices, resulting in slave asset bubble. Cotton factor firms like the now-defunct Lehman Brothers — founded in Alabama — became wildly successful. Lehman moved to Wall Street, and for all these firms, every transaction in slave-earned money flowing in and out of the U.S. earned Wall Street firms a fee.

☒

The infant American financial industry nourished itself on profits taken from financing slave traders, cotton brokers and underwriting slave-backed bonds. But though slavery ended in 1865, in the years after the Civil War, black entrepreneurs would find themselves excluded from a financial system originally built on their bodies. As we remind our students in our new online course American Capitalism: A History, African-Americans — unable to borrow either to buy property or start businesses — lived in a capitalist economy that allowed them to work, but not to benefit.

More recently, history repeated itself — or more accurately, continued. The antebellum world eerily prefigured the recent financial crisis, in which Wall Street securitization once again stepped in to strip black families of their wealth.

In the 1990s red-lining began to end and black homeownership rates began to rise, increasing the typical family's wealth to \$12,100 by 2005 — or one-twelfth that of white households. In those years, African-American family incomes were also rising about as rapidly as white family incomes. And yet, African-American buyers, playing catch-up after centuries of exclusion from the benefits of credit, still typically had lower net worth and credit ratings. They paid higher interest rates and fees to join the housing bubble, and so securitizing their mortgages brought enormous profits to lenders and investors.

Then the crash of 2008 came. By 2010, median African-American household wealth had plunged by 60 percent — all those years of hard work lost in fees, interest, and falling prices. For whites, the decline was only 23 percent, and those losses were short-lived. Lenders resumed lending to white borrowers, restoring the value of their assets. But African-American borrowers have had a much harder time getting new loans, much less holding on to property bought at securitization-inflated prices. Median white household wealth is now back up to 22 times that of blacks — erasing African-Americans' asset gains over the preceding 20 years.

Recent foreclosures represent another transfer of wealth from African-Americans to the investors of the world. For the past 200 years, the success of American finance has been built on the impoverishment of African-American families. We should remember the heroic struggles of African Americans to get political equality, but to forget their

exclusion from our financial system, except as a source of exploitation, is to miss a basic truth of not only black history but financial history.

Edward E. Baptist and Louis Hyman teach history at Cornell

Edward E. Baptist

#4: Toxic Debt, Liar Loans, and Securitized Human Beings

The Panic of 1837 and the fate of slavery

Early in the last decade, an Ayn Rand disciple named Alan Greenspan, who had been trusted with the U.S. government's powers for regulating the financial economy, stated his faith in the ability of that economy to maintain its own stability: "Recent regulatory reform coupled with innovative technologies has spawned rapidly growing markets for, among other products, asset-backed securities, collateral loan obligations, and credit derivative default swaps. These increasingly complex financial instruments have contributed, especially over the recent stressful period, to the development of a far more flexible, efficient, and hence resilient financial system than existed just a quarter-century ago."

At the beginning of this decade, in the wake of the failure of Greenspan's faith to prevent the eclipse of one economic order of things, Robert Solow, another towering figure in the economics profession, reflected on Greenspan's credo and voiced his suspicion that the financialization of the U.S. economy over the last quarter-century created not "real," but fictitious wealth: "Flexible maybe, resilient apparently not, but how about efficient? How much do all those exotic securities, and the institutions that create them, buy them, and sell them, actually contribute to the 'real' economy that provides us with goods and services, now and for the future?"

These versions of the Panic are capsules that carry other versions of the history of American capitalism into the bloodstream of historical consciousness.

Solow's distinction between the "real" economy and the "exotic" realm of securitized debts like mortgage bonds, credit default swaps, toxic debt, and zombie banks is not uniquely his. As a widespread assumption—a persistent distinction in our thought between "real" and "fictive" money, wealth, or productivity—it may be one factor that accounts for the reluctance of many historians to delve into financial dynamics when seeking to account for "Hard Times." Reflexively, we analyze such dynamics with the tools of the linguistic turn, and so spend our time demonstrating that the fictions on which economic actors build their worlds are, in fact, fictional. (Most historians are also reluctant—maybe even unprepared—to work with numbers.) But when collective euphoria, financial innovation, and astonishing disproportions of power mix together,

what bubbles into being is anything but mere vapor. We can minimize its weight by calling it fiction, but we do so only at grave risk to our understanding of what happened and why. For in such financial exchanges we see not only the generation and transfer of real wealth—that is, real effects in the social and political world—but also that such transfers can incorporate great violence and disruption for some as the causes of great profit for others.



"Slave Market of America," William S. Dorr, 67 x 50 cm., broadside published by the American Anti-Slavery Society (New York, 1836). Courtesy of the Broadside Collection at the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. Click image to enlarge in new window.

Read casually through the pieces of paper that document Jacob Bieller's life and enterprises, and this planter of Concordia Parish, Louisiana might look like someone who lived not just thousands, but millions of miles away from the center of international financial markets in the 1830s—and his business might seem even more distant in kind from the markets that worry us in our own day. Browse through the letters between Bieller and his son Joseph, the latter writing from the bank of Bayou Macon, thirty miles or so from Jacob's own place on the Mississippi River. Joseph wrote his father in an untutored orthography, recounting the events of life on a cotton labor camp, or what contemporaries called a plantation: "I shall be short of corn," or someone has found the body of the father of Enos, Bieller's overseer, the old man having "drownded in Deer Drink." The cyclical rhythm of forced agricultural labor thrummed onward—"I send you by Enos fifteen cotton pickers they are all I can spare. We have twelve thousand weight of cotton to pick yet from the appearance of the boals yet to open." Always the urge to extract more product clashed with the objection of the enslaved to their condition: "I

have had a verry seveal time among my negros at home. they have bin swinging my hogs and pigs. Harry & Roberson I caught. I stake Harry and gave him 175 lashes and Roberson 150. since that I found two hogs badly crippled." You can almost see the Spanish moss on the low branches, parting as the whining hog lurches out; can picture Enos's father as he poles his pirogue. His booted foot slips on the wet edge; you hear him splashing frantically as the dark water gurgles.

For good and for ill, though, there is much more in common than what we might initially suspect between Jacob Bieller and—for instance—the men and women who "broke the world" in the most recent collapse of the global financial system. The Panic of 1837 launched America's biggest and most consequential economic depression before the Civil War. And it was the decisions and behavior of thousands of actors like Bieller that created a perfect financial storm: bringing an end to one kind of capitalist boom; destroying the confidence of the slaveholding class, impoverishing millions of workers and farmers who were linked to the global economy; demolishing the already disrupted lives of hundreds of thousands of people like Harry and Roberson. Historians have usually described the Panic of 1837 differently, fitting it in their own categorical boxes: Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., the court historian of New Deal Democrats, saw "the business community," with their "dizzy pyramiding of paper credits," as the problem. Historians of American banking, usually a specialized breed interested in, what else, banking, often blame the Panic on Andrew Jackson—in their telling, an ignorant lout obsessed with the idol of precious metal. For them, the cause of the Panic was the Specie Circular of 1836, which forced U.S. government agencies to stop accepting the paper banknotes pumped out by state-chartered banks and to demand specie (metal coins: gold or silver, usually) in payment for federal land and other obligations.

These versions of the Panic are capsules that carry other versions of the history of American capitalism into the bloodstream of historical consciousness. Was the Panic the result of a struggle between factory owners and factory workers, with a dash of hardy Jeffersonian farmers suspicious of the new way of making money? No, it was created by a struggle for greater efficiencies, a process of sweeping away old institutions and prejudices so that the market could be all in all! Yet we have received a recent education in booms and busts, bubbles and panics, one that alerts us to other stories. The first lesson we have learned (or relearned) is that a financial crisis is a mighty and powerful thing. The actors will respond to its impact with language and we historians will want to interrogate those words with the tools of cultural history. Surely it is significant that businessmen were "embarrassed" when their "friends" would not "sustain" their "credit" (Note how the scarequotes "problematize" each word, demanding that we unpack its contextual meaning.) Yet if that is all historians care about, they leave the mechanics of historical financial crises to the court historians of the great banking dynasties, or to economists. The history of financial panics reminds us that we have to integrate the

study of big, impersonal forces with the study of how people shape meaning out of their individual lives.

If we look closely at the transformations and innovations that led to the Panic of 1837, we find new evidence about the role of slavery and slave labor in the creation of our modern, industrialized—and post-modernly financialized—world. Look a little more closely at Jacob Bieller, who can tell us things worth the due diligence. In 1837 Bieller was 67 years old. He had grown up in South Carolina, where in the first few years of the nineteenth century he and his father took advantage of that state's reopening of the African slave trade and speculated in survivors of the Middle Passage. In 1809, little more than a year after Congress closed the legal Atlantic slave trade, Bieller moved west. Driven in part by divorce from his first wife, but drawn by the opportunities for an entrepreneurial slave owner in the new cotton lands opening to the west, Bieller took his son Joseph and 27 enslaved African Americans and settled just up the Mississippi River from Natchez, on the Louisiana side.



"Barbarity Committed on a Free African," drawing by Alexander Rider, engraved by Alexander Lawson, 8.7 x 14.3 cm. Illustration for face page 36, *A Portraiture of Domestic Slavery in the United States*, Jesse Torrey, (Philadelphia, 1817). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. Click image to enlarge in new window.

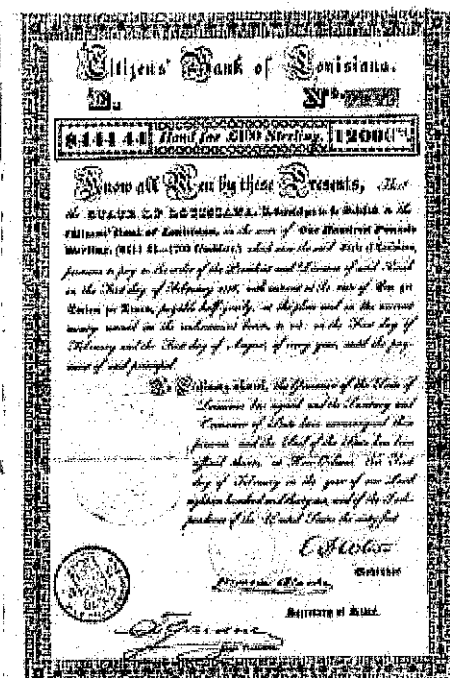
The enslaved people that Bieller brought to Concordia Parish became the root of his fortune—as they and a million others like them would become the root of the prosperity of not just the antebellum southwestern states, but of the United States as a whole. And perhaps one could go further than the U.S. By the 1830s, the cotton that enslaved people grew in the new states and territories taken from Native Americans in the early nineteenth century was the most widely traded commodity in the world. Its sale underwrote investments in new forms of enterprise north of slavery. It was also the raw material of the industrial revolution. The creation of textile factories in the British

Midlands launched a process of continuous technological innovation, urbanization, and creation of markets that broke the Malthusian traps of traditional agricultural society. First Britain, and then the U.S., and then the rest of Western Europe achieved sustained rates of economic growth never before seen in human history.

The easy way out is to credit this astonishing growth to the increasing division of labor and high pace of technological innovation—the spinning jenny, the mechanical loom—that emerged in the eighteenth-century British manufacturing sector. But world historian Kenneth Pomeranz insists that we also have to look at the capacity of environments to produce resources if we want to understand what really allowed the West to emerge from the rest of the pack. The cotton fields of the slave South were particularly crucial because they allowed Britain to break out of its own "cul-de-sac" of resources: the limits imposed by the delicate balances between labor, land, fuel, food, and fiber that kept such a revolution from occurring in other societies. Even if every acre in Britain were converted into fiber production, the island would have been incapable of matching the capacity of the slave South to produce the raw materials for a textile-based economic transformation, to say nothing of the labor that would have to be taken out of the pool of potential factory workers to produce fiber.

When Jacob Bieller put his two dozen slaves to work growing and picking cotton, his whip was also driving the creation of a new, more complex, more dynamic world economy. In the lifetime between the ratification of the Constitution and the secession of the Confederacy, enslavers moved more than a million enslaved African Americans to cotton-growing areas taken by the new nation from their original inhabitants. Forced migrations and stolen labor yielded an astonishing increase in cotton production: from 1.2 million pounds in 1790 to 2.1 *billion* in 1859, and an incredible dominance over the international market—by the 1830s, 80% of the cotton used by the British textile industry came from the southern U.S.

We live today with the results of the long days that Bieller's slaves sweated out in the field, but we also live in a world distantly shaped by the financial decisions of cotton entrepreneurs on both sides of the Atlantic—as well as by the forgetfulness of those who have not learned from their lessons of two centuries ago. Specifically: their decisions about how to obtain and use credit, as well as to manage risk. And there was risk aplenty. Up and down the chain of (mostly white) people who sold, traded, shipped, and speculated on the cotton that enslaved people made, credit and risk were imminent to the task of moving the world's most important commodity through a chain of buyers and sellers that stretched from Louisiana cotton field to Liverpool cotton exchange. Prices suddenly dropped when rumors raced through New Orleans, New York, or Liverpool: "Optimism prevailed"—till the market learned that the U.S. crop is too big for the demand this year. Cloth isn't selling because of "overproduction." The mill workers in Manchester have been "turned out"—laid off.



"Bond in Sterling from Citizens' Bank of Louisiana," February 1, 1886. Courtesy of the Louisiana Banking Series, Manuscripts Collection, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University Libraries, New Orleans, Louisiana. Click image to enlarge in new window.

When rumors of bad news overwhelmed the desire for speculative gain—when the "animal spirits" of the marketplace, to use a term coined by John Maynard Keynes, turned negative—a massive, systemic crash could result. This is what almost happened in 1824-1825, when cotton buyers were initially convinced that the 1824 crop was small. After buying all the bales that they could at rising prices, middlemen discovered that in fact the crop had been very large. Beginning with Adam Smith, utopian economists have argued that the logical outcome of profit-maximizing behavior by all market actors is the maximum collective benefit. In this case, when the price of a pound of cotton plummeted, merchant firms were unable to pay back the short-term commercial loans they had taken, and so they demanded repayment from their fellow firms to whom they had made loans. This individually rational behavior—shoring up liquidity as pressure for payment increased—led to collectively irrational outcomes. Every firm was suddenly moving in the same direction, every firm faced the same crisis, each one responded in the same way. The result was crash and paralysis in the British cotton and credit markets.

The mini-crash of 1824-26, like every financial panic, underlined the problem of systemic risk. The fact that the mid-decade's outbreak of animal spirits did not end in full-scale economic disaster in the U.S. was a result, some believed, of the expanded ability of the Second Bank of the United States to regulate the level of systemic risk in

the American economy. Under the direction of Nicholas Biddle the B.U.S. fulfilled many of the functions of a modern central bank. By forcing smaller, state-chartered banks to redeem their own credit in highly convertible currency, like gold dollars, British pounds, or banknotes of the B.U.S. itself, Biddle's Bank kept a tight rein on those institutions. They could not issue too much credit. By making and by calling in its own loans, the B.U.S. also "curtailed" speculation on the part of private individuals. The B.U.S. ensured a level of systemic stability that in turn enabled individual market participants to devise workable strategies for hedging against individual counterparties. To avoid the possibility that they might be left holding the hot potato if cotton prices dropped suddenly, middlemen began insisting on shipping cotton bales on consignment. This meant that planters still owned their crop and bore much of the risk of a drop in price, up until one of the buyers working for the Manchester textile companies purchased it.

The Bank not only worked to prevent financial panics but to drive steady growth. As the single biggest lender in the economy, it lent directly to individual entrepreneurs—including enslavers like Jacob Bieller, who were always eager to buy more human capital whom they could put to work in the cotton fields of the southwest. "The US Bank and the Planters Bank at this place has thrown a large amt of cash into circulation," wrote slave trader Isaac Franklin from Natchez in 1832. Franklin was the Sam Walton of the internal slave trade in the U.S., selling hundreds or even thousands of men and women in New Orleans and Natchez in a given year. In fact, by the early 1830s, the Natchez and New Orleans branches had lent out a full third of the capital of the B.U.S., much of it used to buy thousands of enslaved people from the Chesapeake, Kentucky, and North Carolina. Some of the lending was in the form of renewable "accommodation loans" to large-scale planters who were members of, or connected to, the clique of insiders who ran the B.U.S. branch and the series of state banks chartered by the Mississippi government. Even more of the lending was in the form of commercial credit to cotton buyers. This kept the price of cotton steady and, finding its way to the planters themselves, inspired Natchez-area enslavers to buy more of the people that Franklin and others were purchasing in the Chesapeake states and shipping to the Mississippi Valley.

While planters like Jacob Bieller waited for payment, merchants like the Natchez broker Alvarez Fisk, a Massachusetts-born man who funneled bank money to planters and cotton to Liverpool, lent them operating funds. But ultimately the entire structure was bottomed on, founded on, funded by the bodies of enslaved people: on the ability of slaveholders to extract cotton from them, and on the ability of slaveholders (or bankruptcy courts) to sell them to someone else who wanted to extract cotton. And the fact that cotton fields were the place where the margins of growth were created meant that they presented lenders with both needs and opportunities to hedge against the risk that individual counterparties would default.

*Liste des esclaves offerts à la Banque des Citoyens
par M. J. B. Maureau.*

Louis — 33 —	Mary Sandridge — 18
Spencer — 31	Francis — 33
Lynne — 23	Fanny — 20
Betty — 26	Octavia — 1
Manch — 8	Barbara Margaret — 31
John — 1	Louisa — 34
Matthew — 27	Julius — 16
Charles — 11	Alabauda muler — 9
Will — 6	Victorina — 7
Melinda — 3	Sophia — 4
Edmond — 4 min	Agnes — 35
	Betsy — 8 min
14 —	18 —
à A. Gordonet	à M. Maureau
J. B. Maureau	

"List of Slaves Mortgaged to the Citizens' Bank," Courtesy of the Louisiana Banking Series, Manuscripts Collection, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University Libraries, New Orleans, Louisiana.

