

AFRICAN AMERICAN RESISTANCE TO RACIALIZED VIOLENCE

“THEY WILL HAVE TO PROTECT THEMSELVES”: AFRICAN AMERICAN
RESISTANCE TO RACIALIZED VIOLENCE IN THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

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Lay Abstract

This dissertation examines how black men and women experienced racialized violence during the transition from slavery to freedom and in the decades immediately following emancipation. The struggle to combat racialized violence, I argue, was conditioned by the experiences of black men and women during slavery. By adopting and transforming resistance techniques developed to oppose slavery, the newly freed black population found ways to contest subjugation. To reconstruct the experiences of black men and women, this dissertation also reconceptualizes how we think about violence and resistance. It moves beyond the equation of violence with physical force, and instead recognizes that acts of violence can result from an imbalance of power. Resistance, similarly, should be understood in broader terms to include acts that are not explicitly recognized as resistance by those involved, but that informed observers might reasonably perceive as thwarting attempts at subjugation.

Abstract

Black men and women were the victims of verbal abuse, neglect, intimidation, rape, physical assault, lynching, and other manifestations of violence in both the late antebellum and postemancipation South. This dissertation reconstructs how the newly freed black population experienced racialized violence during the transition from slavery to freedom and in the decades immediately following emancipation. By analyzing primary source collections that chronicle the transitional period between slavery and freedom, it is possible to frame resistance to racialized violence as part of a continuum. The struggle to combat racialized violence, I argue, was conditioned by the experiences of black men and women during slavery. This dissertation, then, highlights the continuities that existed in a period of apparent discontinuity.

To reconstruct the experiences of black men and women, this dissertation also reconceptualizes how we think about violence and resistance. There is a tendency among scholars who study racialized violence to equate violence with the use of physical force. This dissertation, however, defines violence as the use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation. By adopting a definition of violence that is broader than those used in most existing studies of racialized violence, it becomes possible to understand the long-term, psychological, and developmental impact of racialized violence on black men and women. Resistance, similarly, must be understood in broader terms to include acts that are not explicitly recognized as resistance by those involved, but that informed observers might perceivably recognize as thwarting

an attempt at subjugation. The reality is that overt resistance was dangerous for African Americans, and so many turned towards clandestine methods of resistance to voice their opposition.

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Declaration of Academic Achievement

Sarah Emma Katherine Whitwell is the sole author of this dissertation.

Introduction

Violence has shaped relations between white people and black people in the United States since the seventeenth century.¹ In the slave states of the antebellum South, violence was intimately linked to slavery.² Violence, or the threat of violence, was the standard practice for compelling deference and acceptable behaviour from enslaved people.³ Jenny Proctor, an enslaved woman in Alabama, experienced firsthand the brutality of everyday violence. As retribution for stealing a biscuit, Proctor was brutally beaten. After being whipped with the cat-o-nine-tails, the overseer rubbed salt in her wounds “for mo’ punishment.”⁴ The severity of the beating left Proctor unable to work

¹ A discussion on how to define violence begins on page 20. Violence has long been used in the United States to control and suppress undesirable groups. While my research centres on the experiences of African Americans, Indigenous people and other marginalized groups of people were also the frequent targets of violence. On violence against Indigenous people, see Alan Axelrod, *Chronicle of the Indian Wars: From Colonial Times to Wounded Knee* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1993); Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 2005); and Gary Clayton Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian: The Crime That Should Haunt America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014).

² Although there is uncertainty regarding the status of some Africans at the time of their initial arrival in the continental colonies, by 1660 slavery was an entrenched legal institution in both Maryland and Virginia. With the advent of slavery, legislators explicitly deprived black people the protection of the common law of crimes by passing exculpatory acts that granted all white people the legal right to beat, whip, and kill enslaved people. In other words, lawmakers legitimized white power and authority over enslaved people because of the perceived need to control the enslaved population. Andrew Fede, “Legitimized Violent Slave Abuse in the American South, 1619-1865: A Case Study of Law and Social Change in Six Southern States,” *The American Journal of Legal History* 29, no. 2 (April 1985): 95-96.

³ I use the verb ‘enslaved’ instead of the noun ‘slave’ to emphasize the inhumane actions of white people. According to Deborah Gray White, “The noun ‘slave’ suggests a state of mind and being that is absolute and unmediated by an enslaver. ‘Enslaved’ says more about what happened to black people without unwittingly describing the sum total of who they were.” By using ‘enslaved’ as a verb and as an adjective, it is my intention to remind the reader that black men and women had an identity beyond their status before and during slavery. Deborah Gray White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, Revised Edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 8.

⁴ George P. Rawick, ed. *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, Volume 5, Part 2 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1972), 208-209. All references to the Slave Narrative Collection have been taken from George P. Rawick, ed. *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1972 and 1977). Future references to these volumes will be referenced as *The Slave Narrative Collection* along with the volume number, part number, and page number. Either supplemental series will be distinguished by the notation S1 or S2 in front of the citation. Because the interviews of the Slave Narrative Collection were collected in the late 1930s, the incidents described often lack specific

for a week, an economic loss which far outweighed the value of the stolen biscuit. Yet such punishment was justified in the eyes of slaveholders. Because organized state power was chronically weak in the South, slaveholders controlled the enslaved population through violence; the goal was to foster obedience and submissiveness.