For there were many things that could cause individual counterparties, especially planters, to fail. They depended on the bodies and the lives of people whom they also brutally exploited, beginning with their forced migration to a deadly environment. The cotton country of the Mississippi Valley was hot and wet, and the people transported there died of fevers in great number. One of the chatty letters written by Daniel Draffin, an Englishman Jacob Bieller hired to tutor his grandchildren, described the mosquitoes that flew in phalanx formation: "I have been out gunning when I could not take sight they were so numerous." Mosquitoes loved all of the new blood; and there was plenty of it: 155,000 transported from the old slave states to the new ones in the 1820s, for instance, according to the best existing estimate. And other diseases besides malaria thrived in the radically new environment of the ghost acres. In 1832-33, cholera raged through the slave labor camps of Mississippi and Louisiana, carried on the same steamboats that brought new slaves in and took cotton out. At the "Forks in the Road," the huge slave market just outside of Natchez, Isaac Franklin desperately hid the evidence of epidemic among his "fancy stock of wool and ivory," as his cousin coarsely put it. "The way we send out dead negroes at night and keep dark is a sin," wrote Isaac about secret burials in the woods behind his barracoon. He kept the secret hidden, and

the price of men up at \$700 per, until "I sold Old Man Alsop's two scald headed boys for \$800 one of them Took the Cholera the day afterwards and died and the other was very near kicking the Bucket." During boom times in particular, death rates for the enslaved in the new southwestern states and territories were comparable to those in the Caribbean, or in the lowcountry of South Carolina.

Then there was simple failure, sometimes for reasons endemic to slavery's new frontiers, sometimes not. Even as cotton markets soared in the 1830s, Jacob Bieller, for instance, plunged into his own personal crash. His daughter by his second marriage eloped with an ambitious young local lawyer named Felix Bosworth. She was only fifteen or so, but it seems likely that Bieller's wife, Nancy, encouraged the elopement because she quickly left home to join her daughter, and began divorce proceedings—claiming half of Bieller's property. According to Nancy, not only had Jacob threatened to shoot her in 1827, but for years "he kept a concubine in their common dwelling & elsewhere, publicly and openly." (The courts of Louisiana declined to rule on either charge when they eventually granted the couple a divorce. Jacob's last will gave tacit freedom "to my slaves Mary Clarkson and her son Coulson, a boy something more than five years old, both bright mulattoes.")

In a moment of despair, Jacob wrote on the cover of a family bible that his daughter's elopement had "destroyed my welfare, family, and prospects." But it was clear that the ultimate hedge for him, for Nancy, and for Alvarez Fisk and Isaac Franklin, was the relative liquidity of enslaved people. (Bieller had recently purchased dozens of additional slaves on credit from Isaac Franklin, paying more than \$1,000 each, bringing his total number of captives to over eighty). All he and Nancy had to debate about was the method—he wanted to sell all those determined to be community rather than separate property, and divide the cash. She wanted to divide the men, women, and children up, "scattering them," she wrote, intentionally. Enslaved people, Nancy said, were "susceptible to a division in kind without injury to us." Or to a sale, so long as the system was not in crisis and there was a steady market, Jacob could have retorted. Either way, the families of the almost one hundred people listed in Bieller's documents would be melted like ice in his summer drink.

For everyone who drew profit in the system, enslaved human beings were the ultimate hedge. Cotton merchants, bankers, slave traders—everybody whose money the planter borrowed and could not pay until the time the cotton was sold at a high enough price to pay off his or her debts—all could expect that eventually enslaved people would either 1) make enough cotton to enable the planter to get clear or 2) be sold in order to generate the liquidity to pay off the debt. In 1824, Vincent Nolte, a freewheeling entrepreneur who almost cornered the New Orleans cotton market more than once in the 1810s, lent \$48,000 to Louisiana-based enslaver Alonzo Walsh. The terms? Walsh had to pay the money back in four years at a rate of about eight percent. To secure payment he

committed to consigning his entire crop each year to Nolte to be sold in Liverpool. And, just in case, he provided collateral: "from 90 to a 100 head of first rate slaves will be mortgaged." In 1824 those nearly five score people meant up to \$80,000 on the New Orleans auction block—a form of property whose value fluctuated less than bales of cotton.



"Slave Sale, Charleston, South Carolina," from a sketch by Eyre Crowe. Illustration in *The Illustrated London News* (Nov. 29, 1856). Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Yet enslavers had already—by the end of the 1820s—created a highly innovative alternative to the existing financial structure. The Consolidated Association of the Planters of Louisiana (despite its name, the "C.A.P.L." was still a bank) created more leverage for enslavers at less cost, and on longer terms. It did so by securitizing slaves, hedging even more effectively against the individual investors' losses—so long as the financial system itself did not fail. Here is how it worked: potential borrowers mortgaged slaves and cultivated land to the C.A.P.L., which entitled them to borrow up to half of the assessed value of their property from the C.A.P.L. in bank notes. To convince others to accept the notes thus disbursed at face value, the C.A.P.L. convinced the Louisiana legislature to back \$2.5 million in bank bonds (due in ten to fifteen years, bearing five percent interest) with the "faith and credit" of the people of the state. The great British merchant bank Baring Brothers agreed to advance the C.A.P.L. the equivalent of \$2.5 million in sterling bills, and market the bonds on European securities markets.

The bonds effectively converted enslavers' biggest investment—human beings, or "hands," from Maryland and Virginia and North Carolina and Kentucky—into multiple

streams of income, all under their own control, since all borrowers were officially stockholders in the bank. The sale of the bonds created a pool of high-quality credit to be lent back to the planters at a rate significantly lower than the rate of return that they could expect that money to produce. That pool could be used for all sorts of income-generating purposes: buying more slaves (to produce more cotton and sugar and hence more income) or lending to other enslavers. Clever borrowers could pyramid their leverage even higher—by borrowing on the same collateral from multiple lenders, by also getting unsecured short-term commercial loans from the C.A.P.L., by purchasing new slaves with the money they borrowed and borrowing on them too. They had mortgaged their slaves—sometimes multiple times, and sometimes they even mortgaged fictitious slaves—but in contrast to what Walsh had to promise Nolte in 1824, this type of mortgage gave the enslaver tremendous margins, control, and flexibility. It was hard to imagine that such borrowers would be foreclosed, even if they fell behind on their payments. After all, the borrowers owned the bank.

Using the C.A.P.L. model, slaveowners were now able to monetize their slaves by securitizing them and then leveraging them multiple times on the international financial market. This also allowed a much wider group of people to profit from the opportunities of slavery's expansion. Perhaps it was no accident that the typical bond issued by the C.A.P.L. and the series of copycat institutions that followed was denominated at \$1,000, which was roughly the price of a field hand. For the investor who bought it from the House of Baring Brothers or some other seller, a bond was really the purchase of a completely commodified slave: not a particular individual, but a tiny percentage of each of thousands of slaves. The investor, of course, escaped the risk inherent in owning an individual slave, who might die, run away, or become rebellious.

Between 1831 and 1834, for reasons about which historians have argued long and hard (without, alas, reaching consensus), President Andrew Jackson fought a brutal battle against the Second Bank of the United States. The Bank had pumped millions of dollars of loans into Mississippi and Louisiana in Jackson's first term—almost half of the Bank's total balance sheet was there by 1832—but it remained unpopular in the large sections of the southwest. Creditors are not always loved among those to whom they lend. Jackson vetoed the recharter of the B.U.S. in 1832, and won reelection that fall against a pro-Bank opponent. The next year, he ordered the transfer of the government's deposits out of the Bank. Jackson claimed that by giving the B.U.S. effective control over the financial market, the federal government had made "the rich richer and the potent more powerful." No doubt it had done so. But he distributed the deposits to a horde of so-called "pet banks"—state-chartered institutions that, at least initially, were run by his political allies—who in turn were often not members of the old cliques that had run the banks that the B.U.S. treated as favorites. In reaction, Biddle called in millions of dollars of loans, provoking a recession that began in late 1833. In early 1834, however, the B.U.S. had to concede and move on to doing business as a still large, but significantly

shrunk ordinary bank. Now, nothing—no bank, no other institution—regulated the financial economy of the U.S.



"The Sale," color lithograph by Henry Louis Stephens (ca. 1863). Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

The utopian faithful, more like Greenspan than like Keynes, have controlled both academic economics and economic policy-making over the last quarter-century. They have argued that a self-regulating market will unleash innovation, leading to the best possible outcome. The history of the 1830s, however, suggests otherwise—insisting, instead, that unregulated financial markets permit financial innovation that then leads to speculative bubbles. They in turn popped, as bubbles do. The consequences can be massive, complex, and lasting.

Economists of financial crisis such as the late Hyman Minsky and Charles Kindleberger (names unfashionable before 2008), argued that most historical bubbles contain three crucial elements: policymakers who believed markets were stable and did not need regulation; financial innovations that make it easier to create and expand the leverage of borrowers; and what economic writer John Cassidy helpfully shorthands as "New Era thinking typified by overconfidence and disaster myopia." By "New Era thinking" he means those who believe that, to quote the title of another recent work on financial panics, "This Time is Different"—that the rules have changed and prices will continue to climb. Belief leads one to want to buy into speculation, even if one must assume large

debts to do so, because one is confident that prices will keep rising and one can sell to some other buyer further down the road. In this way, every boom takes on aspects of a Ponzi scheme. "Disaster myopia," meanwhile, refers to the common propensity of economic actors to underestimate both the likelihood and the likely magnitude of financial panic. The magnitude is exacerbated by the extent of indebtedness (entered into because of overconfidence) and the degree to which individual hedging and unregulated over-leveraging make it likely that pulling one card will bring down the whole structure.

The anti-B.U.S. elements in Jackson's administration did not replace Biddle's institution with any other check within the financial system, opening the way for all three developments. State politicians, to whom the ball was in effect handed, apparently assumed that nothing could go wrong. After 1832, the securitization, world-wide marketing, and multiple leveraging of enslaved people, pioneered by the C.A.P.L., proliferated. Across the southwest, cotton entrepreneurs created a series of banks, many of them far larger than the C.A.P.L. In 1832, the state of Louisiana chartered the Union Bank of Louisiana, which issued \$7 million in state bonds. The bank contracted with Baring Brothers to sell them, and Baring sent some to their American partners, Prime, Ward, and King in New York City. Soon Union Bank securities were circulating in all the financial centers of Europe and North America. Next, in 1833, came the mammoth Citizens' Bank of Louisiana, which was capitalized with an issue of \$12 million in bonds that Hope and Company in Amsterdam agreed to market.

Still the Louisiana legislature churned out new bank charters. The New Orleans and Carrollton Railroad and Banking Company—\$3 million. The New Orleans Gas Light and Banking Company—\$6 million. And on and on, until, by 1836, New Orleans was, per resident, the U.S. city with the greatest density of bank capital—\$64 million in all. Other states and territories in the area, self-consciously copying Louisiana, began to create new banks of their own, each one exploiting the loopholes of the now-unregulated system with innovative financial devices. Mississippi issued \$15.5 million in state bonds to capitalize its own Union Bank. Alabama did not issue state bonds, but the Rothschilds, financiers of London and Paris and bitter rivals of the Baring Brothers, invested heavily in Alabama's banking system. Florida sold \$3 million dollars of bonds to capitalize its own Union Bank, and another million or so for smaller institutions. Arkansas, with almost no residents, did something similar. By the end of the 1830s, the state-chartered banks of the cotton-growing states had issued bonds for well over \$50 million dollars.

Armed with repeated infusions of new cash lent by banks who handed it out with little concern for whether or not mortgaged slaves had already been "hypothecated"—assigned to someone else as a hedge against loans—southwestern enslavers brought tens of thousands of additional slaves into the cotton states. Some of the purchasers were

long-time residents in states like Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi. Some were new migrants fired by the "spirit of emigration," the belief that "there is scarcely any other portion of the globe" that could permit "the slave holder or merchant of moderate capital" to convert said capital into a fortune. They calculated the money that they would make: from the labor of one "hand"—one enslaved person in a cotton field—"between three and four hundred dollars" a year, said one man who thought his expectations modest—"though some claim to make six or seven hundred dollars." Not bad returns for an "asset" purchased for only two or three times that amount, which could also be mortgaged to produce multiple streams of income. So migrants and longterm residents alike trooped to the banks, mortgaged property (some of which, later critics would charge, did not even exist) and spent the credit they received. Huge amounts of money were shifted around: to slave traders, to the sellers of goods like food and cheap clothing, to slave owners in the Chesapeake who sold people to the southwest, to the banks in Virginia and elsewhere who took their slice of profit as the financiers of the domestic slave traders. By the time the decade was out, at least 250,000 enslaved men, women, and children had been shifted from the old terrain of slavery to the new. There they were set to work: clearing forests from which Native Americans had recently been evicted by Andrew Jackson's policies; planting cotton seed; tilling it while the harvest neared.

A quarter million people were moved by force, sold, mortgaged, collateralized, securitized, sold again 3,000 miles from where they actually toiled. Each summer they learned how to pick the fields clean faster, at the end of a whip. From 1831 to 1837, cotton production almost doubled, from 300 million pounds to over 600 million. Too much was reaching Liverpool for Manchester to spin and weave, much less to sell to consumers in the form of cloth. Prices per pound at New Orleans, which had begun the boom in 1834 at eighteen cents, slipped to less than ten by late 1836. "Everybody is in debt neck over ears," was the word from Alabama, but slave "traders are not discouraged"—many of their buyers believed that cotton prices would begin to climb again. They had no evidence to suggest a return to rising prices. Supply clearly exceeded demand. Yet here was the psychology, the animal spirits of the typical bubble at work, saying: this time is different. But as the slowing prices began to pinch, the Bank of England, alarmed at the outflow of capital to the U.S. in the form of securities purchases, cut its lending in the late summer of 1836. (At the about the same time, Andrew Jackson issued his Specie Circular, which slowed the purchases of public land, but appears to have had little effect on what transpired next in the cotton market.) Merchant firms subsequently began to call in their loans to each other.

In early 1837, a visitor to Florida, which was already—as it has ever been—one of the most bubble-prone and speculative parts of the U.S.—wrote that "there is great risk to the money lender and paper shaver—for the whole land, with very few exceptions, are all in debt for property and a fall in cotton must bring a crash with most tremendous

consequences to all trades and pursuits." Back in Britain, the crash had already begun. Three massive Liverpool and London firms, unable to meet their commercial debt because cotton prices had dropped, collapsed at the end of 1836. The tsunami rushed across the ocean to their trading partners in New Orleans. By late March each of the top ten cotton-buying firms there had collapsed.

Except for planters, who were mostly debtors, almost every market actor—cotton merchants, dry-goods merchants, Southern bankers, Northern bankers—now realized that they were both creditors and debtors. But as they scrambled to collect debts from others so that they could pay off their own, two things were happening. The first was that their individually rational pursuit of liquidity created the collectively irrational outcome of systemic failure. No one was able to pay debts, and so most buying and selling ground to a halt. An attempt to restart the system failed. A second, bigger crash in 1839 finished off many of the survivors of the 1837 panic. During those two years, meanwhile, a second consequence had emerged: the discovery that most of the debt owed by planters and those who dealt with them was "toxic," to use a recent term. It was unpayable. The planters of Mississippi owed New Orleans banks alone \$33 million, estimated one expert, and could not hope to net more than \$10 million from their 1837 crop to pay off that debt. Nor could they sell off capital to raise cash because prices for slaves and land, the ultimate collateral in the system, had plummeted as the first wave of bankruptcy-driven sales tapped what little cash there was in the system. This meant that the financial system wasn't just frozen, but that many creditors' balance sheets were overwhelmed.

Armed with repeated infusions of new cash lent by banks who handed it out with little concern for whether or not mortgaged slaves had already been "hypothecated"—assigned to someone else as a hedge against loans—southwestern enslavers brought tens of thousands of additional slaves into the cotton states.

After the cotton-brokerage and plantation-supply firms, the next to go were the southwestern banks, whose currency and credit became worthless. They were unable to continue to make coupon payments—interest installments on the bonds they had sold on far-off securities markets. Some might have been able to collect from their debtors by foreclosing mortgages on slaves and land, but, of course, the markets for those two assets had collapsed. Many slave owners had layered multiple mortgages on each slave, meanwhile, and were using political leverage to protect them from the consequences of their financial over-leverage. The ultimate expression of this practice was the repudiation of the government-backed bonds by the legislatures of several southwestern states and territories, most notably Mississippi and Florida—in effect, they toxified the bonds themselves, emancipating slave-owning debtors from the holders of slave-backed securities. The power of the state had created the securitized slave, and now the power of the state destroyed it, in order to protect that slave's owner from his creditors.

But not all debts could be repudiated. And many of the creditors were located in northern states. Their attempts to collect increasingly brought Southern planters to calculate the value of the Union. Nor could Southern entrepreneurs recapitalize their own institutions. After repudiation, outside investors were cautious about lending money to Southern institutions. In the 1830s it was still not clear where the center of gravity of the national financial economy was located—Philadelphia, home of the B.U.S., and New Orleans were both in contention. By the early 1840s, Wall Street and New York had emerged as the definitive victor. Slave owners continued to supply virtually all of the industrial world's most important commodity, but the post-1837 inability of Southern planters to control their own financing or get the capital that would enable them to diversify led them to sacrifice massive skimmings of their profits to financial intermediaries and creditors. They sought greater revenues in the only ways that they could. The first was by making more and more cotton. They forced enslaved people to achieve an incredible intensity of labor, developed new kinds of seed, and expanded their acreage, but the increase in cotton production (which rose from 600 million pounds in 1837 to two billion in 1859) was more than the market could absorb. The price remained low in most years in comparison to historic levels.