Violence remained a crucial part of racial subordination long after the abolition of slavery. Emancipation and Reconstruction partially undermined white control as formerly enslaved people began to assert themselves as citizens.⁵ When the prior racial hierarchy collapsed, many white Southerners saw their economic and social expectations challenged. To regain control, both individuals and groups again turned towards violence to perpetuate their dominance over the newly freed black population.⁶

Black men and women were the victims of verbal abuse, neglect, intimidation, rape, physical assault, lynching, and other myriad manifestations of violence. Despite the promise of emancipation, material conditions in the South did not improve for African Americans after the Civil War. Although free, the black population still faced persecution by hostile white Southerners. In many ways, the patterns of exploitation and oppression that existed during slavery continued. My goal is to reconstruct how the newly freed

dates. This makes it difficult to determine when specific incidents took place. I have endeavoured to include the dates where possible.

⁵ The constitutional amendments and federal legislation introduced during Reconstruction made all African Americans citizens of the United States. Black citizens had the legal right to enjoy all the same entitlements given to white citizens. This threatened to undermine the racial and class structures of southern society and prompted white Southerners to turn towards violence as a method of social control and repression. On Reconstruction, see Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); K. Stephen Prince, *Stories of the South: Race and the Reconstruction of Southern Identity, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014); and Carole Emberton, *Beyond Redemption: Race, Violence and the American South After the Civil War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

⁶ Shawn Leigh Alexander, *Reconstruction Violence and the Ku Klux Klan Hearings* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2015), 5.

black population experienced racialized violence during the transition from slavery to freedom and in the decades immediately following emancipation. The struggle to combat racialized violence, I argue, was conditioned by the experiences of black men and women during slavery. Drawing upon resistance methods popularized during slavery, the newly freed black population found ways to contest subjugation.

Overt methods of resistance were dangerous, as those who attempted to assert their rights as free citizens frequently became the targets of attack.⁷ By adopting clandestine methods of resistance alongside overt methods of resistance, black men and women were able to thwart attempts at subjugation while limiting the risks of reprisal. Many white people failed to recognize such resistance because it was seemingly inconsequential. A sharecropper might steal from his employer as recompense for lost wages; a mother might reclaim a child who was illegally apprenticed; a preacher might condemn the abuses inflicted upon black men and women; a wife might lie to the Ku Klux Klan about the whereabouts of her husband; or the black community might rally together to bury the body of a lynching victim. Such methods of resistance weakened the power of white Southerners as black men and women embraced a culture of opposition in response to racialized violence.

⁷ Race riots, for example, erupted across the United States in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century when black men and women openly asserted their rights. Notable race riots in the United States include the Meridian Race Riot (1871), the Detroit Race Riot (1863), the Memphis Riot (1866), the New Orleans Massacre (1866), the Charleston Riot (1919), the Tulsa Race Riot (1921). See Donald G. Nieman, ed., *Black Freedom/White Violence, 1865-1900* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994); Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence and the Meaning of Race in the Post-Emancipation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), chap. 2; and David F. Krugler, *1919, The Year of Racial Violence: How African Americans Fought Back* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

Black women, in particular, had significant power to shape resistance efforts because they were not seen as intimidating or dangerous, and were considered unlikely to overwhelm the perpetrators of violence during an altercation.⁸ As a result, black women had greater leeway to engage with the perpetrators of violence, especially when they were not the intended target. When the Ku Klux Klan began its campaign of terror it was often black women who confronted the disguised men in defense of their homes. Emeline Brumfield, for example, urged her husband to flee when a group of disguised men arrived at her home in South Carolina. Brumfield answered the door and claimed that her husband was not home. The disguised men threatened to kill Brumfield, but she remained steadfast. Brumfield was not harmed and eventually the men retreated without inflicting injury.⁹

Black men and women both experienced racialized violence, but their experiences were not necessarily the same. Indeed, black men and women experienced – and responded to – racialized violence in different ways. My dissertation, therefore, highlights how black men and women manipulated gender differences in power relations to contest racialized violence in its totality of forms. More importantly, perhaps, my dissertation situates the resistance of black men and women to racialized violence in the late

⁸ See Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada, 1994), 24; W. Fitzhugh Brundage, “The Roar on the Other Side of Silence: Black Resistance and White Violence in the American South, 1880-1940,” in *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 279–280; and Patricia A. Schechter “Unsettled Business: Ida B. Wells Against Lynching, or, How Antilynching Got Its Gender,” in *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South*, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 308.

⁹ United States, Congress, Testimony Taken by the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, Vol. 5. (Washington: GPO, 1872), 1948-1949. Future reference to the thirteen volumes of testimony gathered by the congressional committee will be referenced as *KKK Testimony* along with the volume number and page number.

antebellum and postemancipation South more broadly by reconceptualising how we think about violence and resistance as part of a continuum.

The narratives explored in my dissertation are those of ordinary black people. As a result of widespread illiteracy among the black population in the late nineteenth century, scholars have falsely assumed that few records exist detailing their experiences. The records of ordinary black women seem even more enigmatic. Deborah Gray White lamented the difficulty of studying the lives of enslaved women because they often masked their thoughts and feelings to protect themselves from white and male invasion.¹⁰ Yet ordinary black people – including women – did record their experiences, especially those relating to racialized violence. They often produced records in collaboration with state and federal officials.¹¹ By studying the records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (1865-1872), the first-person testimony recorded by the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States (1872), and the interviews with formerly enslaved people compiled in the Slave Narrative Collection of the Federal Writers' Project (1936-1938), it is possible to gain access to some of the recorded thoughts, feelings, and knowledge of those who experienced and witnessed racialized violence. These sources, however, are mediated records of the past that must be interpreted with care. Both black people and white people, as Chapter 1 explains, contributed to the creation of these records on racialized violence, making the records themselves yet another potential site of violence.