The second method of enhancing revenues was by seeking new territory, both in order to add to the land under cultivation and with the hope of provoking a new boom. Unleashing the animal spirits of speculation in new territories had almost worked before, so why not try it again by acquiring California, Cuba, Mexico, or Kansas for slavery? The result of the commitment of political capital to that end, of course, was the Civil War, in which the consequences of the long-term financial difficulties of the cotton economy played a major role in Southern defeat.

Financial innovation in the 1820s and 1830s thus had massive, unforeseen, and often ironic consequences. But they were consequences in the "real" economy. Of course, there is something magical, fictitious, and strange about commodifying houses, land, and most of all, human beings. Each of those things has its own claim to being treated as something unique, with moral rights. The house acquires extra-financial value from the lives that are lived in it and which turn it into a home. Its market value depends, as well, on the domestic and family ideologies that "invest" it with more value than wood, stone, and skillful carpentry alone can supply. The land, still more immovable than the house, teems with claims, both human and non-human, historical and ecological. The securitization of a human is far more offensive still to our moral sensibilities, turning persons into numbers and paper bonds, and so dividing them up and recombining them by legislative fiat that you can carry them across the ocean in suitcases and sell them to people who profess their support for emancipation. If that isn't fiction, then I don't know what is. And yet in the end the reverberations set off by the leveraging of slavery's inequities into further equity for those who exploited them were what brought the structure of real-life slavery crashing down.

Further reading

The records of Jacob Bieller and the people he brought to northeast Louisiana can be found in the Alonzo Snyder Papers at the Hill Library of Louisiana State University. Another excellent primary source that illuminates the issues discussed in this article is the R.C. Ballard Papers, located in the Southern Historical Collection of the University of North Carolina. A recent book that looks at the aftereffects of Andrew Jackson's victory over the Second Bank of the United States is R.H. Kilbourne, *Slave Agriculture and Financial Markets in Antebellum America: The Bank of the United States in Mississippi, 1831-1852* (London, 2006.) Kilbourne argues that the fall of the Bank made the ultimate calamity of 1837 inevitable.

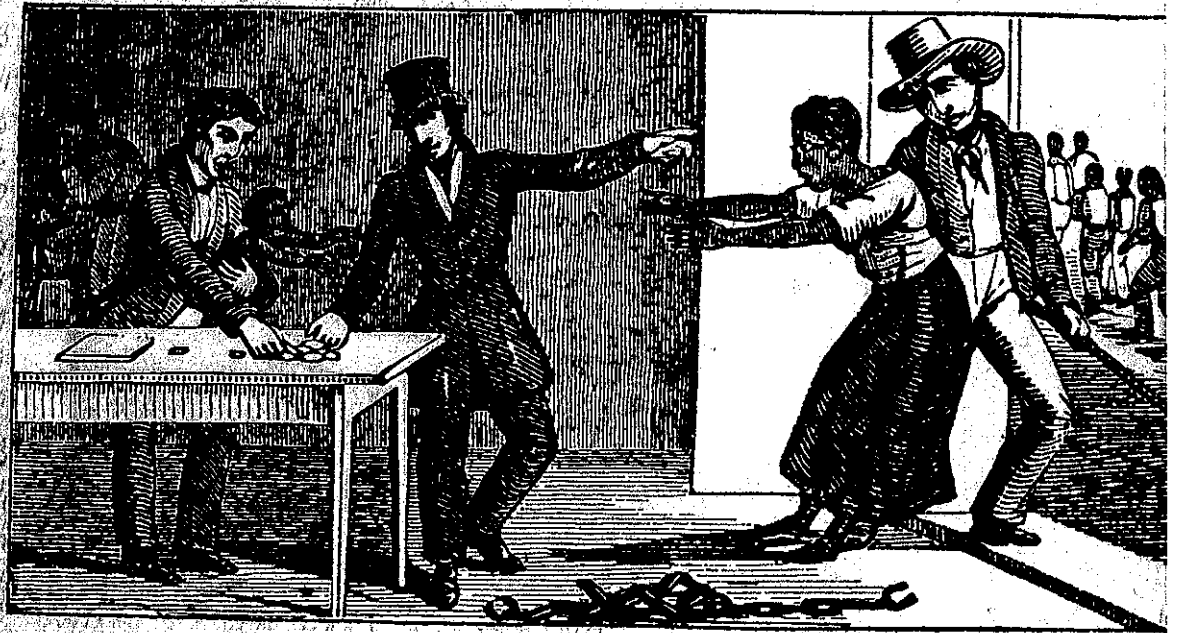
A recent award-winning dissertation by Jessica Lepler—"1837: Anatomy of a Panic," (Ph.D. Diss., Brandeis University, 2007)—recreates the collapse of the international economy. Perhaps the most significant book in recent years about world history on the grand scale is Kenneth Pomeranz's *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World-Economy* (Princeton, 2000), which argues that "ghost acres" of southwestern cotton fields enabled Europe to break out of the "resource cul-de-sac" that trapped the Chinese economy before it could reach what scholars used to call the takeoff point of modernization.

Finally, an excellent introduction to the way that the economic profession has, over the past fifty years, increasingly hidden from the investigation of historical issues like panics and crises in the "utopian economics" of simple models and free-market panaceas is John Cassidy, *How Markets Fail: The Logic of Economic Calamities* (New York, 2009).

NA
EY
RY

THE PRICE FOR

THE PRICE FOR THEIR POUND OF FLESH



The Value of the Enslaved,
from Womb to Grave,
in the Building of a Nation

DAINA RAMEY BERRY

"A brilliant resurrection of the forgotten people who gave their lives to build our country...Searing, revelatory, and vital to understanding our nation's inequities."

—ISABEL WILKERSON

THE PRICE FOR THEIR POUND OF FLESH

The Value of the Enslaved,
from Womb to Grave,
in the Building of a Nation

DAINA RAMEY BERRY

Beacon Press
Boston, Massachusetts
www.beacon.org

Beacon Press books
are published under the auspices of
the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations.

© 2017 by Daina Ramey Berry
All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America

20 19 18 17 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

This book is printed on acid-free paper that meets the uncoated paper
ANSI/NISO specifications for permanence as revised in 1992.

Text design and composition by Kim Arney

"Amen," by James Baldwin, is reprinted here by arrangement with
The James Baldwin Estate.

"The Ballad of Nat Turner," by Robert Hayden, is used by permission
of Liveright Publishing Corporation.

Literary of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Berry, Daina Ramey, author.

Title: The price for their pound of flesh : the value of the enslaved from womb
to grave in the building of a nation / Daina Ramey Berry.

Description: Boston : Beacon Press, 2017. | Includes bibliographical
references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016014894 | ISBN 9780807047620 (hardback)

Subjects: LCSH: Slavery—Economic aspects—United States. | Slave-trade—

United States—History. | Slaves—United States—Economic conditions. |

Slaves—United States—Social conditions. | Child slaves—United States—

Social conditions. | Women slaves—United States—Social conditions. | Older

slaves—United States—Social conditions. | BISAC: SOCIAL SCIENCE /

Slavery. | SOCIAL SCIENCE / Ethnic Studies / African American Studies.

Classification: LCC E443 .B446 2016 | DDC 306.3/620973—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016014894>

For my cousin Felicenne Hou
who introduced me to the inner
and allowed others to live beyond her d
For my parents, Melvin and Felicenne Ra
who taught me the infinite value of my

Contents

Author's Note ix

Preface xiii

List of Images xv

INTRODUCTION The Value of Life and Death 1

CHAPTER 1 Preconception: Women and Future Increase 10

CHAPTER 2 Infancy and Childhood 33

CHAPTER 3 Adolescence, Young Adulthood, and Soul Values 58

CHAPTER 4 Midlife and Older Adulthood 91

CHAPTER 5 Elderly and Superannuated 129

CHAPTER 6 Postmortem: Death and Ghost Values 148

EPILOGUE The Afterlives of Slavery 194

Acknowledgments 198

Appendix: A Timeline of Slavery, Medical History, and Black Bodies 202

Note on Sources: A History of People and Corpses 205

Notes 213

Index 248

About the Author 262

Author's Note

In a very real sense, I've been living with this book since childhood. I grew up in a small college town in California, in an area where most of my peers would say they didn't see race. However, much of my upbringing involved assessing the value of blackness. We lived in a pleasant community with close friends nearby. My father was the second African American scholar hired at the local university where my mother completed her law degree. After law school, she became a professor at a public institution in a neighboring city. Most of my friends' parents were professors as well. Although teaching came naturally to me, I initially pursued a career path outside the academy. But as I aged, I decided to become a professor in the hope that I could help others make sense of both the valuation and devaluation of blackness that shaped my upbringing.

Historically, black bodies in the United States have represented two competing values: one ascribed to the internal self and the other to the external body. White valuation of the black body under slavery is one of the most dramatic historical examples of the latter. An enslaved person had *individual* qualities that enslavers evaluated, appraised, and ultimately commodified through sale. Yet enslaved *people* had a different conception of their value, one that did not appear in historical scholarship until the late 1990s. My parents were the first to expose me to the history of slavery. They also taught me about internal values, which came from that legacy but were much different than the value of enslaved people. But in other settings, such as school, I noticed a different set of external principles that ascribed a negative association to my heritage.

Through each stage of our lives, my parents validated my brother and me, encouraging pride in our lineage and giving us a strong sense of who

we were in the world. We celebrated and studied our genealogy by filling our house with art from the African diaspora. At a young age, I learned to value blackness in the form of imagery, history, and ancestry, understanding that we stood on the shoulders of many who gave their lives for us. However, as I grew and matured, I constantly experienced devaluation that contradicted the values presented at home. When I was in preschool, other children treated me like a pet: some boldly patted me on the head to feel my hair texture. In kindergarten, one classmate asked, "Why are your palms white and the rest of your body black?" A year later, when I was six, the neighborhood bully called me a "dirty n——r." And, in first grade, a classmate asked me what it was like to be a slave.

In school, I was reminded that something about me was different and not valued. I didn't see anyone who looked like me in the books we read or on my school's staff, or who represented me during career day. On Halloween in second grade, children snickered at the Afro-pumpkin that I had so carefully crafted to submit to the pumpkin contest. I loved my pumpkin and thought it would win a prize. Not only was it black and beautiful, sporting an Angela Davis hairstyle, but my mother was one of the judges! Every time I valued aspects of my black girlhood, my African American ancestry was ridiculed and devalued. In social studies, I could not understand why some of my classmates stared at me with pity and sorrow when teachers mentioned slavery and civil rights history. I was raised to be proud of this history, not ashamed. I come from a lineage of survivors.

My life has always been structured around the academic calendar because of my parents' careers and the community in which we lived. In each stage of schooling from elementary and middle to high school, we took summer tours around the United States. These long road trips from the west to the east, north, and south, exposed my brother and me to the diverse group of people who shaped this country, from the Mayan and Powhatan, to the Italian, Irish, and Polish immigrants who entered the United States through Ellis Island. We studied the Donner Party and the California Gold Rush as well as American slavery on Southern plantations. We hiked the Appalachian Mountains, backpacked in the Grand Canyon, chased bison at Yellowstone National Park, and learned about water

technology at the Hoover Dam. During the long car rides in between destinations, we played games and took pictures every time we crossed a state line. My parents gave daily lessons on a range of topics, from creating a budget and managing money, to understanding anatomy and physiology. Those educational road trips meant a great deal to me, and I was filled with mixed emotions during the last one, when my parents drove me to college.

During my undergraduate education, my organic curiosity about values persisted, and I decided to major in economics. Things changed when I took a class on slavery from a female professor who looked like me. It was my first experience outside of the home in which I learned about African American history and my peers did not stare at me. This professor, Brenda E. Stevenson, supported my curiosity and encouraged me to become a historian. She was the second scholar to suggest that I study history, and later, she became my dissertation advisor. The first person to recommend I study history was a visiting scholar I confronted a year earlier for his excessive use of the N-word in an African American survey course. These experiences, one positive, the other negative, played an important part in my decision to pursue a graduate degree in history. I knew I wanted to write books about slavery without alienating my audience.

Remnants of my upbringing resurfaced in graduate school in a pendulum-like manner. I felt like a balance ball in Newton's cradle being pounded with racism on one side and academic success on the other. The ups and downs were difficult, but I found my way to a platform from which I could study and share the tremendously difficult balancing act enslaved people navigated as human property. This book is evidence of that journey.

How is black life valued and devalued at different points in American history? This is the fundamental question at the center of my life and my work. The seesaws and pendulums I experienced led me to look to history for answers. I found them, but also found many more questions in the voices and experiences of those who were enslaved. These questions inspired me to analyze value and personhood.

While I, and other scholars, contend that enslaved captives aboard slave ships in the Middle Passage had their personhood devalued, it is also true that their bodies, as commodities, increased in value over the course of their lives, reaching a peak in early adulthood. The tension between person

and property merged in human chattel, and their awareness of their marker value evolved as they matured.

Dave Harper and many other formerly enslaved people taught me about the valuation and devaluation that comes with blackness. "I was sold for \$715," he shared in a postslavery interview in the late 1930s. "When freedom come," he said, "give me \$715 and I'll go back." Harper and others knew that they were more valued in slavery than in freedom. Henry Banner noted, "I was sold for \$2,300—more than I'm worth now." Some scholars deliberately interpreted such reflections to mean that enslaved people preferred captivity to freedom. This bothered me. I couldn't fathom why anyone would prefer captivity unless they did not value themselves. The many voices I encountered in the archives, as I wrote articles, books, and encyclopedias about gender and slavery, spoke to me loudly and clearly. Enslaved people, of course, preferred freedom.

This book, which encompasses a decade of research, addresses the value of enslaved peoples' lives before birth, through the stages of growth, to death and beyond. By questioning and analyzing life cycles, it becomes clear that human chattel could never escape commodification. My study emerges on the 140th anniversary of the end of Reconstruction and in the early stages of contemporary social justice movements to value black lives. I hope that readers will understand the historical antecedents to the racial seasaw I experienced as a child in a community that did not intentionally devalue me. And I welcome each reader to take this journey through the stages of enslaved life as a person as well as a commodified good.

This is a coming-of-age story, a narrative of the valuation of black bodies. It is a lengthy tribute to my parents for teaching me to appreciate my life and the lives of others, whether they look like me or not. Finally, and most importantly, this book gives voice to enslaved people and their feelings about, and reactions to, being treated as property.

The Price for Their Pound of Flesh is a response to questions that have consumed me for most of my life. Only now, after many years of research and reflection, have I found the language to answer them.

Preface

This book is written in a historical moment that historians have not yet named—a moment when black persons are disproportionately being killed and their deaths recorded. We witness the destruction of their lives via cell phones and dash and body cameras. The current voyeuristic gaze contains a level of brutality grounded in slavery. I call this moment *Black Book* the historic spectacle of black death: a chronicling of racial violence, a fore-shadowing of medical exploitation, a rehearsing of ritualized lynching that took place in the postslavery era. African Americans and their allies respond by rejecting the devaluation of their bodies with the phrase Black Lives Matter. This book, however, argues that the historical record is clear: Black Bodies Matter. They did 150 years ago, and they do today. This is not a "red record" like that catalogued by Ida B. Wells-Barnett in 1895, but rather a historical reckoning, a financial recapitulation of black bodies and souls. It traces the internal self-worth African Americans held on to when external forces literally and figuratively sought to strip them of humanity. Here you will see that African Americans created a protective mechanism to restore the soul by valuing it intrinsically, instinctively, innately . . . immortally. They deployed Paul Laurence Dunbar's mask, W. E. B. Du Bois's double consciousness, Maya Angelou's caged bird, James Baldwin's "Amen," Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. I see the soul values, as do many others. Through the historical reckoning in the following pages, readers, too, will see the infinite value of African American souls.

AMEN

No, I don't feel death coming,
I feel death going:
having thrown up his hands,
for the moment.

I feel like I know him
better than I did.
Those arms held me,
for a while,
and, when we meet again,
there will be that secret knowledge
between us.

—James Baldwin,
*Jimmy's Blues and Other Poems*²

List of Images

- Page 40: Enslaved siblings separated from each other and their mother.
Source: Library Company of Philadelphia.
- Page 50: Cane Brake Plantation records. Source: Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.
- Page 59: Lucy Delaney. Source: Rare Book Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- Page 59: Prime male on the auction block. Source: Library Company of Philadelphia.
- Page 69: Broadside announcing the sale of "Choice Slaves." Source: Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.
- Page 120: Scaffold on which John Brown and his followers were hanged.
Source: Horatio N. Rust Photograph Collection, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
- Page 123: Shields Green. Source: Horatio N. Rust Photograph Collection, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
- Page 125: Dangerfield Newby. Source: Horatio N. Rust Photograph Collection, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
- Page 156: Cadaver bag. Source: © Thomas Jefferson University Photography Services.
- Page 177: University of North Carolina School of Medicine anatomy students staging a dissection. Source: North Carolina Collection Photographic Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- Page 180: Chris Baker. Source: Special Collections and Archives, Tompkins-McCaw Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

age 180: Chris Baker posing with the students of the Medical College of Virginia. Source: Special Collections and Archives, Tompkins-McCaw Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

age 185: Illustration of Solomon Marable being transported in a barrel. From Richmond (VA) Planet, August 1, 1896. Source: *Chronicle of America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

INTRODUCTION

The Value of Life and Death

APPRAISAL PRICE RANGE: \$0—\$5,771 [\$169,504 IN 2014]¹

SALE PRICE RANGE: \$0.14—\$3,228 [\$4—\$94,812 IN 2014]

We are a race of beings who have long labored under the abuse and censure of the world, that we have long been looked upon with an eye of contempt and that we have long been considered rather as brutish than human and scarcely capable of mental endowments.