¹⁰ White, *Ar'n't I A Woman?*, 24. See also Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West," *Signs* 14, no. 4 (Summer 1989): 912–20.

¹¹ Kidada E Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me: African American Testimonies of Racial Violence from Emancipation to World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 5.

By focusing on primary sources that chronicle the transitional period between slavery and freedom, it is possible to frame resistance to racialized violence as part of a continuum. Scholars have long acknowledged the continuities between slavery and freedom. However, these continuities are more often asserted than explored. Because of the tendency to use the Civil War as a dividing line in American history, it is not common to see the experiences of enslaved people placed alongside those of freedpeople in a sustained discussion. Most works divide the discussion of slavery and emancipation into separate chapters on the basis of chronology.¹² In contrast, my dissertation moves between the slavery, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow eras in an effort to better understand the continuities that existed in a period of apparent discontinuity. The sources under consideration span from the late antebellum period to the early twentieth century.

My dissertation does not have a firm start or end date because of the continual nature of racialized violence. As W. Fitzhugh Brundage argued, resistance “was something more than a tactical sleight of hand, something more than merely seizing the possibilities that a moment offered.”¹³ The methods of resistance employed by black men and women against racialized violence in the postemancipation South did not emerge in a vacuum. Rather, as George Lipsitz argued, black protest flowed from “underground

¹² The following works divide use the Civil War as the dividing line in their analysis: Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980); Leslie A. Schwalm, *A Hard Fight For We: Women’s Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Tera W. Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997); Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to Present*, Revised Edition (New York: Basic Books, 2010) and Deborah Willis and Barbara Krauthamer, *Envisioning Emancipation: Black Americans and the End of Slavery* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013).

¹³ Brundage, “The Roar on the Other Side of Silence,” 271.

streams of resistance from the past.”¹⁴ If we view racialized violence in the postemancipation South as part of a larger effort to preserve a racial hierarchy in which black people were denigrated and the practical realities of slavery endured, we must similarly view the corresponding methods of resistance as part of a broader narrative. My dissertation, then, is unique because it carefully considers the ways that violence under slavery shaped the lives of black men and women, and how the resistance techniques developed to oppose slavery were adopted and transformed after emancipation to confront the rising tide of racialized violence.

Studying resistance to racialized violence as part of a continuum allows for a more complete reconstruction of the experiences of those black men and women who lived during the transitional period between slavery and freedom. Leslie Schwalm, Deborah Gray White, and Jacqueline Jones, among other historians, have acknowledged the treacherous and ambiguous nature of emancipation.¹⁵ James Lucas, a formerly enslaved man from Mississippi, reflected on his understanding of freedom when he was interviewed by the Federal Writers’ Project in 1937. Enslaved people, he revealed, did not know what to expect from freedom. Some expected to be fed and kept in idleness by the government. Others expected to receive land and farming implements in order to support themselves. Others still had no conception of what freedom meant. To Lucas, freedom

¹⁴ George Lipsitz, *A Life in the Struggle: Ivory Perry and the Culture of Opposition*, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 229.

¹⁵ Leslie A. Schwalm, *A Hard Fight For We: Women’s Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Deborah Gray White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, Revised Edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999); Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*.

was just a word.¹⁶ Yet while many black men and women did not know what freedom would entail, they were keenly aware that racialized violence was incompatible with freedom. To this end, thousands of black men and women adopted and transformed those same resistance techniques once used to combat slavery – theft, physical resistance, flight, etc. – while using their newfound freedom to cultivate new avenues of resistance.

Racialized violence was not confined to any one region of the United States, although scholarship on racialized violence tends to focus on the South.¹⁷ There are a number of reasons for this, but most can be traced back to slavery. First, the black population was greater in the South immediately following emancipation. Nearly four million black men and women became free citizens following the abolition of slavery, dramatically changing the demography of the region. This created tension when white Southerners were forced to adapt to a potentially new racial hierarchy where black people were no longer enslaved. Feeling that their economic and social expectations were being challenged, many white Southerners lashed out violently. In the North, however, every state had implemented legislation for gradual emancipation by 1804. While black people in the North experienced racism and violence, there was no singular moment of upheaval when millions of enslaved people became free. Second, while incidents of extraordinary violence were not unknown in the North, they were more prevalent in the South where white people were accustomed to using violence to subjugate black people. Incidents of

¹⁶ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-8.3: 1343.

¹⁷ On racialized violence outside of the South, see, for example, Michael J. Pfeifer, *The Roots of Rough Justice: Origins of American Lynching* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011); Michael J. Pfeifer, *Lynching Beyond Dixie: American Mob Violence Outside the South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013); and Brian Purnell and Jeanne Theoharis, eds., *The Strange Careers of the Jim Crow North: Segregation and Struggle Outside of the South* (New York: New York University Press, 2019).

nightriding, lynching, and rioting were statistically more significant below the Mason-Dixon Line in the years immediately following emancipation.¹⁸

My dissertation remains centred on the South, partly because of the availability of primary sources and partly because it was the South where manifestations of racialized violence were most prevalent. However, it is important to acknowledge that violence also occurred in the North. The North was not an idyllic safe haven for black men and women; nightriding, lynchings, and race riots occurred in the North, as did other more subtle forms of violence such as threats, intimidation, and neglect.¹⁹