—Benjamin Banneker to Thomas Jefferson,
August 19, 1791²

Just think of a people that hold four millions of their fellow-creatures in chains—four millions of human beings in chains!—and sell them by the pound.

—*The Christian Recorder*³

"Many a man, fifty years old, had not seen and felt what I had before my twentieth year."⁴ These are the words of Jourden H. Banks, who was born into slavery, sold three times, escaped twice, and ultimately reached freedom. His early years were pleasant compared to those as he matured into adulthood. In his narrative, published in 1861, we learn many things about the value of the enslaved and the ways enslavers, traders, and medical doctors trafficked human chattel from birth to death and beyond.

Banks lived on a Virginia plantation with his parents and sixteen siblings. His mother served as the cook, his father was the headman; the family was intact. As a young child, he played with his enslaver's son, Alexander, who was just a year older. By age five, Banks realized that he and Alex were different when his playmate began beating him. Banks fought back, because his father warned him that he had to respond or suffer continued beatings. Embracing this spirit, Banks kept track of how many whippings he owed Alex and returned them, blow for blow. Even in childhood, Banks's actions showed a nascent understanding of his soul value.

separate from his enslaver. As he processed the distinctions between himself and his nemesis, Banks experienced another epiphany: Alex attended school, while he was sent to "scare crows in the fields." In his words, "the dreary days of boyhood began in the fields."⁵

This moment, during enslaved childhood, served as a turning point in Banks's understanding of the reality of his condition. Historian Wilma King calls this "the quantum leap" into the world of work.⁶ As they aged, enslaved youth and young adults learned and intimately understood their place in the world. Banks's maturation solidified his understanding of enslavement, especially during three pivotal events of youth and early adulthood: the sale of his two sisters, the nearly fatal beating of his mother, and the slow death of his enslaver. Of the latter, Banks remarked, "I saw him in life, and I saw him in death; but he left me in chains."

Enslaved adults knew very well that the death of their enslavers often meant the breaking up of their families. Thus, when Banks was put on the auction block in the summer of 1857, he had a message for his potential buyers. He fought the traders and tried to liberate himself by running away: "I gave them evidence that they had a man to deal with and I determined now to see how they would treat me as a prisoner."⁸ During interviews with potential buyers, Banks remained defiant by not revealing information about his health and skills, because he knew it would affect the monetary value placed on him. Despite these efforts, he recalled being purchased that day for \$1,200.

Exploring the ways enslaved people like Banks recalled and responded to their monetary value throughout the course of their lives is the primary thrust of this book. In particular, I examine enslaved and, occasionally, free blacks' values, along with the individuals who had a vested interest in their fiscal vitality throughout their lives, upon their deaths, and even after death. The intimate relationship between enslavers, physicians, and human property shows just how commodification—the act of being treated as a commodity—touched every facet of enslaved people's births, lives, and afterlives. From the enslaved perspective, this knowledge came gradually as they matured. Importantly, this book is also an intellectual history of enslaved people's thoughts, expressions, feelings, and reactions to their own commodification.

Organized around the stages of life, each chapter represents a window into enslaved people's awareness of their monetary value and places them in conversation with enslavers' accounting of their bodies from birth to death. Rather than follow a chronological structure, the book is organized around the life cycle of an enslaved person's body. Many studies address the fiscal value of enslaved people's work; this book does that, yet it differs by examining the spiritual and financial value of human commodities before and at birth, and even after death. That they were treated as disposable property before they were born and after they died forces us to reconsider the life cycle of human property. What did it mean to have a projected or real price from preconception to postmortem? Even the unborn children of expectant mothers were marked with a monetary value. And, when an enslaved person died, who would receive money for his or her body? For a period of time, the financial value of the bodies of the enslaved was sometimes contested in court, depending on the cause of death. During this time, death became a monetized value that accrued interest until the case was settled.

Some dead bodies were cultivated as cadavers, trafficked and sold to medical schools for human anatomy courses at major institutions throughout the North and South. Unraveling what I call the *domestic cadaver trade*, I also address some aspects of enslaved people's ideas about the afterlife and their preferences for specific burial rituals, even when doctors wanted to harvest their bodies for dissection.

Banks's narrative also describes his experience as a fugitive in a Kentucky prison and his thoughts about death. Jailed in Smithland, Kentucky, in October 1857, he remained incarcerated for seven months and two days. The jail was "more like a place of punishment than a place of detention," as authorities spent much time trying to extract answers from the prisoners. Banks found it ironic that the jailers believed that the "worse we were treated the more likely we should be to tell where we came from." He and his fellow captives shared a code of secrecy, vowing "not to tell their real names or place of abode." If they did, Banks reflected, "[w]e might just as well turn and go back home ourselves" and "save the masters expense." Just like slavery, prison life was "a trap."⁸

During his time in jail, physicians came to treat the sick, enslavers came in response to notices, and two whites came when convicted of murder and

other crimes. While subjected to this dual captivity as an enslaved prisoner, Banks had an encounter with an emaciated man who was assigned to share his cell; the man was near death. Banks was interested in him and wanted to know his story. The doctor who treated his sick cellmate developed a rapport with him and discovered that he suffered from tuberculosis and needed care. The two talked often, and from Banks's perspective, the sick man made the mistake of trusting the physician. The doctor, described as "very kind," found out where the man came from, as well as the name of his enslaver. He promised the sick man that he would purchase and care for him. Shortly after, the enslaver came to the jail to claim his property. The doctor had informed him that the sick man would not survive the journey back to his homestead, "but his reply was that he did not care about the value of his life, he would rather take him dead, as a caution to his other slaves, than not get him at all." Witnessing this exchange, Banks observed:

"This was a case that shows with what a spirit of revenge the owners pursue the slaves who escape. Here is a man offered more than the poor skeleton of his slave is worth, but the malicious gratification of getting him home dead or alive was so sweet that he would not receive the price of his pound of flesh."¹⁰ With that, the sick man and his enslaver left, leaving a deep impression on Banks's understanding of himself as human property.

The enslaver had refused to sell a nearly dead man to a physician who was willing to pay a "price for his pound of flesh" above market value, preferring to make an example of him, and asserting that dead or alive, he had use for his enslaved body. But what was the physician's interest in this man? Had he developed an affinity for him or did he have ulterior motives? Doctors, just like planters, found ways to use enslaved bodies at all stages of health. They, too, had a price tag for the dead.

Enslaved people represented an exchangeable commodity in the eyes of traders, enslavers, and doctors. By exploring the web of relations among these groups of people, we find that the financial value of human chattel touched every facet of their lives. Banks modified the Shakespearean phrase "the price for his pound of flesh," from *The Merchant of Venice*, further emphasizing the knowledge base of enslaved people. Their awareness and intellect have always been present in the historical record, but few scholars have asked, "What did the enslaved think?" Much of the existing

literature is about what enslaved people *experienced*, but if we attempt to add their engaged understanding, this narrative changes. Enslaved people like Jourden Banks had very particular ideas about their value, ideas that differed greatly from their enslavers. Looking at their views of commodification shifts the way we interpret slavery and adds to our understanding of social and cultural systems that continue to (de)value black life (i.e., mass incarceration, elite athletes, and performers).

Part of a new economic history of American slavery, this book incorporates the voices of those traded on the auction block along with the valuations of their captivity. Enslaved people speak back, through their words and actions. They reach out from these pages and invite the reader to hear their stories, to see them as human beings, and to understand them as commodities, just as they did. Enslaved people of all ages recognized the multilayered values ascribed to their bodies, and, to borrow from the great philosopher Alain LeRoy Locke, their values were self-actualized.¹¹

We begin this journey before conception because even enslaved people's *imagined* lives had a monetary value. The chapters follow the maturation process to and through adulthood and end at death and the postmortem travels of their bodies and spirits. This journey hinges upon capitalism and commodification, as well as human emotions and expressions of love, loss, and grief. It is an examination of a most unique product—a product that has the ability to enote, express, respond, reject, and liberate. This is the story of human chattel and the duality of their position in life and death.

When enslaved children entered the world, their birth announcements came in the form of federal records, such as ship manifests, or private papers, such as business ledgers, bills of sale, or plantation lists of births. Their parents were not showered with gifts to start them on their journey. Instead, announcements consisted of simple statements in public and private papers, with notations like "Molly's infant born today" or loud pronouncements at auctions, such as "Look at this fine specimen . . . will make a good hand." Today's birth announcements look quite different. Included in these formal introductions of a child to friends and loved ones are typically the name, age, date and time of birth, weight, footprints, and sometimes a picture. Just as contemporary parents look forward to the birth of their children or create a forever home for an adopted child, enslavers

noted the birth of enslaved infants. However, rather than record details about the newborn, they appraised them with a monetary value that typically increased as they aged.

Like birth announcements, obituaries and death notices serve as public pronouncements of a person's passing. They contain brief overviews of the life of the deceased, often published in local newspapers. These notices signal the opening of probate, if there are outstanding debts on the deceased's estate. Being "carried away" or "passing on," as enslaved people referred to it, marked a transition into another world for those who viewed death in this way. Reflecting on the end of life, one enslaved person noted, "When I leave this world I am going to take the wings of the morning and go into the building where there is eternal joy."¹² The idea that there was a place of peace and a space for redemption gave enslaved people hope for a better world. Some saw it as a vision before their deaths and understood themselves as two bodies: one eternally free and the other navigating the space of a world with enslavement. On rare occasions, obituaries of some highly recognized or special enslaved people were published in local newspapers. From these public pronouncements, we learn about their lives, likely from their enslavers' perspective, but we know something about them that often sheds light on their personality, service, and legacy.

Enslaved people were valued in life and in death. But because they were people and property, multiple sets of values encompassed them and were placed on their bodies. *Value* is used here as a noun, a verb, and an adjective. It is active, passive, subjective, and reflexive. It is "rooted in modes or kinds of *valuing*" and requires an assessment of feelings. The first value signifies an internal quality, I call this their *spirit* or *soul value*. It was an intangible marker that often defied monetization yet spoke to the spirit and soul of who they were as human beings. It represented the self-worth of enslaved people. For some this meant that no monetary value could allow them to comply with slavery. Others, weakened by enslavement, negotiated certain levels of commodification to survive their experience. Still others were socially dead. While the value of the soul should not be located on a spectrum, this book addresses their living soul values, seeking to uncover "what the enslaved actually made of their situation." They considered conceptions of self in spaces that denied it. By centering their own thoughts

and feelings as opposed to the "flesh and blood values" ascribed to their bodies, I demand recognition of the self-actualized values of their souls.¹³

The second form of valuation signifies external assessments rooted in appraisals, which were projected values that planters, doctors, traders, and others attributed to enslaved people based on their potential work output. The third value, also an external assessment, represents the market value in terms of a sale price for their human flesh, negotiated in a competitive market. It often marked the highest price paid for them as commodities. Exploring all three forms of valuation at once—soul, appraisal, and market—allows us to consider enslaved people as human beings and tradable goods, without divorcing one from the other. But enslaved people had a fourth external value, one constructed at and beyond death. *Ghost value* is my term for the price tag affixed to deceased enslaved bodies in postmortem legal contestations or as they circulated through the domestic cadaver trade.

Once an enslaved person died, whether buried or not, they were given a ghost value. Some were then sold or transported for sale to medical schools throughout the United States. Ghost values were also assigned for legal and insurance purposes, as indicated by state-sponsored executions, court disputes, and personal insurance policies. In other words, since enslaved people's values were calculated regularly it was easy to determine the value of their bodies at death—ghost values. An individual enslaver could look at his or her most recent estate inventory, insurance policy, or bill of sale to find out how much one of his or her enslaved laborers was worth. Ghost values are also evident in the probate records of plantation owners who appraised the value of their laborers in their last will and testament. Legal disputes over hiring contracts that resulted in the loss of enslaved life gave courts the right to value deceased human chattel in order to settle cases.¹⁴

While not all dead enslaved people were sold, many were, as were free blacks and poor and marginalized whites. The enslaved body, although no longer enslaved, was still traded, sold, and used after death. In postmortem spaces, formerly enslaved and free black cadavers were used on the dissection table, in the halls of major medical schools, and by prominent physicians in the North and the South. Any unclaimed bodies, from blacks and whites, poor and marginalized citizens, as well as criminals of all races

were subject to the cadaver trade. Several bodies were at the center of a legal process following a coroner's inquest to determine the cause of death. Anatomy professors justified this practice as being for the benefit of medical knowledge and confirmed that what they were doing was not sacrilege. The demand for hands-on medical research fueled the traffic in dead bodies and served as the lifeblood of the domestic cadaver trade.

When the enslaved died, few public notices marked the transition. Those buried were placed in coffins, mostly pine boxes, and lowered into shallow graves, often near the site of their enslavement or, for some, in public cemeteries. As noted, some of those more valued by their enslavers received obituaries, headstones, and elaborate funerals. Others entered the realm of death by way of execution, which was the beginning of an extended postmortem journey of their physical bodies. Life after death for enslaved people existed in a spiritual world. One remembered that "the Lord . . . carried me off in the spirit, and showed me this old body in the ground and my new body up in the air and me singing, 'Hark from the tune.'" But from the enslaver's perspective, dead bodies of the enslaved also continued on in the earthly financial world. Enslaved bodies were appreciated at the time of death, and some even accumulated interest, years after legal cases were settled. Such cases often involved financial recompense to the former enslaver for the death of their human property. It seems that few enslaved people rested in peace.

This book follows the trail and trafficking of the cadavers of the enslaved. Historian Ruth Richardson called our attention to the cadaver trade in the early 1980s, confirming that corpses were indeed commodities, but her focus was not the formerly enslaved. She discovered cadavers were "bought and sold, they were toured, priced, haggled over, negotiated for, discussed in terms of supply and demand, delivered, imported, exported, [and] transported."¹⁶ The scholars Robert Blakely, Michael Sappol, and Harriet A. Washington have expanded our understanding of the underground disposal and traffic in dead bodies, of which African Americans occupied a disproportionate majority.¹⁷ Their research provided a context for the discovery in the 1980s and 1990s of hundreds of improperly disposed African American remains in the basement of the Medical College of Georgia and in a well at Virginia Commonwealth University. Construction and later

archival excavations led to physical evidence of the domestic cadaver trade that I describe in this study. I trace the contemporary connections to these remains and introduce readers to enslaved people who did not receive respectable burials. The question of what to do with their remains is still being debated.

Placing the history of this illicit trade against the backdrop of other forced migrations and the impetus of medical education allows for a new approach to slavery studies. My goal is to highlight the voices of the enslaved so that views of their life and death incorporate their spiritual, fiscal, and physical worlds. My hope is that the enslaved "body would not be disposed of like that of a dead animal but the book be closed with some dignity and solemnity."¹⁸ I aim to counter the continued exploitation of the enslaved. Each chapter begins with an auction at a particular stage of life and ends with a burial. It is my hope that this pendulum swing between the body as property and death as liberation, between value and devaluation, will allow their souls to rest in peace.

Adolescence, Young Adulthood, and Soul Values

AVERAGE APPRAISED VALUES:

FEMALES: \$317 [\$15,189 IN 2014]

MALES: \$610 [\$17,934 IN 2014]

AVERAGE SALE PRICES:

FEMALES: \$315 [\$15,131 IN 2014]

MALES: \$662 [\$19,447 IN 2014]

They abolished the external or African slave trade, in 1808, the effect of which gave an impetus to the infamous traffic of slave breeding and trading among themselves; and perhaps it was one of the main objects they had in view, the protection of their slave breeders and traders.

—Thomas Smallwood, 1851¹

As was the custom, all the negroes were brought out and placed in a line, so that the buyers could examine their good points at leisure . . . once negotiated with the trader, paid the price agreed upon, and started for home to present his wife with this flesh and blood commodity, which money could so easily procure in our vaunted land of freedom.

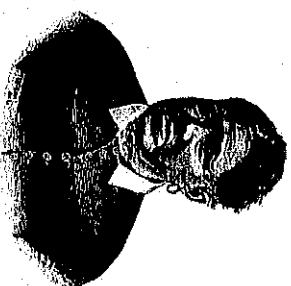
—Lucy A. Delaney, 1891²

On the eve of the Civil War, an abolitionist attending the auction of 149 human souls in New Orleans, Louisiana, was intrigued by the bid caller's excitement over a seventeen-year-old field hand named Joseph who was on the auction block. "Gentlemen," the bid caller exclaimed, "there is a young blood, and a capital one! He is a great boy, a hand for almost every thing. Besides, he is the best dancer in the whole lot, and he knows also how to pray—oh! so beautifully, you would believe he was made to be a minister! How much will you bid for him?" The opening bid for Joseph was a thousand dollars, but according to the enthusiastic auctioneer, Joseph

was worth more, considering his value over time. "One thousand dollars for a boy who will be worth in three years fully twenty-five hundred dollars cash down. Who is going to bid two thousand?" the caller asked his audience. As the price for Joseph increased to \$1,400, each interested party eagerly made eye contact with the bid caller. Standing on the podium with a wand in hand, he tried to increase Joseph's price by assuring the audience that \$1,400 was "too small an amount for" him. "Seventeen years only," he added, "a strong, healthy, fine-looking, intelligent boy. Fourteen hundred and fifty dollars! . . . One thousand, four hundred and fifty—going! going! going! and last—gone!" As the caller slapped his hand on the platform, just like that, in less than five minutes, Joseph was sold "to the highest bidder."