The quantity of testimony available regarding racialized violence in the late antebellum and postemancipation South is immense. Therefore, in order to elucidate the methods of resistance employed in response to racialized violence, my dissertation examines the testimony of black men and women from four states: Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas. I have selected these four states primarily because of the quality of documentation available. Mississippi, for example, produced the third greatest number of interviews for the Slave Narrative Collection.²⁰ Following the Ku Klux Klan hearings, South Carolina was the only state where President Ulysses S. Grant proclaimed a condition of lawlessness in response to the gathered testimony.²¹ And the Freedmen's Bureau in both Georgia and Texas compiled an extensive list of outrages and criminal

¹⁸ Kidada E Williams, "Resolving the Paradox of Our Lynching Fixation: Reconsidering Racialized Violence in the American South after Slavery," *American Nineteenth Century History* 6, no. 3 (September 2005): 323–350.

¹⁹ On racialized violence in the North, see, for example, Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); and Brian Purnell, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard, eds., *The Strange Careers of the Jim Crow North and Struggle Outside of the South* (New York: New York University Press, 2019).

²⁰ Sharon Ann Musher, "Contesting 'The Way the Almighty Wants It': Crafting Memories of Ex-Slaves in the Slave Narrative Collection," *American Quarterly*, 53, no. 1 (March 2001): 3.

²¹ Alexander, *Reconstruction Violence and the Ku Klux Klan Hearings*, 15.

offenses committed against African Americans.²² Together, these four states offer the greatest potential for examining incidents of racialized violence. This approach allows me to provide breadth by looking at broader trends of racialized violence across the South, and depth by examining the responses of black men and women at the local level.

I have also considered, however, the unique conditions of slavery and emancipation in each state.²³ In Georgia, for example, the economic, political, and cultural landscape was dominated by a slaveholding minority. Less than one-third of adult males in Georgia were slaveholders; and only fifteen percent of slaveholders owned twenty or more enslaved labourers.²⁴ Yet these slaveholders occupied the best land,

²² “Freedmen’s Bureau Records – Georgia,” *The Freedmen’s Bureau Online: Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands*, <http://www.freedmensbureau.com/georgia/index.htm> (accessed 13 September 2017); “Freedmen’s Bureau Records – Texas Reports of Murders and Outrages,” *The Freedmen’s Bureau Online: Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands*, <http://www.freedmensbureau.com/texas/index.htm> (accessed 13 September 2017).

²³ The unique conditions of slavery and emancipation in individual states is a topic that scholars have devoted entire books to exploring. My goal here is to provide a broad overview of conditions in the four states under consideration. On Georgia, see Thomas F. Armstrong, “From Task Labor to Free Labor: The Transition Along Georgia’s Rice Coast, 1820-1880,” in *From Slavery to Sharecropping: White and Black Labor in the Rural South, 1865-1900*, ed. Donald G. Nieman (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994), 3-12; Paul A. Cimbala, *Under the Guardianship of the Nation: The Freedmen’s Bureau and the Reconstruction of Georgia, 1865-1870* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997); Anthony Gene Carey, *Parties, Slavery, and the Union in Antebellum Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997); and Watson W. Jennison, *Cultivating Race: The Expansion of Slavery in Georgia, 1750-1860* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2012). On Mississippi, see John Hebron Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest: Mississippi, 1770-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); Noralee Frankel, *Freedom’s Women: Black Women and Families in Civil War Era Mississippi* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); and Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013). On South Carolina, see Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Norton, 1975); Leslie Schwalm, *A Hard Fight For We: Women’s Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997); and William Dusinger, *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000). On Texas, see Randolph B. Campbell, “The End of Slavery in Texas: A Research Note,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 88, no. 1 (July 1984): 71-80; Carl C. Moneyhon, *Texas After the Civil War: The Struggle of Reconstruction* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004); and Andrew J. Torget, *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery, and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

²⁴ James C. Cobb, *Georgia Odyssey: A Short History of the State*, 2nd Edition (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 13-14.

owned the vast majority of enslaved people, and comprised a majority of state legislators. This gave slaveholders considerable power in Georgia. Moreover, this power was upheld by a judicial system that denied African Americans the legal rights enjoyed by white Americans. In the antebellum South, black men and women were prohibited from testifying and, while the law technically prohibited white people from abusing or killing enslaved people, it was extremely rare for such cases to result in prosecution, let alone conviction.²⁵

The conditions faced by enslaved people in Georgia could vary widely. Those who worked on rice plantations endured particularly dangerous conditions, as the wet environment required for rice production allowed for the easy transmission of disease. One rice plantation in Savannah, for example, saw an average mortality rate that equaled ten percent of its total enslaved population between 1833 and 1861.²⁶ Other enslaved people worked on cotton plantations. The work was still labour intensive, but environmental conditions were less dangerous. The invention of the cotton gin saw a massive boom in cotton production and, as a result, the majority of enslaved labourers in Georgia could be found on cotton plantations in the Black Belt by the early decades of the nineteenth century.²⁷ Rice cultivation persisted in the coastal regions of the state.

Regardless of the type of plantation, most enslaved labourers in Georgia lived in large groups. While a typical slaveholder owned only six slaves, the large concentration

²⁵ The barriers faced by black men and women seeking justice via the judicial system are discussed at length in Chapter 1.

²⁶ Jeffrey R. Young, "Ideology and Death on a Savannah River Rice Plantation, 1833-1867: Paternalism amidst 'a Good Supply of Disease and Pain'," *The Journal of Southern History* LIX, no. 4 (November 1993): 681-684.