In the 1890s, Lucy Delaney described the enslaved experience on the auction block.

*Young blood
Lucy A. Delaney*



Prime male on the auction block with mothers and babies bearing witness.

We do not have direct testimony from Joseph about his response to this sale, in which he was sold with 148 others from the same Louisiana plantation, Joseph's enslaver, who provided religious instruction to his human chattel, decided to retire from planting in order to pursue a political career.⁴ In two days, he sold an enslaved population consisting of field hands (like Joseph), carpenters, bricklayers, blacksmiths, coopers, drivers, and household servants. How did Joseph (enslaved person #2) feel about being the second person on the auction block that day? Did Joseph's experience differ at age seventeen, as he approached his "prime" working years, from the experiences of others who were younger or older than him? Had Joseph's adolescence and teen years prepared him for this moment? Was he conditioned to handle and/or witness auctions from previous exposure? Where were his parents? Did he have any siblings, given that there is no mention of his relatives? Yet witnesses said the enslaved stood "upon a platform, similar to a funeral pile erected for martyrs" holding on to their last embrace.⁵ Joseph stepped on the block alone as the auctioneer described him with a host of complimentary adjectives. What was his mind-set? Did these descriptions comfort him, uplift him, or add to the trauma of being sold? Joseph and Isam (slave #21) were noted for their ability to preach, and they likely approached the block in silent prayer. Ultimately, their fate is unknown.

We have much to learn about the value of human property during each stage of life, not only the moment of sale. This chapter examines the experiences and valuation of the enslaved during the important years of puberty and young adulthood, from ages eleven to twenty-two. These years marked significant changes in the lives of girls and boys. Girls became women after the onset of their menstrual cycles—a defining moment of their maturation. As harbingers of additional sources of labor, fertile enslaved women commanded high prices in the market, and their enslavers appraised them accordingly. Young men also brought forth more laborers as breeders, and these years were equally important as they too, matured. The men could be used for sexual reproduction even in their elder years. The institution of slavery defined and extended by law through a woman's uterus and beyond, continued as long as enslaved women gave birth to healthy children. Women provided the vessel and seed, men provided the

fertilizer, and between the two, additional enslaved laborers were born. But as with everything else in the lives of enslaved people, reproduction was fraught. Whatever value they held for themselves now worked in opposition to the devaluation they experienced through sexual interference and exploitation. As a result, many dreaded puberty.

ADOLESCENCE AND YOUNG ADULT AWARENESS OF ENSLAVEMENT AND SOUL VALUES

The pubescent years were terrifying. Not only were their bodies changing, but this was also a time when enslaved children experienced the separation they had feared all their lives. Daughters and sons were taken from their parents as the external value of their bodies increased. Market scenes from their childhood now made sense and haunted them for the rest of their lives. At this stage in their maturation, they knew full well that others claimed ownership of them and sexual assault came at any age.

However, their parents (if present), as well as other kin, reminded them of a value that enslavers and traders could not commodify—the spiritual value of their immortal selves. *Soul values*—my term for such valuation—often escaped calculation and developed during these years. Enriched through an inner spiritual centering that facilitated survival, soul values were reinforced by loved ones. Sometimes this internal value appeared as a spirit, a voice, a vision, a premonition, a sermon, an ancestor, (a) God. It came in public and private settings and was occasionally described as a personal message from a higher being, a heaviness in the core of their bodies. "My soul began singing," one enslaved person recalled, "and I was told that I was one of the elected children."⁶ This telling, this uplifting, this singing of a "fearful trill of things unknown, but longed for still" made the enslaved feel free during captivity? Freedom of the soul matured in puberty.

Soul values, which came from deep within a person's heart, were often felt in childhood, yet not fully articulated until the early teens. Recreating the social and economic circumstances under which enslaved people suffered allows us to make educated conclusions regarding enslaved adolescents' internalized soul values. Unlike appraisal and sale values, these yearnings came from within; outsiders did not bargain for them. Such values shaped and defined enslaved people's characters. "From the time I was

a little boy," Edward Walker related, "it always ground my feelings to know that I had to work for another man." These feelings were "not encouraged by my parents or the other slaves." Instead, they "came from within me and grew with the years." As he aged, Walker had the fortunate opportunity to learn to read and write and developed "a big taste for arithmetic." He "could add up numbers like a flash, could multiply and divide quickly, and correctly, and was good at fractions." These skills, his inherent yearning, and his belief in an incalculable soul value led to Walker's successful escape years later.⁸ Enslaved people often expressed their soul values by running away.

The internal and spiritual lives of the enslaved varied. Some believed in a Christian or Muslim God, others relied on West African, Caribbean, and Brazilian religious philosophies such as Vodun, Santeria, and Candomblé.⁹ Some enslaved people appeared to have no faith or did not comment on it. Historian Albert Raboteau reminds us that enslaved people's religion was an "invisible institution," which can be traced through enslaved testimony and behavior. For some, the idea of an afterlife was an extremely important part of their belief system. They held on to the notion that there was a place beyond the here and now where they would be redeemed and released from captivity. Some enslaved people dreamed that place was Africa, while others referred to it as heaven. In coastal Georgia, the large population of African-born enslaved people dreamed of flying home to Africa and anxiously waited for that to come to pass.¹⁰

In addition to an increasing spiritual awareness, puberty also represented the years "adolescents reached sexual maturity and [became] capable of reproduction."¹¹ The onset of menses for girls and the deepening voices of young boys served as physical manifestations of their transition into adulthood, as both sexes became physically stronger and more capable of heavy labor. Puberty also brought forth the importance of their increased commodification. These years generated outsiders' interest in their bodies, especially the interest of medical professionals and enslavers who actively sought ways to maximize their profits. For some, puberty simply meant more challenging health issues, and just as at other stages of life, enslaved people confronted death during these years. Some young women died giving birth; others within a few days or months of giving birth.

Young men, on the other hand, experienced complications such as shame or lack of arousal resulting from being forced to have sex on demand. As a result, they were physically assaulted by enslavers and spent much of their early teens and twenties on the auction block. Sometimes they took the stand with their parents, and on other occasions, their parents tried to purchase them.

One witness shared the following story of a young child and his father being auctioned: "I saw a beautiful boy of twelve years of age, put on the auction-block, and on one side of him stood an old gray-headed negro—it was plain he was his father—and he kept his eyes on the boy, and the boy kept his eyes upon the old gray-headed man, and the tears rolled in silence down the cheeks of each."¹² Imagine the gaze between the father and son. This was not the look of buyers and sellers inspecting property. It was a lingering stare that both knew might be their last. A paternal gaze with a son's eyes locked on his father's—a reverse gaze. The value between this father and son, immersed in tears and silence, was priceless. At twelve years old, this young boy knew it might be the last time he saw his father. They had likely lived together for all of the young boy's life and this would be the first time they were separated.

As with children under ten first learning about their captivity, for adolescents and young adults, separation and sale was a defining moment. This rare testimony describing a father and son on the auction block shows that paternal lineage was valuable to this duo and others. We know nothing about his mother or whether he had siblings, but we know the two held hands as they stood there together with an uncertain future on the horizon.

Some enslaved children remember their fathers fighting to keep their families together by raising funds to purchase them. Although it was extremely difficult for enslaved people to purchase themselves, Solomon Bayley, enslaved in Delaware and Virginia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, spent much of his adult life purchasing yet, ironically, burying members of his family. He bought his family members with a clear understanding of American and British currency, both in circulation at the time. As a skilled tradesman, Bayley received small amounts of money for some of the labor he performed. After saving enough to purchase his wife,

Thamar, Bayley wanted to raise funds to purchase his only son, Spence. He knew that his son's enslaver had died and all of his property was to be sold. Bayley remembered when the two were first separated; Spence was only nine months old and too young to fully comprehend the transaction. Bayley, on the other hand, went into "a fit of distress" when his son was "sent away" from him.

Years later, in 1813, he learned that Spence was going to be sold again, and his friends and neighbors (both black and white) encouraged him to try to purchase the boy. When he arrived at the courthouse, Bayley heard the "crier" (auctioneer) shout "a likely young negro fellow for sale," and he, the father, laid the first bid. "I bid two hundred dollars," said Bayley, knowing full well that was only "half what he was appraised" for when his enslaver died. Bayley understood the difference in values and knew that an appraised value was not the same as a sale price. He waited anxiously to see if anyone else bid on his son. To his disappointment, a man bid \$333 and one-third, "which was thirty-three dollars and a third more than" Bayley had. Discouraged by the thought of losing his son again, Bayley bid a second time. "A shilling" he interjected, and the trader responded with a bid of \$20 more, increasing the price to \$354. Sadly, Bayley "thought I must give him up, and let him go," but he decided to bid once more. In total desperation, he bid "a cent" and the "crier" rejected that bid, asking him to raise it to a shilling. The penny was the last of his money; Bayley's situation looked grim when the trader once again outbid him. As the price continued to rise, Bayley "cried, and turned off, and went and leaned against the court house." He exhausted all his cash and now pondered the loss of his son all over again. Luckily for him, through faith and prayer, bystanders (referred to as "three great men") came to his aid and gave him extra money to help purchase his son for \$360 and a shilling. One of the men was a Methodist minister. Bayley signed the bond along with securities from the three men, who agreed to cover his costs so that he and Spence could be together.³

Imagine this scene from Spence's perspective. How might he have experienced this trade? What was it like to watch his father bid on him? Was he proud? Did he even remember his father? Did it matter? Here was someone who valued him in a different way. His father's actions show a man trying to live in freedom with those dear to him. Participating in

an auction for his own child signals that some enslaved people faced their commodification in the very space in which they and their families were objectified. Spence witnessed his father actively trying to purchase him so their family could live in a place where people valued him beyond his market price. His father came prepared to buy him and play by the rules of an institution that defined his family as property. The institution of slavery did not always account for soul values. Such values disrupted appraisal and sale transactions daily. Spence witnessed his father's expression of love side by side with the cold calculation of market values necessary to purchase him. He also saw his father give up, cry, and almost accept defeat, that is, until three men stepped in and contributed funds to complete the sale. By age twelve, Spence knew that he had multiple values and interests on his body and his soul. Unfortunately, like his sisters, he too died "prematurely."⁴

Fathers were not alone in trying to purchase their families. Mothers, such as Charity Bower, did the same. Bower lived with her young daughter and twelve-year-old son Richard. She worried about Richard because she knew as he matured it would be "hard work for him to bring his mind to be a slave." Approaching the age of realization and a sense of their place in the world, Bower brought all of her money to Mistress McKinley, hoping to purchase her son. But, according to Bower, McKinley would not let her "have my boy." One day, after Bower had been away, she returned to find her daughter crying in front of McKinley, who was counting a wad of money. At first, Bower thought McKinley had hit her daughter, but when she asked the child what was wrong, her daughter "pointed to mistress's lap and said 'Broder's money! Broder's money!'" Richard was gone, and his sister understood that the only remaining part of him was the money in the lap of her mistress. Perhaps she could not fully process where Richard had gone or why he had left, but certainly she recognized that her brother's absence meant cash for McKinley. Bower immediately understood that McKinley had sold her son. McKinley then looked Bower in the face and said, "Yes, Charity; and I got a great price for him!"⁵

As young men and women grew up, they learned to distinguish between the multiple values placed on and within their bodies. Bower's young daughter knew that money represented her "Broder" and that he was sold

for "a great price" that day. She was probably beginning to understand what boys and girls Richard's age learned—their external market and appraisal values took them away from loved ones. Had Richard grasped the idea of an internal soul value? We do not know. There is evidence, however, that from a young age, some enslaved youth recognized that nobody could purchase their soul. It was the only place where they were truly free. For many, this freedom came at the moment of death, when the spirit left the body. Until they reached spiritual freedom, they still had to contend with external commodification.

VALUATION OF ENSLAVED ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS IN LIFE

No age was more important for the valuation of black bodies than these years (ages eleven to twenty-two), and the years of midlife and adulthood (ages twenty-three to thirty-nine), which will be covered in the next chapter. These were the prime fiscal and reproductive years of an enslaved person's life. Ages eleven to twenty-two represented a period of maturation and knowledge. We know from the writings of Walter Johnson, Wilma King, and others that enslaved youth learned they were both people and property. Johnson writes, "They were taught to see themselves as commodities." They viewed their own bodies through "two different lenses," which he describes as "the chattel principle," taking language from the formerly enslaved.¹⁶ King underscores this point in terms of this age group, noting that "the majority of the slaves sold in the Upper South were teenagers and young adults."¹⁷ I begin with a person's soul value to understand how enslaved youth and young adults worked against commodification. They clearly had another set of values for themselves in addition to the models that scholars suggest.¹⁸

"As soon as I came to the age of maturity and could think for myself," Thomas Likers explained, "I came to the conclusion that God never meant me for a slave, & that I should be a fool if I didn't take my liberty if I got the chance."¹⁹ He and many others did so by making their way to Canada where they lived as free people. African American abolitionist William Still and Boston abolitionist Benjamin Drew collected the stories of individuals who successfully thwarted the institution of slavery and made

their way north in the nineteenth century. Through these narratives, we learn how enslaved people valued themselves and how these internal values drove them to liberation.²⁰ Enslaved people rejected their status in many ways, including hiding out, feigning ignorance, destroying crops, murdering enslavers and overseers, suing for freedom, learning to read and write, and running away. In certain instances of that push for freedom and self-liberation, clear expressions of their soul values appear.

During youth, enslaved young women and men learned more about the internal value of their lives and did all they could to escape. At fifteen, George Johnson liberated himself because he always "felt" himself a free person "and wanted to be a freeman." Since the US government "didn't give me the liberty I wished, I concluded I would go where I could possess the same liberty as any other man."²¹ Upon their arrival in free places, formerly enslaved young women and men worked for themselves, acquired land, and spent time with their families. The abolitionists Still and Drew shared the story of John Hill, who left slavery in Virginia because he "didn't like the condition of things there." He did not "like to be trod upon."²² His ideas about liberty came from his family, including values taught to him by his parents, grandparents, and uncles. Through letters written to Still, we learn of his "remarkable intelligence," despite the fact that he had no formal training.

He proudly admits that "the whole family of us bought ourselves." Hill "came away" from slavery when he was eighteen years old. His uncles paid for their twice before being granted freedom. They "paid \$1,500 apiece for themselves," Hill recalled. After his uncles purchased themselves, they purchased Hill and his mother. Witnessing this made a significant impression on him, particularly because he recognized the dishonesty of their enslavers. When they all settled in Canada, they leaned on values taught to them by Hill's grandfather, learned a trade, and created a firm that offered "pretty good wages." Hill took pride in paying his laborers good wages, something he was denied during slavery. Still remained impressed with Hill because it was clear "how much liberty was valued, how the taste of freedom moved the pen of the slave; how the thought of fellow bondmen, under the heel of the slaveholder, aroused the spirit of indignation and wrath" in the letters he wrote to the abolitionist in Pennsylvania. These letters display Hill's

intellect as he evokes phrases from Patrick Henry: "I had started from my Den that morning for 'liberty or for Death.'" He also bares his soul in longing for his wife to join him and enjoy the place where they would have the rights of human beings, not chattel. Impressed, Still published a series of Hill's letters because he wanted the larger, "ignorant" public to learn about the class of "brave intelligent fugitives" that Hill represented.²³

George Johnson and Thomas Likers, self-liberated enslaved men (mentioned above) who were not as fortunate as Hill, experienced the hardships of public and private sales. Sellers prepared the enslaved for display, determined the condition of their health, and sometimes rated them on a five-point scale of 0 to 1 in increments of 0.25. Prime or full hands had a rating of 1 or At Prime, which represented a projection of the amount of work a person could perform in a given day. Prime "hands," typically between the ages of fifteen and thirty, were the strongest laborers on farms and plantations. Age was not the only factor in providing this rating. Other enslaved people had their rates set at three-fourth hand, one-half hand, or, for those unable to work or contribute to the plantation economy, zero.²⁴

This rating system resembles US Department of Agriculture (USDA) meat grades, in which beef undergoes a "composite evaluation" to determine quality. For example, USDA Prime, the highest-quality meat, is typically younger, has better muscle quality, and is "firm, fine-textured, bright, cherry-red colored [and] lean." But as an animal matures, these characteristics are less refined and the "muscle color become[s] darker and muscle texture becomes coarser"; thus, the animal is downgraded to "Select" or "Choice." When agriculturalists grade meat, they often do not know the age of the animal, so "the physiological age" takes precedence over the "chronological age"; they can determine the former through "bone characteristics, ossification of cartilage, color, and texture" of the meat. The link between meat grading and enslaved people might seem absurd, but the language used by today's USDA to rate meat uncomfortably mirrors the categories for rating enslaved bodies in the nineteenth century.²⁵ Abraham Lincoln established the USDA in 1860 when the meatpacking industry developed in conjunction with the growth of the railroad industry. In sale advertisements in nineteenth-century newspapers, these terms are peppered throughout the pages.²⁶

EXTENSIVE SALE OF CHOICE SLAVES
 Comprehensive Field Hands, Mechanics and House Servants,
 AT THE ST. LOUIS HOTEL,
 BY O. M. GIBBARD & CO.,
 OFFICE OF MARSHALL STREET.