²⁷ Jennison, *Cultivating Race*, chap. 7.

of enslaved labourers on a small number of plantations meant that almost half of all enslaved labourers in Georgia lived on estates with more than thirty slaves.²⁸ This helped to foster a strong sense of community, and many enslaved people developed close family ties that helped to mitigate some of the trauma of slavery.

The emancipation of enslaved men and women happened slowly over the course of the Civil War. Emancipation in Georgia was complicated by General William T. Sherman's March to the Sea. On 15 November 1864, Sherman left the captured city of Atlanta and marched across Georgia to the Atlantic Ocean. His goal was to destabilize the Confederacy by destroying industry, infrastructure, and civilian property.²⁹ Moreover, as he marched virtually unopposed, Sherman liberated thousands of enslaved men and women. Slaveholders tried to limit the spread of information among enslaved labourers, but quickly found that the strong sense of community among enslaved men and women allowed for the transmission of information. Word spread quickly and many took the opportunity to secure their own freedom. Sherman's March, then, deprived white Georgians of both their physical and human property.

On 16 January 1865, Sherman issued Special Field Order No. 15. This order redistributed approximately 400 000 acres of land to black men and women in forty-acre plots.³⁰ Nearly 40 000 black men and women settled on the confiscated land, making

²⁸ Cobb, *Georgia Odyssey*, 13-14.

²⁹ The March to the Sea is often described as the Civil War's most destructive campaign. Indeed, many Georgians were traumatized by the resulting destruction and loss of life. See Janice Hume and Amber Roessner, "Surviving Sherman's March: Press, Public Memory, and Georgia's Salvation Mythology," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 86, no. 1 (2009): 119-137.

³⁰ The confiscated land stretched along the coast from Charleston, South Carolina to the St. John's River in Florida. It included Georgia's Sea Islands. Special Field Orders, No. 15, Headquarters Military Division of

improvements and beginning to cultivate their own farms. While President Johnson ordered that planters be allowed to reoccupy their plantations after the Civil War, black men and women had already come to recognize the importance of land ownership.³¹ The postemancipation period, then, was dominated in large part by the efforts of freedpeople to gain economic independence. Former slaveholders, meanwhile, endeavoured to keep black men and women subjugated on white-owned land. Former slaveholders used violence not only to preserve their way of life, but also to express their frustrations over the physical destruction inflicted by the Civil War.

Conditions in antebellum Mississippi closely mimicked those of Georgia, although the focus was firmly on cotton. From 1835 to 1860, Mississippi was the leading cotton producer in the United States.³² When the federal government opened the former lands of the Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw for white settlement, there was a massive land rush as prospective white farmers wanted land to produce cotton. Many of these newcomers established successful farms and plantations. Their success, however, was heavily dependent on the labour of enslaved people.³³ And with the abolition of the international slave trade in 1808, slaveholders in Mississippi needed to bring in labour from older slave states.³⁴ The growing profit potential of cotton, along with the decline of

the Mississippi, 16 Jan. 1865, Orders & Circulars, Series 44, Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, National Archives.

³¹ Paul A. Cimbala, "The Freedmen's Bureau, the Freedmen, and Sherman's Grant in Reconstruction Georgia, 1865-1867," in *The Freedmen's Bureau and Black Freedom*, ed. Donald G. Nieman (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), 21-56.

³² Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest*, 286.

³³ *Ibid.*, 286-287. Moore notes that many newcomers to Mississippi purchased land and enslaved people on credit.

³⁴ On the domestic slave trade, see Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999); and David J. Libby, *Slavery and Frontier Mississippi, 172-1835* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 60-65.

tobacco production, saw the importation of thousands of enslaved men and women from the Upper South – especially Maryland and Virginia – to Mississippi.

Mississippi thrived as a slave state partly because of its location. With easy access to the Mississippi River, it was possible to import thousands of enslaved men and women for sale. The Forks of the Road Slave Market at Natchez was perhaps the busiest slave market in Mississippi, and enslaved people were often brought to market by steamboat. Others came overland from Alabama, Tennessee, and Georgia.³⁵ When the Civil War began, these same routes became a means for enslaved men and women to escape. Indeed, those counties near the Mississippi River saw the greatest instances of self-emancipation.³⁶ By fleeing towards the Mississippi River, enslaved men and women were sometimes able to find refuge with the Union Army.

Emancipation in Mississippi was a complex process. While some enslaved men and women escaped to freedom, others waited for emancipation by the Union Army. Initially agents of the federal government, particularly the Union Army, showed little concern with the liberation of enslaved people. Those who did escape to Union lines were not welcomed into the ranks. However, by the end of 1862, it became apparent that the newly freed black population could be used to undermine the Confederacy. By welcoming fugitives and liberating enslaved labourers, the Union deprived the Confederacy of valuable resources.³⁷ As a result, thousands of formerly enslaved people

³⁵ Jim Barnett and H. Clark Burkett, “The Forks of the Road Slave Market at Natchez,” *Journal of Mississippi History* 63, no. 3 (September 2001): 168-187.

³⁶ Thomas C. Buchanan, “Levees of Hope: African American Steamboat Workers, Cities, and Slave Escapes on the Antebellum Mississippi,” *Journal of Urban History* 30, no. 3 (March 2004): 360-377.

³⁷ Michelle Wartman, “Contraband, Runaways, Freedmen: New Definitions of Reconstruction Created by the Civil War,” *International Social Science Review* 76, no. ¾ (2001): 122-128.

were settled on captured plantations, put to work in the military, and held in contraband camps. These numbers peaked following President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, which formalized the idea that the Union was fighting to abolish slavery.³⁸

In Mississippi, the period after the Emancipation Proclamation saw increased resistance to slavery by black men and women. As in Georgia, news and information spread quickly between plantations.³⁹ Slaveholders tried to keep their enslaved labourers ignorant; some went as far as to relocate large groups away from sites of likely military action. There was widespread fear amongst slaveholders about the possibility of rebellion. Winthrop D. Jordan, for example, described a conspiracy to rebel by enslaved people in Natchez. Slaveholders dealt with the conspiracy by executing those involved and restricting information to prevent the news from reaching other enslaved people. Elsewhere government officials restricted the movement of enslaved people and endeavoured to impress enslaved people for use in the Confederate Army.⁴⁰ When the Civil War came to an end, these lingering tensions manifested in widespread violence against the newly freed black population. In particular, we can see a strong effort to restrict the movement of black men and women through the use of physical force and restrictive labour contracts.

In South Carolina, the focus on rice production created a sense of community rooted in a shared ethnic background. When slaveholders first imported labour from Africa to South Carolina, they tended to favour men and women from regions that

³⁸ Emancipation Proclamation, January 1, 1863, Presidential Proclamations, 1791-1991, Record Group 11, General Records of the United States Government, National Archives.

³⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-8.3: 1084-1085.

⁴⁰ Winthrop D. Jordan, *Tumult and Silence at Second Creek: An Inquiry into a Civil War Slave Conspiracy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993).

produced rice. Between 1751 and 1800, captives from West Africa’s “Rice Coast” – a rice-growing region stretching from Senegal to Sierra Leone and Liberia – constituted the majority of enslaved people imported into South Carolina.⁴¹ While no single group ever achieved demographic dominance, there was a great sense of unity among enslaved people because many shared an ethnic background.⁴² Moreover, because of the large number of enslaved men and women imported from Africa, by 1765, black people outnumbered white people by more than two to one.⁴³

In order to maintain control amidst this demographic imbalance, slaveholders came to dominate the state legislature. These slaveholders used their position of power to enact laws that upheld the institution of slavery. Burglary, arson, and running away, for example, were declared offenses punishable by death. These measures were largely inspired by widespread fear that the majority black population might one day rise up. When rumours began to circulate regarding the prospect of abolition, most South Carolinians responded negatively. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that South Carolina was the first state to call for a convention to secede from the Union following the election of Abraham Lincoln.⁴⁴

Emancipation was especially fraught in South Carolina. Former slaveholders feared that the newly freed black population might seek vengeance. These fears were largely baseless, but they gave rise to significant antiblack sentiment that persisted

⁴¹ Edda L. Fields Black, *Deep Roots: Rice Farmers in West Africa and the African Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 180.

⁴² We can see the perseverance of African culture in the material culture, language, and cuisine of enslaved people. See, for example, Matti Turner, “Baskets of Rice: Creolization and Material Culture from West Africa to South Carolina Lowcountry,” *African & Black Diaspora* 12, no. 3 (November 2019): 320-336.

⁴³ Wood, *Black Majority*, chap. 5.

⁴⁴ William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 213-228.

throughout the postemancipation period. The Ku Klux Klan was especially active in South Carolina. Indeed, there are more incidents of nightriding and physical abuse discussed in South Carolina than in any other state considered as part of my dissertation. Racialized violence became so problematic that in 1871 and 1872, following the Ku Klux Klan hearings, President Ulysses S. Grant intervened by suspending the writ of habeas corpus in the counties of Spartanburg, Union, York, Chester, Laurens, Newberry, Fairfield, Lancaster, and Chesterfield. Federal prosecutors came south to indict hundreds of men accused of belonging to the Ku Klux Klan because local courts had proved ineffective.⁴⁵

Texas, the final state considered in my dissertation, is somewhat of an outlier because of its geographic location and relatively late entry into the United States. When Texas declared independence from Mexico in 1836, there was already a thriving cotton economy dependent on enslaved labour. Still, the number of enslaved men and women in the region was relatively low compared to Georgia, Mississippi, and South Carolina. Indeed, Texas had a population of approximately 5000 enslaved labourers in 1836. This number increased to 30 000 by annexation in 1845. By 1860, the census identified 182 566 enslaved men and women – approximately thirty percent of the total population.⁴⁶

The vast majority of enslaved people came to Texas with their masters. As slaveholders relocated to the new state, they brought along enslaved men and women to carry out the necessary labour.⁴⁷ Life for enslaved people in Texas was undoubtedly hard,

⁴⁵ Alexander, *Reconstruction Violence and the Ku Klux Klan Hearings*, 15.