ON SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22, 1859.
 As the undersigned have, commencing immediately after the noon hour, will be sold, AT AUCTION, the following valuable Slaves to wit:

1. AUGUSTIN, male, aged 17 years, very healthy, No. 1 field hand.
2. HERBERT, black, aged 23 years, very healthy, No. 1 field hand.
3. FRANK, black, aged 23 years, and his wife.
4. UELIA, black, aged 30 years, both field hands.
5. UELIA, black, aged 19 years, both field hands.
6. JOHN, black, aged 17 years, good body's man, and house servant, capable of doing any kind of work.
7. JIMMY, black, 23 years, good cook, excellent washer and ironer, capable of doing any kind of work.
8. JANE, black, 15 years, an excellent and practical Sew-Mill man.
9. MARY, black, 17 years, excellent washer and ironer.
10. MARY, black, 17 years, excellent washer and ironer.
11. PERSIMMON, black, 16 years, good field hand and house servant.
12. NICK, black, 17 years, do.
13. DAN, black, 18 years, do.
14. HERBERT, black, 18 years, do.
15. SAMUEL, black, 18 years, do.
16. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
17. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
18. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
19. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
20. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
21. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
22. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
23. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
24. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
25. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
26. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
27. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
28. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
29. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
30. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
31. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
32. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
33. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
34. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
35. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
36. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
37. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
38. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
39. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
40. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
41. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
42. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
43. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
44. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
45. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
46. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
47. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
48. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
49. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
50. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
51. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
52. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
53. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
54. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
55. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
56. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
57. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
58. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
59. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
60. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
61. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
62. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
63. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
64. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
65. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
66. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
67. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
68. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
69. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
70. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
71. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
72. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
73. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
74. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
75. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
76. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
77. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
78. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
79. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
80. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
81. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
82. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
83. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
84. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
85. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
86. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
87. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
88. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
89. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
90. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
91. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
92. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
93. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
94. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
95. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
96. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
97. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
98. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
99. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.
100. JAMES, black, 18 years, do.

One Family.

Broadside announcing the sale of "Choice Slaves" along with detail of Rachel, #29, who has irregular "menstrus [sic]." She is discussed on page 76.

Even at this heightened stage of external commodification, young adults held on to their internal values. A. T. Jones, who understood his fiscal value, did not have the means to purchase himself; however, he offered to pay \$350 for his liberty, "which was a proportion to what others" had paid for him. When his enslaver did not honor the sale and terms

negotiated, he wrote a pass for himself and had "no trouble getting to Canada."²⁷ He had tried to participate in the market process on enslavers' terms, but when it did not work out, he ultimately valued his soul more and chose self-liberation as opposed to self-purchase.

Bid callers or "criers" shouted out the values of enslaved people as "prime," "first-rate," or "A," but enslaved people had different understandings of these terms. From freedom in Canada, Benjamin Miller explained what "first-rate" meant to the enslaved. Before his escape, his North Carolina enslaver had trusted him to travel to and from the market, run errands, or do favors. Sometimes his enslaver even gave him small amounts of money but "I was still a slave," he explained. On one occasion, Miller said, he "bought myself for \$450." Neighbors told his enslaver "he was a fool to sell me for \$450, when he might have got \$800." When his enslaver raised the price to \$500, Miller was unwilling to pay it. Instead, he fled without paying and made his way to Canada. Reflecting on this pivotal event, Miller discussed what it meant to be "first-rate." "I have done first rate here," he explained. "I will tell you what I call first-rate . . . I say first rate, from the fact that we have to row against wind and tide when we get here, and being brought up illiterate, I consider that if we live and keep our families well fed and clad, *we have done first-rate*."²⁸ Considering his deprivations during slavery, his journey to freedom, and the obstacles he encountered, Miller believed his actions and survival were first rate. This more expansive evaluation went beyond the simple calculations enslavers used to determine the work rates found in plantation ledgers, newspaper advertisements, and broadsides. It reflected Miller's sense of doing well for himself. George Ross, another self-liberated person, described his experience using the term another way: "I have been treated first-rate since I have been in Canada. I can't complain at all."²⁹

In addition to the aforementioned rating system, another method to determine the monetary value of the enslaved was physicians' medical exams to evaluate whether individuals were "sound" or "unsound." Health, often measured by "soundness," played an integral role in the commodification of bodies. "Sound" simply meant healthy and able to work; "unsound" meant unhealthy, with a compromised work effort. Medical examiners aided enslavers, insurance companies, and traders to determine an enslaved person's

health—including bodily integrity and perceived mental stability—which had a direct relationship to his or her appraised and market values. In some cases, various body parts or whole persons had warranties to confirm the quality of their health. Their dual commodity value confirms that people were being treated as property, particularly when their bodies were commodified and their humanity objectified in legal cases such as "warranty suits," or after death, through coroner's inquests. Legal historian Ariela Gross describes this process, noting that "sometimes the body of a slave was read for signs of character . . . at other times . . . as a piece of property."³⁰

Healthy enslaved people were poked, prodded, and examined. At some sales, for privacy during a more physical exam, they were taken behind a curtain or into a "little room," but one wonders for whom this privacy was reserved. Northern abolitionist James Redpath said that, in these rooms, "the slaves were stripped naked, and carefully examined, as horses are—every part of their body, from their crown to their feet, was rigorously scrutinized by the gallant chivalry who intended to buy them."³¹

Redpath witnessed several slave auctions, including that of a young man in Petersburg, Virginia, whose "vest was removed and his breast and neck exposed." Next the enslaved man's "shoes and stockings" were "taken off and his legs beneath the knees examined." Even more vivid, "his other garment was then loosed, and his naked body from the upper part of the abdomen to the knees, was shamelessly exhibited to the view of the spectators." The auctioneer or "body-seller" as he was referred to, instructed the young man to "turn round," exposing his naked body from "the shoulders to the calves" to the crowd for inspection. To this, the auctioneer said, "You see, gentlemen, he's perfectly sound and a very finely formed n[ig]er."³²

Those interested in enslaved bodies were also concerned with "unsoundness." Medical professionals discussed definitions and conditions that qualified as "unsound," since this assessment compromised sale. Enslaved people recognized that their health and capabilities were under scrutiny and some decided to intervene. One girl on a Richmond, Virginia, auction block had a right hand deemed entirely useless or "dead," as she aptly called it. Before the sale, she had a physician remove one finger, but an auctioneer "scared that she herself chopped off the other finger—her forefinger—because it hurt her, and she thought that to cut it off would

cure it." When questioned about the finger, she said, "Now, you see it was a sort o' sore, and I thought it would be better to cut it off than be plagued with it."³³ Taking matters into their own hands was one way enslaved people responded to their oppression.

Some physicians wrote articles that classified all the conditions that qualified black bodies as unsound. Dr. Harris of the Savannah Medical College, for example, listed some of the common illnesses that would change the categorization of an enslaved body from sound to unsound, including strands of syphilis, varicose veins, aneurisms, bone disease, hernia, hemorrhoids, and tickers, if it disfigured women's reproductive organs.³⁴ The discussion of soundness and unsoundness was best articulated in specific values, particularly for enslaved women and their perceived capacity to reproduce.

Menstruation

Enslaved girls and young women were very private about their physical development. Older women taught them to protect themselves from abuse, because they understood the connection between their bodies and the institution of slavery.³⁵ Women and "their increase" populated and sustained slavery during the years after authorities banned the international trade in African captives. Given that the law sanctioned slavery through a woman's womb, it is no surprise that enslavers, traders, and medical doctors paid careful attention to gynecological health. The field of gynecology grew out of slavery and, in particular, enslaved women's bodies. There is a rich and well-documented history of US physicians, including the "father of gynecology," Dr. James Marion Sims, who conducted their research on enslaved women. Doctors in Europe and the Caribbean also examined black women's bodies.³⁶

The most well-known European case involved French naturalist Georges Cuvier's exploitation of Saartjie Baartman, a Khoikhoi born in the 1770s in South Africa. She became the subject of scientists' physicians, and the general public's curiosity because parts of her curvy body—breasts, buttocks, and labia—were viewed as exceptionally large. Cuvier exhibited her in Europe for five years under the epithet "Hottentot Venus." People paid to see, touch, and study her body as she stood on a

perpetual auction block, subject to the gaze of audiences worldwide. How did she grapple with the internal and external values placed on her? Did she remain composed? Treated with less decency than a mannequin, Baartman died in 1815. Her postmortem life and ghost value remained in circulation and on display until 2002. Cuvier made a plaster cast of her body and preserved her genitalia in a glass jar; both were displayed in Paris's Museum of Man until 1974. Nelson Mandela led an effort in 1994 to have her remains returned to South Africa, but the French government did not comply until 2002. Her remains were finally given a proper burial in South Africa in 2002.³⁷

Caribbean enslavers also expressed interest in black women's bodies, as well as their reproductive organs. Dr. John Robertson of Manchester, England, for example, sought to determine whether women of African descent entered puberty earlier than European women. His theory was that climate had an impact of the onset of puberty, and he believed that warmer climates triggered women's menstrual cycles. He also thought that "the union of the sexes at an early age" led to early childbearing and was a result of "warm latitudes, where there is a low state of civilization."

To test his theories, he solicited statistics from people who attended and documented births. In June 1841, Robertson asked Moravian missionaries in Antigua and Jamaica for data on the age of first menarche among their "Negro populations." Slavery had been abolished in the British West Indies in 1833, but he longed to collect data, given the meticulous plantation and missionary records in both regions. Hoping to have between twenty and fifty cases, he wanted to know the "age of puberty in that race." A Mr. Elliott of Jamaica responded a few months later with a table that contained information on twenty-one "Negresses" ranging from eight to sixty years old. Most of the women between eight and eleven years old had "not yet" had their menses. But the age varied for those who had: "twelve cases in which the menses appeared, in one aged sixteen years, in three fifteen, in three fourteen, in three thirteen, and in two aged twelve years."

Other missionaries sent information to Robertson from church book registrations that listed whether girls had their menses at the time of baptism. "The idea of any (menstruating) younger than" twelve years, wrote a Mr. Zorn, "was ridiculed by nurses." Dr. Nicholson of Antigua reported

in December 1841 from his own recollections that "menstruation before the twelfth year" was not common among black or white women, despite knowing of a few "rare" cases. In his experience, most girls became women during their fourteenth or fifteenth year.³⁸ This evidence supports the idea that enslaved women in the United States likely experienced puberty in their early teen years; however, evidence from American physicians tells a slightly different story, and one that includes health complications.

Enslaved women in the United States had reproductive health issues and complained about this to their enslavers, medical professionals, women healers, and just about anyone who would listen. Frances Anne Kemble, whose husband owned property in Georgia, encountered several enslaved women with health complications related to the female body.³⁹ However, according to Dr. Robert C. Carroll of Jackson Street Hospital in Augusta, Georgia, black women frequently suffered from "menstrual derangement." He was not alone in trying to determine the cause of such health challenges. Other Southern practitioners discussed these concerns in medical journals and with each another.⁴⁰ Many blamed "negro women" for their poor health, referring to it as "their proverbial carelessness" and their "reckless disregard" of their medical condition. Carroll's reports were derived from rare cases when black women were observed daily in a hospital setting "under the eye of the physician."

Mary, an enslaved "mulatto" woman, from Edgefield District, South Carolina, had irregular periods since age fourteen. The degree to which Carroll described her irregularity "both as to time and quantity" indicates the precise nature of her care. She gave birth to her first and only child at age eighteen, but the infant died three days later, marking the beginning of extended discomfort. Her condition does not appear to have been menstrual cramps, which some enslaved women cured by wearing a cotton string tied with nine knots around their waist, because her symptoms became more frequent and lasted for nearly a decade.⁴¹ For eight or nine years after giving birth, Mary became very ill every month around the time of her menses. Described at first as occasional "hysterical symptoms," the frequency increased as Mary displayed "convulsive movements" daily, "generally about daylight," before being admitted to the hospital. Her enslaver removed her from the plantation, took her to an urban area, and admitted

her to the hospital because she had "not been able to do work of any consequence for many months."

Think about this rationale for a moment. Mary apparently went to the hospital after years of physical pain and months of being unable to provide reproductive or productive labor to her enslaver. Clearly her symptoms became more disruptive, as her enslaver was not able to extract work from her. That he traveled an unknown number of miles to a local city suggests that it was important to him that she received medical care. But given contemporary knowledge, Mary could possibly have been suffering from a severe case of postpartum depression, which at that time was not entirely known. She may have been upset by the death of her child, or this may have been one of many losses. There is also the possibility that she did not want her child to grow up enslaved and that his or her death was a relief. We cannot uncover her mental state; we know much more about her physical condition.

After a thorough medical exam, Mary lay lifeless, pale, and "somewhat emaciated," with a "melancholy expression of countenance." She had diarrhea, back pains, gastrointestinal pain, and "tenderness on pressure over the region of the womb, extending up" to her belly button. The physician performed a "digital exam" and placed a finger in her vagina, "causing her to shrink from the pressure." Perhaps she pulled away because she did not want the doctor to examine her. She may have been uncomfortable with that level of scrutiny, as it may have been the first time a white male physician examined her. Most enslaved women were accustomed to black women healers tending to their health needs.⁴² Possibly, she had some serious health issues. The attending physician found that the walls of Mary's "vagina are apparently healthy" and suspected she was feigning her illness. He therefore asked "another woman" to remain in the room to observe Mary's attacks. The very next day, at daylight, Mary experienced another one of her convulsive episodes that put her in "a state of apparent unconsciousness and lethargy." The physicians concluded that she was not faking and labeled her illness "hysterical catalepsy."

From April 25 through June 8, 1859, Mary remained in the hospital and received treatment. Her lengthy stay speaks volumes about how her enslaver must have valued her. Medical fees, including medication

testing, boarding, and other expenses, were not taken lightly by enslavers who sought to maximize the labor of their enslaved workforce. We know Mary's enslaver took her to the hospital because she had been unable to work. Perhaps Mary was worth the cost of this treatment because she was in her prime years. As time went on, Mary expressed that she was feeling better, while the doctors worked to restore her health. In addition to her "hysterical catalepsy," she had leucorrhoea, a white or yellowish discharge of mucus in the vagina that caused an infection. Folk remedies to treat this condition included "tea made of poached egg shells or green coffee."⁴³ At the hospital, she received "a tincture of guaiacum," or evergreen tea, common in the Caribbean.

After one month of treatment, Mary felt stronger and had gone weeks without any pain. In June, she shared that she did not "remember any period when she has been entirely free from pain." She had her first normal menstrual period with no "nervous symptoms"; her enslaver was in the city, so doctors discharged her. About nine months later, her enslaver reported to the physicians that Mary rested for three weeks after being discharged (as instructed) and "she requested to be allowed to go into the field with the other hands, and has continued at work and [was doing] well ever since."⁴⁴ We have no way of knowing whether Mary felt violated during her medical care, but she was clearly relieved to be feeling better. Although her enslaver reported that she wanted to return to work, we must be careful not to assume that she enjoyed enslavement. She may have wanted to go back because she missed her community of family and friends while confined in the hospital.

Other women with irregular menstrual cycles were advertised for sale with added descriptors about their health. Nineteen-year-old Rachel of Louisiana was put up for sale along with a group of thirty-six "choice slaves" (see page 69 for illustration). All were described as valuable, and they ranged from age three to forty-three. Physical characteristics such as color, age, and labor skills followed their names listed on the public notice, but Rachel stood out from the rest. She had a "black" complexion and was "a superior House Servant, good Seamstress and a fair Cook, Washer, Ironer, and Hair Dresser." She had been raised in New Orleans, which partially explains her labor skills. However, one sentence marked her as

different: "Her menses are irregular, otherwise fully guaranteed." Rachel's cycle was so important that the administrator of the sale made a special notation about it, perhaps for full disclosure or to avoid any future lawsuit. "The above are all fully guaranteed, with exceptions stated," and the conditions of the sale were reemphasized at the bottom of the broadside (poster).⁴⁵ Was Rachel sold that day? We do not know, but she was advertised with personal health information, facts that described her capacity (or not) to give birth—information made illegal today due to privacy laws. Rachel was not alone in having this private information made public.

In Natchez, Mississippi, in 1841, Bathsheba suffered from pregnancy complications. "After the most intense suffering," she "gave birth to an infant dead." Her enslaver had a physician examine her because "her suffering since then [the birth of the stillborn infant] has been great."⁴⁶ It is difficult to know whether Bathsheba tampered with her pregnancy or if her sadness was genuine, because some women did not want to bring children into the world.

Women described as "barren" were also discussed extensively and, in most cases, devalued for their perceived incapacity to give birth. However, given enslaved women's expressions of reproductive control, we cannot assume that all embraced motherhood. Some chose to terminate pregnancies, and others, like Margaret Garner, an enslaved mother of four children from Kentucky, participated in infanticide and took their children's lives.⁴⁷ Some enslaved women on a Tennessee plantation deliberately terminated their pregnancies, and physicians studied these cases to determine how they did so.⁴⁸

Jamaican physicians were shocked to learn of an enslaved woman who performed a Cæsarean section on herself. She had experienced labor pains that were too much to bear, so apparently "she took a very sharp knife and made a deep incision, and extracted the child and placenta herself." Her incision was so deep that it cut into the buttock of her child. Enslavers called for a "negro house doctor" after the mother "cried out for help," and he sewed her up "the same way we sew up dead bodies." The baby died of tetanus on the fifth day. The mother survived and years later gave birth to a healthy child.⁴⁹ Was this woman trying to terminate her pregnancy or was she simply trying to relieve herself of severe labor pains? Regardless

of her motive, she asserted her right to care for her own body when others around her did not.