⁴⁶ Kenneth Mason, *African Americans and Race Relations in San Antonio, Texas, 1867-1937* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 13-14.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

though conditions varied little from other cotton producing regions in the United States. But Texas always remained somewhat isolated because of its geographic position to the southwest. As a result, when the Civil War began, Texas became a safe haven for some slaveholders. Cato Carter, an enslaved man from Texas, described to the Federal Writers' Project how some slaveholders relocated to Texas at the close of the Civil War. These slaveholders claimed that if the Union won, they would have to live in Texas to keep their enslaved labourers.⁴⁸

Emancipation came to Texas later than elsewhere in the Confederacy because it was the most remote slave state. While General Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox Court House on 9 April 1865, it was not until 19 June 1865 that General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston to announce the emancipation of all enslaved men and women.⁴⁹ Elsewhere enslaved men and women had been freed roughly two months earlier, but it was not until "Juneteenth" that news of emancipation formally reached this last Confederate state.⁵⁰ According to Melinda Pollard, a formerly enslaved woman, this meant that African Americans in Texas tended to celebrate freedom more than those who had been enslaved elsewhere.⁵¹

Because of the unique circumstances surrounding emancipation in Texas, there was a great deal of hostility between the newly freed black population and former slaveholders. Indeed, even after the announcement of emancipation, it was not uncommon

⁴⁸ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-3.2: 649. See also S2-6.5: 2253.

⁴⁹ "General Orders No. 3," *The Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph* (Houston, Texas), Vol. 31, No. 41, 23 June 1865.

⁵⁰ Randolph B. Campbell, "The End of Slavery in Texas: A Research Note," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 88, no. 1 (July 1984): 71-80; and Shennette Garrett-Scott, "'When Peace Come': Teaching the Significance of Juneteenth," *Black History Bulletin* 76, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2013): 19-21.

⁵¹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-8.7: 314.

for slaveholders in Texas to keep the news of freedom a secret, to confine formerly enslaved labourers to plantations, or to hold children in illegal apprenticeships.⁵² Despite having a smaller black population, testimony by black men and women reveals a considerable amount of violence directed at formerly enslaved people in an effort to approximate the conditions of slavery.

Even after restricting my dissertation to focus primarily on Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas, the amount of available testimony by black men and women is immense. To manage my sources effectively and to elucidate the ways in which black men and women resisted racialized violence, I employed digital humanities techniques to support and enhance my research. My dissertation is supported by a relational database featuring the testimony of both the victims of and witnesses to racialized violence. By extracting data on individual incidents of racialized violence – the victims and perpetrators, geographic locations, forms of violence, methods of resistance – it is possible to identify thematic trends. In particular, I wanted to identify the relationships between specific forms of violence and the methods of resistance employed in response. The results of this work are present throughout my dissertation. A more detailed discussion of the minutiae of creating a relational database to study racialized violence can be found in the appendix of the dissertation. Also included in the appendix are two sample data visualizations.⁵³

⁵² These acts of violence are discussed at length in Chapters 2, 3, and 4.

⁵³ The use of digital humanities techniques is intended to supplement, not replace, the traditional close-reading methodology. For more a detailed discussion of my work as it relates to digital scholarship, please see Appendix A.

In order to study racialized violence in the United States, there are several terms – race, violence, resistance – that we must first define due to the imprecise way that both scholars and laypersons have historically used these terms.⁵⁴ Current scholarship rejects essentialist biological and genetic explanations of race. As Barbara J. Fields noted, it is dangerous to assume that race is an observable, biological fact. This is because race does not exist clearly and immutably in biology.⁵⁵ Geneticists have argued that there can be more genetic variation within a race than between the races. Those with dark skin, for example, are often grouped together on the basis of race, despite speaking different languages and originating from different countries.⁵⁶ Because race has no firm basis in biology, historians must consider it within a historical context as a continually constructed ideology. To argue that race is an ideological construction and historically mutable, however, does not deny that race has material implications. Barbara J. Fields, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Kathleen Brown, and Jennifer L. Morgan have all demonstrated how ideologies of race influenced the creation of laws and the treatment of men and women in the United States.⁵⁷ Moreover, my own work examines how race has

⁵⁴ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, in his recent monograph on the history of torture in the United States, emphasizes the importance of definitions because of the way that words – like torture and, in this case, violence and resistance – can be used “expansively and promiscuously.” See W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Civilizing Torture: An American Tradition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019), 4-7.

⁵⁵ Barbara J. Fields, “Ideology and Race in American History,” in *Region, Race and Reconstruction: Essays in Honour of C. Vann Woodward*, ed. J. Morgan Krusser and James McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 144-145.

⁵⁶ Eric Nellis, *Shaping the New World: African Slavery in the Americas, 1500-1888* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 9-10.

⁵⁷ Fields, “Ideology and Race in American History; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” *Signs* 17, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 251-74; Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

been used to motivate, justify, and perpetuate the use of violence to subjugate African Americans in the late antebellum and postemancipation South. By historicizing race and recognizing how race is constructed, it becomes possible to explore the connection between racial discourses and structures of power.

There is a rich corpus of scholarship on violence in the United States. Most works, however, assume a common understanding of what constitutes violence. In other words, scholars expect that their readers will be able to identify and understand incidents of violence without significant explanation. A physical attack, for example, is a seemingly obvious manifestation of violence. Merriam-Webster echoes this sentiment, defining violence as “the use of physical force so as to injure, abuse, damage, or destroy.”⁵⁸ Violence becomes racialized when it is motivated by, or enacted through, race. Indeed, this seems to be the implicit definition underlying most scholarship on racialized violence, particularly those works that consider violence narrowly in the context of race riots and lynchings.⁵⁹ Mary R. Jackman explained, “The apparent concreteness and immediacy of physical injuries heightens their visibility and ease of observation.”⁶⁰ The problem, however, is that considering violence narrowly as related to physical force ignores the full range of potential outcomes.

⁵⁸ “Definition of Violence,” *Merriam-Webster*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/violence> (accessed 14 February 2019).