Forced Breeding

As external values took on new meaning during enslaved men's and women's teens and early twenties, these individuals came to understand another aspect of their worth—the price of their reproduction. Reflecting on her shift to adulthood, Harriet Jacobs described puberty as “a sad epoch in the life of a slave girl.”⁵⁰ For her and many others, it marked the beginning of a period when all men could sexually assault them. Bethany Veney recalled being forced to entertain her enslaver and his friends by “singing and dancing.” Later, she had to go to his room, where she performed more dancing and singing with “grotesque grimaces, gestures, and positions,” as he informed her what “he wanted of me.”⁵¹

But enslaved girls and women were not the only ones terrorized by sexual abuse; so, too, were boys and men. Historian Thomas Foster reminds us that “black manhood under slavery was also violated,” yet most of the literature focuses on the sexual assault of women and girls.⁵² Men recalled being treated like breeding animals. Their appraisers scrutinized their size, strength, and virility. John Cole, enslaved in Georgia, remembered that men were selected specifically for “raising up strong black bucks.” They were sometimes taken on a “circuit” to visit other plantations and impregnate the women. After all, he noted, “this was thrifty and saved any actual purchase of new stock.”⁵³ Laura Thornton, enslaved in Alabama, testified that enslavers “would work them to death and breed them too.” In some cases, she added, “old massa kept one for himself.”⁵⁴

As with girls, the exploitation of boys started at a young age. They were objectified on the auction block and made to run and jump, often with little or no clothing to cover their genitals. In New Orleans, brothel houses specialized in young boys, markets advertised them, and enslavers wanted to purchase them. Enslavers were both male and female. Historian Stephanie Jones-Rogers suggests that slaveholding women administered and sanctioned exploitation as readily as their husbands.⁵⁵ Some enslaved males learned about exploitation from their fathers. “I heard my father say,” explained Oscar Felix Junell, “that in slavery time, they took the finest and

portlies' looking Negroes—the males—for breeding purposes.”⁵⁶ Adrienne D. Davis, a legal scholar, thus labels slavery as a “sexual economy” that began during these years, was reinforced predominantly by elite white men, and made enslaved women and men productive and reproductive laborers.⁵⁷ Thus, enslaved women and men experienced exploitation at the hands of men and women of every rank and class, from the enslaved to the free.

The meaning and practice of nineteenth-century breeding differed from the eighteenth-century conceptions of the term outlined in chapter 1. Rape and forced breeding became common experiences for the enslaved, particularly after the transatlantic slave trade was abolished in 1808. The values of enslaved women's bodies, in particular, increased during the decades before and after the law passed, and breeding in this century became associated with animal husbandry.⁵⁸ Men too were valued for their ability to “make” babies, and their experiences with breeding depended on location. Frederick Douglass explained it best: “I am from a breeding state—where slaves are reared for the market as horses, sheep, and swine.”⁵⁹ Southern newspapers confirmed such notions; so too did instructions among enslavers and speeches among politicians.⁶⁰ Traders advertised breeding practices in local newspapers. One North Carolina paper reported, “Since the discontinuance of the African slave trade, some parts of America have become great breeding districts, in which human cattle are raised for the Southern market.”⁶¹ Clearly, by the nineteenth century, some enslavers used forced reproduction, which often increased their enslaved populations. Some historians recognize these practices and describe them as the “fetishization” of black bodies.⁶² I have argued elsewhere that the exploitation of both sexes occurred when enslavers forced enslaved people to copulate against their will—which I labeled *third-party rape*.⁶³ We still have much more to learn about this history, and the thoughts, comments, and feelings of the enslaved on this subject are an important resource.

Many enslaved men recall being greased up and groomed for the auction block. One bystander in Louisiana referred to the preparations as “dressing up the slaves to be sold.” Some traders “kept a big, good-natured buck to lead the parade” of enslaved people ready for sale.⁶⁴ Whether in a yard, a private home, or a business, enslaved men were objectified on the auction block, just as their female counterparts were. Potential buyers

tugged on their skin, opened their mouths, pressed against their muscles, and asked them a series of questions.⁶⁵

Enslaved people testified about several forms of sexual coercion, but the stigma attached to nineteenth-century notions of breeding contribute to its scarcity in recent historical literature. We now identify broader categories of sexual abuse, including "physical penetrative assault, forced reproduction, sexual coercion and manipulation, and psychic abuse."⁶⁶ This spectrum of abuse was part of the slavery story. Sylvia Watkins, an enslaved woman from Tennessee, recalled that "white men went with colored gals and women bold[ly]." Continuing, she said that the white "women went with colored men too." In her estimation, the presence of single white women in some communities was a cover for them "goin' with one of their [male] slaves."⁶⁷ These "relationships" had a power dynamic that cannot be overlooked. With this in mind, it is no surprise that sexual abuse crossed racial and gender lines, even if we cannot always know the meaning behind such interactions.⁶⁸ But what happened to an enslaved man when he was forced to have sex with a woman he did not choose? How did he respond to the "sex on demand" nature of forced couplings? How did he become aroused enough to perform for his enslavers? What did he do when they wanted to watch? Likewise, how did women experience these shameful acts?

Sam and Louisa Everett of Virginia recalled orgies on their plantation where their enslaver "forced them to have sexual relations," even though they had other partners. Their enslaver made Sam expose his genitals and asked Louisa, "Do you think you can stand this big [n—r]?" When she hid her face from his "nakedness," her enslaver forced her to look at Sam. Next, "he told us that we must git busy and do it in his presence, and we had to do it."⁶⁹ Henry Bibb, who successfully escaped slavery, summarized such practices: "Every slaveholder, who is the keeper of a number of slaves of both sexes, is also the keeper of a house or houses of ill-fame." He viewed white men as "licentious" because they broke up "the bonds of affection" among enslaved families.⁷⁰

When Robert Newsome, a small Missouri farmer, purchased Celia, age fourteen, he had no idea the transaction would end in his death. The middle-aged Newsome began raping her on their way home from the market. This was probably Celia's first sexual experience. Newsome repeatedly

raped Celia for five years, resulting in the birth of two children. Despite her efforts to protect herself from him, Celia was pregnant a third time. She also had a relationship with an enslaved man named George that complicated her continued exploitation. By the time she turned nineteen, Celia had had enough of Newsome's abuse. In the summer of 1855, Newsome came to her cabin to have sex with her, but Celia refused, hitting him over the head twice with a large club and killing him. She understood the ramifications of her actions and was trying to "protect her principle," borrowing language from legal scholar Adrienne D. Davis and historian Brenda E. Stevenson.⁷¹ She, and other enslaved men and women, understood that puberty meant their bodies would be valued for reproductive purposes. And, as young girls became women, they learned how to thwart abuse, whether it came from white or black men or white women. Celia likely felt justified in protecting herself from further exploitation because of her soul value, a value that Newsome could not commodify. He was interested in his own sexual gratification.

Next Celia covered up her actions. She dragged Newsome's body to the fireplace and burned him right there in her cabin. By daylight, she spread ashes throughout the yard with the help of his grandson, who had no idea he was burying his grandfather. Celia buried the larger bone fragments. A few days later, when Newsome's family could not find him, she confessed to the murder.

This story of an enslaved woman's rape is a familiar one. In their narratives, several enslaved women discuss their sexual exploitation. Given that the law sanctioned slavery through a woman's womb, black women faced widespread sexual abuse. For white enslavers, the more children their enslaved women bore, the more enslaved people they had in their labor force. Producing children was a cheap alternative to purchasing them at the market.

Some enslaved men spoke more readily about women's abuse than their own. Thomas Smallwood shared that enslaved women's "virtue is trampled with, trampled on, violated; and is entirely at the mercy and will of any and every debauchee who chooses to arm himself with the advantages he has over the poor coloured female." As a result, black women had a difficult time protecting themselves, and even if they had black male partners

like Celia's George, their physical fidelity "is almost sure to be destroyed by some white man."⁷² Based on his parents' recollections, Willie McCullough of North Carolina described breeding: "Some of the slave women were looked upon by the slave owners as a stock raiser looks upon his brood sows, that is from the standpoint of production." He understood the fiscal connection and added, "If a slave woman had children fast she was considered very valuable because slaves were valuable property."⁷³

Some enslaved men and boys tried to defend their female relatives from sexual abuse. Bob, a Louisiana enslaved man tried to protect his sister Nancy from sexual abuse. One day when they were little, Nancy started to cry and told her brother that "I am very unhappy—I wish to die." Just as Bob asked her why, the overseer's son Peter came running across the yard with a whip in his hand, grabbed Nancy by the neck, and threw her on the grass. Bob jumped in between the two and yelled, "Peter don't hurt my sister. No! You shall not hurt my sister!" Peter struck Bob in the face with the whip and completely destroyed his eye.⁷⁴ Testimonies such as those of Thomas, Willie, and Bob are just a few stories about black women's sexual abuse told from the perspective of enslaved men. One father painfully noted that he was "TIREED on it" after seeing his daughter and other women being exploited.⁷⁵

Returning to the story of Celia, how different would her narrative be if we could hear from George, her lover? As the community developed a case against Celia, George and others were interviewed. He denied involvement with the crime, even though some could not imagine how Celia could have committed it on her own. While she awaited trial, Celia gave birth to a stillborn child. When the court proceedings began, medical doctors testified about whether "a human body could be so completely destroyed in a simple fireplace in a span of only six or so hours." This case occurred before the use of cremation to dispose of bodies in the United States. The first American crematorium did not open until 1876. One could argue that Celia's actions represented one of the first makeshift cremations in US history. As this book unfolds, Celia's act will take on multiple meanings, some perhaps connected to the history of medicine.

In Celia's testimony, we learn that "she did not intend to kill him when she struck him, but only wanted to hurt him." Despite this, and the fact

that she was guilty only of valuing herself enough to resist exploitation, Celia was "hanged by the neck until dead on the sixteenth day of November 1855."⁷⁶ Her children were given values and sold, but we do not know to whom or where. What happened to George also remains a mystery. We know that the state paid for her execution and valued her death over her life. We do not know if her body was ever laid to rest.

Some women were not as "successful" in ending their abuse. One woman, described as an "intelligent and conscientious" person, tried to refuse her enslaver's "criminal intercourse" on multiple occasions. Every time she did, he sent the overseer to flog her. After two severe whippings, she recognized that "her case was hopeless" and "gave herself up to be the victim of his brutal lusts."⁷⁷

Some women like Madeline, described as "a beautiful quadroon," age sixteen, fought sexual abuse on the same night they were sold. Madeline's new enslaver was considered "a confirmed desolute [sic] rascal." After the \$1,900 purchase, "her pitiful cries and groans of anguish, in the horrible night were heard for several houses from that of her inhuman new master." A Frenchman, Raimond Legrand, promised to purchase her and take her to France, but he did not have enough money to buy her. In response, Madeline, who valued herself more than the price tag on her body, tried to escape the next day. While being sought, she ran to the wharf and jumped in the river to her death. Her last words were, "Adieu, cher Raimond!"⁷⁸ Madeline preferred death to enslavement. She valued her soul enough to die.⁷⁹

Commodification Data for Enslaved Adolescents and Young Adults

The external values of those in their teens and early twenties (between ages eleven and twenty-two) increased slightly from those in childhood, unless they were deemed unfit. Examining a sample of 19,041 appraisals and sales from eight Southern states between 1771 and 1865, we learn that the average appraised values for young women and young men were \$517 and \$610, respectively. Clearly, they were becoming more valuable as they approached puberty. As girls developed the capacity to have healthy children, their market values incorporated the ability to produce "future increase." Traders sold a twelve-year-old girl at the Richmond, Virginia, market for \$550. She wore a "small checkered tartan frock, a white apron and white-colored

handkerchief." When she stepped on the platform, the bid caller looked at his audience of "thirty to forty white persons present" and commenced the sale by saying, "Here's a girl . . . warranted, sound and strong." A few minutes later she was sold.⁸⁰ Market prices for young women and men sold in public and in private settings were, respectively, \$515 and \$662.⁸¹

There is a slight difference in women's appraisal and sale values. Many young women, such as the twelve-year-old girl in Virginia, had likely not experienced their transition into womanhood, usually signaled by the onset of menstruation. Buyers wanted to know that they would be good child bearers and were willing to pay increasingly higher prices for them. Boys became young men during these years, and enslavers measured their strength and skills so they could incorporate them into a variety of different tasks. For some, that meant learning a trade; for others, it meant that their enslavers could hire them out for modest payments.

Still, others were not valued as whole people; instead, their worth was partitioned for the benefit of enslavers. Fourteen-year-old Rachel, for example, had three-fourths of her value or time sold, rather than her whole person. She experienced a sheriff's sale where "the purchaser was to have the services of [Rachel] three fourths of the time," meaning that someone still claimed one-fourth "of her appraised value."⁸² When the bidding began, Rachel began "to cry, and wiped her tears with the back of her hand." She made it a point to turn "her back to the people" who bid on a portion of her value. That enslaved people were divided while living should not come as a surprise to legal scholars. Consider the three-fifths clause of the US Constitution. First established in 1783, this rule counted enslaved people as three-fifths of a person when determining representation in congressional seats.⁸³ This parceling out was a financial vivisection of enslaved people, established first in our nation's constitution, and then maintained and continued by institutions invested in slavery.

Inspections and evaluations became even more obtrusive at this stage of life. Young men and women were fondled, poked, prodded, and made to walk, run, and jump; every open cavity was explored, from their mouths to their private parts. Some were stripped naked and, perhaps drawing upon biblical references, felt ashamed, as Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. The humiliation experienced was difficult to express and something

they preferred to forget. Lucy (age fourteen) endured the verbal taunting of her future enslaver as she approached the block in Louisiana. "Thou art mine, black little dove!" he claimed. An apologist who witnessed the scene described him as a "wolf" with a "lustful countenance." She stood there with a "sad, silent face," eyes cast down with tears falling onto the table below as he bid \$1,025 to complete the sale.

A few minutes later, Rosa (age sixteen) stepped onto the same platform. Described as "a capital girl, well built, good natured and intelligent," she could not escape the molestation of the auctioneer as he touched her teeth and displayed them to an audience of several hundred men. Next he worked his way down her body to her "beating bosom," and the audience bid until her sale price reached \$1,250.

In 1836, Tracy Edson of Louisiana witnessed the sale of a "good looking girl about eighteen." Some of the other enslaved merchandise "did not appear to be affected by their situation," while others "seemed deeply to feel their situation." The young woman "covered her face with her hands and sobbed aloud." Curious, Edson asked her why she was crying, and the young woman said that "she was afraid she should be brought away from her relatives." The young woman sold for \$976, equivalent to \$25,600 in 2014 dollars.⁸⁴ Why did she command such a high price? It is likely that she was in her fertility prime. Such scenes were common at large auctions in the Deep South, where the market values maintained the highest averages.

Cane Brake Plantation Patterns of Valuation

Young women appraised on Cane Brake Plantation in Mississippi displayed modest fluctuations in values based on their age. For example, the appraisals of twelve- to fourteen-year-olds increased each year by about \$50 to \$75. Dr. Carson valued Anna Eliza (age twelve) at \$375 at the beginning of 1856 and increased her value to \$450 by the end of the year. A year later, in 1857, she went from \$450 to \$600. Other young women had similar value assessments; by age nineteen, many of their projected values did not increase. From eighteen to twenty years old, Rachel L.'s appraised value at the beginning and end of the year remained \$600. The values of men in this age range on this plantation increased by increments of \$50 to \$100. Male eleven-year-olds received values of around \$400, and

twenty-two-year-olds were valued at \$800 to \$900, with the exception of sixteen-year-old Thomas, who received a \$1,200 value in 1858. Dr. Carson clearly valued Thomas over the other men, indicating either his field labor capacity or his artistry skill.⁸⁵

VALUATION OF ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS IN DEATH

Enslavers used death as a mechanism of control. Although many tried to capitalize on market values upon the loss of life, others willingly killed their human chattel as a threat to the living. While such examples could be financially damaging to enslavers, they were psychologically instructive for enslaved people's soul values. Through funerals, postmortem autopsies, and insurance policies, enslavers manipulated the fiscal vitality of the institution, yet they were rarely able to commodify enslaved people's immortal souls.

Frank Bell, an enslaved man from Texas, witnessed and was forced to participate in the death or murder of his wife. He shared the following story: "When I's about seventeen I marries a gal while master on drunk spell. Master he run her off, and I slips off at night to see her, but he finds it out. He takes a big long knife and cuts her head plumb off, and ties a great, heavy weight to her and makes *me* throw her in the river. Then he puts me in chains and every night he come give me a whippin' for long time."⁸⁶ Men like Bell were willing to risk their lives to see loved ones, but participating in their murder and its cover-up must have been devastating. What did he think when he witnessed the decapitation of his wife? More important, how did he feel about having to throw her head into the river? Unfortunately, we do not have testimony from Bell to learn how this experience sat with his soul. Studying enslaved concepts of death offers one way to see into experiences such as Bell's.

The loss of a parent became a vivid memory for those between the ages of eleven and twenty-two. They not only experienced death, but also witnessed it. "My ma died when I was about eleven years old," Jamie recalled. She, like other women, suffered from overwork and died during pregnancy. "Old Marse was mean to her" and he whipped "her all the time." Even worse, Jamie's mom worked in the fields "the very day she had a baby, and she borne

the baby right out in the cotton parch and died."⁸⁷ Other enslaved teens and young adults remembered their parents' funerals. Catherine Cornelius said she "can still recollect my ma's funeral" because "they gave her a nice one." She was pleased "Brother Aaron" preached the funeral. Her mother was laid to rest in "their own burin' grounds" with planted willow trees as grave markers in place of headstones. "All of the coffins was made on the place, and they was plain wooden boxes"; they were "nicely made." A funeral procession "carried off" the bodies, and all the enslaved were allowed to attend. Whites and blacks alike cried and paid their respects to her dear mother.⁸⁸

Some enslavers allowed similar elaborate services and showed respect for the dead, unlike Bell's owner who did not allow Bell's wife a proper burial. Willis Cofer of Georgia remembered very elaborate rituals to prepare the dead for burial. Someone washed the corpse with soap and hot water, then wrapped it in a "windin' sheet," and laid the body on a "coolin' board." Customized coffins to fit a person's body were common on Cofer's plantation, and men were laid to rest in "a suit of clothes," while women were buried "in de windin' sheets." The burial involved a short procession to a graveyard where the body was placed in the ground. Some more formal funerals had sermons, hymns, and a small service as late as two months *after* the body was laid to rest. The rationale for such a delay had to do with external values. Enslavers wanted to make sure the harvest period was complete and that enslaved people from neighboring plantations could attend.⁸⁹

Octavia George, enslaved in Louisiana, remembered that "funerals were very simple for slaves." Her plantation did not allow a full service. Bodies were just taken to the graveyard and buried. The enslaved could not even sing at the cemetery. Instead, her mistress told ghost stories "after funerals and they would nearly scare me to death." One story involving the decapitated body of a man was a particularly vivid memory for her.⁹⁰

On some occasions, the death of the enslaved involved an official postmortem examination. In these instances, the cause of death was the most important inquiry; the monetary value was the second. Legal historian Ariela Gross notes that postmortems occurred "to determine the monetary value of the slave's body at issue," and that "dissection after death was the final dishonor to a slave's body." In order to determine who made money off of the deceased, postmortems were "prerequisite[s] for any claimant's claim

over a dead slave.⁹¹ Evidence of postmortems is found in medical journals throughout the United States, Europe, and the Caribbean. Through these cases, we learn about the cause of death and the circumstances surrounding the valuation of dead bodies.⁹² A spectrum of commodification continued in postmortem spaces.

Life Insurance

People or companies who insured young adults knew these were years of great physical and earning potential, but they were also risky years due to the myriad of health complications that came with pregnancy and rigorous labor. Such realities were reflected in the insurance premiums and corresponding appraisal values of individuals between the ages of eleven and twenty-two. Representative of the value of black bodies at death, insurance premiums are much higher than annual appraisal values discussed above. An examination of the records of 1,050 policies from the Southern Mutual Life Insurance Company reveals that enslaved people in this age range were of great concern to enslavers. The SMLIC functioned "to make a provision for the survivors in case of death." For their "slave policies," insurance agents helped patrons who depended on enslaved laborers for support and income. In the company's view, "paying a fifth or sixth of their annual hire" was sufficient to "replace the servants who may die" during the term.⁹³ Thus, individuals and companies insured their enslaved people, hoping to protect their investment in the event of death.

Jessup & Hatch, a leather goods and horse equipment company in Augusta, Georgia, insured two high-priced enslaved men, Andrew, age twenty-one, valued at \$2,900, and Sam, age sixteen, valued at \$2,700. These two men had the highest value of all those in this sample and were probably skilled tanners who worked in the company store making harnesses and saddles.⁹⁴ The firm paid a premium of \$55 for Andrew's policy for the year (1864) with a 2.75 percent interest rate. Sam's policy had the same interest and term (one year) but the premium was slightly higher at \$74.25.

Ann, a seventeen-year-old enslaved woman, represented the most financially valuable woman insured, by her enslaver John Murray, through the SMLIC. Valued at \$2,600, Murray paid \$71.50 for the year at a 2.75 percent rate. "Twiggs," gender unknown, was only eleven years old, priced

at \$2,300, with a one-year policy and a \$65.25 premium. Those a bit younger, such as twelve-year-old Lavinia and thirteen-year-old Laura were valued at \$1,800 with a premium of \$40.25 at the rate of 2.25 percent. One wonders if the terms of their policies had anything to do with their ability to give birth. The younger Lavinia had a five-year policy, while Laura's was for one year.

What do these policies teach us about enslaved people's monetary values? They tell us that enslavers capitalized on and thought about the deaths of their enslaved from the moment they were eligible to produce labor in industrial and plantation settings. They also tell us that valuable younger enslaved people had policies and premiums similar to those in their twenties, suggesting that the valuation of black bodies was a well-thought-out enterprise. Enslavers knew that the majority of their wealth was tied up in the lives of enslaved people and protected their wealth through insurance.⁹⁵

Burial

In addition to separation by sale, some of the most memorable moments in enslaved people's lives were the deaths of their loved ones. Solomon Bayley, mentioned earlier, who went to his son's auction, was present at the deaths of his daughters Margaret and Leah. His two daughters died in 1821, just a few months apart—Margaret at age twenty-four in March, and Leah at age twenty-one in July. Bayley recalled that Margaret "bade us farewell, and looked as if she felt assurance and peace that destroyed the fear of death." In her last words, earnestly charged us to "meet her in heaven."⁹⁶ Leah, in her last moments, compared her suffering to that of Jesus and said, "I never shall say I suffer too much." Like her sister who had died a few months before, Leah "held out her hand, and with much composure of mind bade us farewell, as if she was only going for a short walk, and to return."⁹⁷ Just as today, the loss of a child is traumatic for any parent, yet Bayley shared these memories in an effort to celebrate their lives. We do not know how or where Margaret and Leah were laid to rest, and though the stories of their deaths end here, that was not the case for all enslaved people.

As mentioned earlier, some enslaved people received decent burials in plantation or city cemeteries. At Laurel Grove in Savannah, Georgia, 191 enslaved people between the ages of eleven and twenty-two received burials.

Most were laid to rest by their enslavers after suffering scarlet fever, typhoid fever, or yellow fever; a host of other illnesses such as consumption, pneumonia, syphilis, bronchitis, lockjaw, whooping cough, and pleurisy also claimed lives. Approximately fifteen different local physicians visited and treated some of them before their passing. This suggests that their lives had some value, as enslavers paid medical fees to white physicians for treating them. They also had to pay for burial expenses at the cemetery, further supporting the idea that these individuals were valued not only for their productive labor, but also perhaps for their humanness. Fourteen-year-old Mary Ann likely suffered breast cancer, as a Dr. Fish noted she had a tumor in her breast that could not be treated. A larger number of women, such as Maria (sixteen), Lavinia (seventeen), Maria Watts (eighteen), Julia (nineteen), Keziah (nineteen), Sue (twenty), Louisa (twenty-one), Kay (twenty-two), and Helena (twenty-two), died after giving birth. Many of their infants also died within days. For those who died under suspicion, like Caco (fifteen), a coroner's inquest took place to determine the events and perhaps the culprit.

* * *

If young enslaved people did not understand their commodification, those who experienced this humiliation knew very well that their bodies were treated as a movable form of property; by this age, they knew they were chattel. Between the ages of eleven and twenty-two, they experienced a deep understanding of soul value against the backdrop of market and appraised values. Some enslaved people knew in their core that they were not meant to be enslaved. They rejected the external devaluation experiences on the auction block and left slavery by escaping to Canada. Others, like the Bayley women, died enslaved yet expressed freedom of the soul as they looked toward the afterlife with grace and peace. Yet, as enslaved people aged and experienced more separation, they also acted out against their commodification through various forms of resistance. And when they did, many, like Celia, were executed. Upon their executions, their ghost values were assessed, and the financial transactions on their bodies continued. But what about their souls? The next chapter addresses the radical actions of some well-known enslaved people and the unlikely postmortem journeys of their bodies.

CHAPTER 4

Midlife and Older Adulthood

AVERAGE APPRAISED VALUES:

FEMALES: \$728 [\$15,315 IN 2014]

MALES: \$747 [\$21,950 IN 2014]

AVERAGE SALE VALUES:

FEMALES: \$494 [\$14,497 IN 2014]

MALES: \$792 [\$23,266 IN 2014]

I am here loaded with chains, and willing to suffer the fate that awaits me.

—Attributed to Nat Turner, 1831¹

We shall meet in Heaven, where we shall not be parted by the demands of the cruel and unjust monster Slavery.

—John Copeland, 1859²

Sometime in the early 1830s, a middle-aged Virginia woman named Fannie reluctantly stepped up to the auction block. As she approached the platform, however, she refused to stand. Instead, she knelt down in prayer. Melissa, her two-year-old daughter, was in her arms, and her young son, Gilbert, stood nearby suppressing his tears. Under her breath, she murmured, "Trust in the Lord, And you'll overcome, Somehow, Somewhere, Someday!" These had been the final words of Nat Turner, who some believe was her husband. He had shared this prayer with his congregation on the eve of the Southampton rebellion. Now, nearly two months after his execution, the auctioneer commenced the bidding process for Fannie and her daughter. Her son would be sold separately. Fannie had already endured the hanging and decapitation of her husband and several others involved in the rebellion, and afterward, she too was allegedly "tortured under the lash." Now, Fannie would be separated from her young son, knowing she was unlikely to see him again.³

"A brilliant resurrection of the forgotten people who gave their lives to build our country. Rigorously researched and powerfully told, this book tallies the human price paid for the nation we now live in and restores these unrecognized Americans—their hopes, loves, and disregarded dreams—to their rightful place in history. Searing, revelatory, and vital to understanding our nation's inequities."

—ISABEL WILKERSON, author of

The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration

"Daina Ramey Berry's harrowing account of how slaveholders turned every aspect of a slave's life into a commodity to be sold on markets—from the reproductive possibilities of enslaved women to the corpses of deceased slaves—is a must-read for anyone interested in understanding American history, or our contemporary dilemmas. Reading *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh* will leave you with an overwhelming sense of sadness, but also with great anger that we are still failing to fully overcome this history's legacy."

—SVEN BECKERT, author of *Empire of Cotton: A Global History*

"Daina Berry has written the richest account of the many ways in which an enslaved African American's body was bought and sold throughout her or his lifetime. From the cradle to the grave and beyond, enslavers priced black bodies based on their imagined fitness for labor, sexual exploitation, use as collateral, and even their value after death as dissection cadavers. In horrific detail, Berry shows that there was a price tag placed on every pound of flesh. She also shows the efforts of enslaved people to assert that their lives had values beyond the money that could be rendered from their muscles and extracted from their bones. Out of the certainty that their souls were pearls beyond price, black people fought to make room for their own system of human values."

—EDWARD E. BAPTIST, author of

The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism

BEACON PRESS | BOSTON

US \$27.95 / \$36.95 CAN

ISBN 978-0-8070-4762-0

52795



9 780807 047620

News Opinion Sport Culture Lifestyle



Art and design

J Marion Sims: controversial statue taken down but debate still rages

Nadja Sayej

Sat 21 Apr 2018 05.00 EDT

Earlier this week, the city of New York removed a sculpture of J Marion Sims from Central Park. Workers from the parks department lifted the bronze statue on a forklift, wrapped Sims' head in a felt blanket and drove him away on a flatbed truck.

While Sims is known as the grandfather of gynecology to some, he is known as a torturer to others. The 19th-century doctor performed experimental surgeries on enslaved black women throughout his career, and chose not to use anesthesia.

The removal of his 80-year-old statue comes after eight years of protests, activism and the local community collecting more than 26,000 signatures, which were brought to the attention of city officials.

New York City's mayor, Bill de Blasio, agreed to relocate the controversial monument in January, though public protests hit their peak last summer. The city's Public Design Commission approved the move on Monday and the next day, the statue was removed.

A roaring crowd gathered in Central Park for the removal. Some locals said their "ancestors can rest", while another held up a sign that read "Believe black women". In the crowds, it was reported someone hollered: "Off with his head!"

"To hail Sims as a hero was inappropriate and out of bounds," said the deputy borough president of Manhattan, Matthew S Washington, who has been working on the statue's removal since 2010. "It got to a real boiling point in New York, so we put together a coalition of community members who have continued to stand together and say 'we no longer stand for this and we are going to fight until it's gone'."

Following the controversy around Confederate monuments after a far-right rally last summer, this is one of many statues coming down. But where should it go?

"My opinion is that the statue should be melted down and cast that metal into a statue that Sims brutalized, that would be appropriate," said Washington. "His podium is still there in Central Park, we think it should be resurfaced as a blank podium, so the work continues."

One local organization, East Harlem Preservation, has been fighting for the Sims sculpture to be taken down since Viola Plummer, an 81-year-old black activist first called attention to Sims' torture techniques in 2006, the same year a book about him was published, entitled Medical Apartheid.

"Throughout our campaign, we maintained that the statue's presence did a huge disservice to the neighborhood's majority black and Latino residents, groups that have historically been subjected to medical experiments without permission or regard for their wellbeing," said the group's founder, Marina Ortiz. "Dr Sims is not our hero, and we don't need any reminders of his barbarities."



▲ A woman stands beside the empty pedestal where a statue of J Marion Sims was taken down. Photograph: Spencer Platt/Getty Images

Ortiz says she would rather see other doctors honored in Central Park who reflect the local community, like the first African-American female physician Dr Rebecca Lee Crumpler, who worked in Boston during the 19th century, and Helen Rodríguez Trías, a Latina pediatrician and women's rights activist, who died in 2001.

"These are the 'sheroes' that residents would prefer to learn about as they stroll near Central Park, confident in the understanding that black lives matter," she said.

The Sims sculpture has been relocated to Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, which is where the doctor is buried. According to the cemetery's president, Richard J Moylan, the statue was "immediately placed in storage until Green-Wood can construct the historical display that will put Sims' life and work into context," he said. "Ultimately, the sculpture will be placed near Sims' gravesite."

Moylan intends to make sure Sims' entire history be told.

"As a national historic landmark, the responsibility to preserve this history, and not to whitewash it, is something Green-Wood takes very seriously," he said.

But Ortiz and the East Harlem Preservation are not satisfied with the decision to move the statue to Brooklyn. “New York City should not be keeping white supremacy on any pedestal and certainly not in another community of color,” she said. “We humbly suggest that the city bury the statue at Sims’ gravesite if they insist on having it there.”

To JC Hallman, who is writing a book about Sims called *The Anarcha Quest: The Story of a Slave and a Surgeon*, thinks there is a lot of work to be done. “It’s the first time, and hopefully not the last, that a statue in New York City was removed explicitly because of questions about the content of the monument,” said Hallman. “It paves the way for future efforts to get history right, which is absolutely essential in an era when news and truth itself are under attack.”

Not everyone agrees. Michele Bogart, a professor of art history at the Stony Brook University in New York, says the Sims statue should have stayed in Central Park. “People think that older public sculptures somehow continue to celebrate their subjects, but that doesn’t have to be the case at all, it certainly isn’t for me,” said Bogart. “It’s a problem for everyone right now because all anyone can see is racial divide - which is understandable. But it puts blinders on people.”

▲ People gather to watch the removal of a statue of J Marion Sims. Photograph: Spencer Platt/Getty Images

There are still monuments honoring Sims across the country; one stands in the grounds of the state house in Columbia, South Carolina, which has seen protests for its

removal. There is also a building honoring Sims at the department of health and environmental control building on the campus of the University of South Carolina.

The mayor of Columbia, Steve Benjamin, has said he is more offended by the statue of Sims than any Confederate memorial. "It should have come down at some point," he told MSNBC, explaining that Sims "tortured slave women and children for years as he developed his treatments for gynecology".

There is also a Sims monument to the entranceway to the Alabama Capitol building in Montgomery, Alabama, the same city where Sims had his "backyard Montgomery hospital", where he experimented surgeries on slave women, one of whom endured 30 surgeries.

While a painting of Sims was removed from the University of Alabama Birmingham in 2006, removing the statue is not possible, as the Alabama Memorial Preservation Act of 2017 means anyone tearing down monuments in Alabama could be fined \$25,000.

But Michelle Browder, a Montgomery-based educator, doesn't think the local statue of Sims should be removed. "Take it down for whom, for what - to sanitize the history as if it never happened?" she asks. "If he wasn't at the Capitol, you would have no reason tell the kids of his heinous acts of crime against black women."

The solution, she adds, could be one of addition, rather than removal. "I am in favor of erecting a statue beside Sims honoring the mothers of gynecology, to share their contributions to science and medicine that helps all women," she said. "We want the world to know that black women are stronger than any other race of women."

... we have a small favour to ask. Across the US and around the world, millions of readers rely on the Guardian for a global, outsider perspective on the extraordinary news events of our times. Readers chose to support us financially more than 1.5 million times in 2020, joining existing supporters in 180 countries.

With your help, we will continue to provide high-impact reporting that can counter misinformation and offer an authoritative, trustworthy source of news for everyone. With no shareholders or billionaire owner, we set our own agenda and provide truth-seeking journalism that's free from commercial and political influence. When it's never mattered more, we can investigate and challenge without fear or favour.

Unlike many others, we have maintained our choice: to keep Guardian journalism open for all readers, regardless of where they live or what they can afford to pay. We do this because we believe in information equality, where everyone deserves to read

accurate news and thoughtful analysis. Greater numbers of people are staying well-informed on world events, and being inspired to take meaningful action.

We aim to offer readers a comprehensive, international perspective on critical events shaping our world - from the Black Lives Matter movement, to the new American administration, Brexit, and the world's slow emergence from a global pandemic. We are committed to upholding our reputation for urgent, powerful reporting on the climate emergency, and made the decision to reject advertising from fossil fuel companies, divest from the oil and gas industries, and set a course to achieve net zero emissions by 2030.

If there were ever a time to join us, it is now. Every contribution, however big or small, powers our journalism and helps sustain our future. **Support the Guardian from as little as \$1 - and it only takes a minute. Thank you.**

Support the Guardian



Remind me in May

VISA



PayPal