⁵⁹ See, for example, George C. Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and “Legal Lynchings”* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980); George C. Rable, *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1984); Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1995); and Paul Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

⁶⁰ Mary R. Jackman, “Violence in Social Life,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 28 (2002): 393.

Philosopher Joseph Betz insisted that an act must impinge upon a victim's body to qualify as violence.⁶¹ Hiram Rhodes Revels, a black senator from Mississippi, seemingly agreed. In his autobiography, Revels described his time as a religious teacher and educator in Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri. He was met with significant opposition from white Southerners and, in 1854, Revels was imprisoned for preaching to African Americans. Yet immediately after revealing this fact, he stated that he was "never subjected to violence."⁶² This raises important questions about how we define violence. Can an act that causes psychological trauma – fear, anxiety, anguish, shame – be considered violence? Can an act that has material consequences – destruction of property, loss of earnings – be considered violence? And can an act that has social outcomes – public humiliation, stigmatization, imprisonment – be considered violence? It is clear that Revels equated violence with physical force and bodily trauma. I would argue, however, that his imprisonment for trying to "improve the moral and spiritual conditions" of black men and women should also be understood as an act of violence.⁶³

It is difficult to readily objectify and quantify violence, and thus create a checklist defining any particular act as an act of violence. Most scholars theorizing about violence agree that there will always be something elusive about the concept.⁶⁴ For the purposes of

⁶¹ Joseph Betz, "Violence: Garver's Definition and a Deweyan Correction," *Ethics* 87, no. 4 (July 1977): 341–45.

⁶² *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-9.4: 1825.

⁶³ *Ibid.* On the use of the penitentiary as a means of subjugating African Americans in the South, see Barry A. Crouch, *The Dance of Freedom: Texas African Americans During Reconstruction*, ed. Larry Madras (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), chap. 8.

⁶⁴ Most scholarship on defining violence occurs within the fields of philosophy, sociology, and anthropology. See Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois, "Introduction: Making Sense of Violence," in *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*, ed. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois, Blackwell Readers in Anthropology (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), 1–31; Jane Kilby, "Introduction to Special Issue: Theorizing Violence," *European Journal of Social Theory*

my dissertation, however, a broad definition allows for an analysis of the diverse forms of violence that characterized interactions between African Americans and white Southerners in the late antebellum and postemancipation South.

In 2002, The World Health Organization released its *World Report on Violence and Health*. This expansive document defined violence as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation.”⁶⁵ Although broad, this definition of violence is useful in the context of the late antebellum and postemancipation South because it covers a range of outcomes. By including “power” in addition to “physical force,” this approach augments the conventional understanding of violence to include acts that result from unequal power relationships and trauma that is not only physical. Violence, then, should be understood to include threats, intimidation, neglect, along with physical, sexual and psychological abuse.⁶⁶ A restricted definition that equates violence only with physical force and bodily trauma undermines the experiences of countless black men and women, effectively denying their pain, suffering, and oppression.

Discussions of violence are often dominated by two overarching assumptions: 1) violence is motivated by hostility with the intent to cause harm; and 2) violence is legally,

16, no. 3 (August 2013): 261–272; Willem Schinkel, “Regimes of Violence and the Trias Violentiae,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 16, no. 3 (August 2013): 310–25.

⁶⁵ World Health Organization, *World Report on Violence and Health: Summary* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2002), 5.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

socially, or morally deviant.⁶⁷ As a result of these assumptions, violence is often incorrectly viewed as an eruption of targeted hostility that extends beyond the normal boundaries of social interaction. But violence may not be intentional or deviant. In the late antebellum and postemancipation South, violence was motivated by diverse and complex factors, and, in many cases, violence was the by-product of other goals. In 1865 and 1866, for example, various states in the South enacted new laws to curtail the rights of African Americans.⁶⁸ Rather than advancing the transition from slavery to freedom, these Black Codes entrenched the widely held assumption that African Americans existed to raise crops for white employers. African Americans were forced to carry passes and observe curfews. The Black Codes also regulated the rights of African Americans to marry, acquire property, gain access to the judicial system, and negotiate labour contracts. The Black Codes gave ordinary white Southerners authority over African Americans, permitting any white person to arrest any black person, to whip black labourers, and to remove black children from poor families.⁶⁹ As a result of these efforts to subjugate African Americans and preserve white supremacy, violence became an integral component of life in the South.

Violence against black men and women is often quantified by the vast number of lynchings that occurred between 1880s and 1930s. Lynchings are horrific and certainly

⁶⁷ Jackman argues that while these assumptions are rarely stated explicitly, their influence is pervasive in most analytical works dealing with violence. Jackman, "Violence in Social Life," 388.

⁶⁸ On the Black Codes see Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*; Barry A. Crouch, "'To Enslave the Rising Generation': The Freedmen's Bureau and the Texas Black Code," in *The Freedmen's Bureau and Reconstruction: Reconsiderations*, ed. Paul A. Cimbala and Randall M. Miller, *Reconstructing America* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), 261–87; and Eric Foner, "Freedom's Dream Deferred," *American History* 50, no. 5 (December 2015), 42–51.

⁶⁹ Shawn Leigh Alexander, *Reconstruction Violence and the Ku Klux Klan Hearings*, The Bedford Series in History and Culture (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2015), 4–5.

worthy of study, but they are only one manifestation of racialized violence. Indeed, the number of African Americans lynched in the South simply does not compare to the vast number of premature deaths brought about by discriminatory racial practices. Between 1882 and 1930, there were 2,805 lynchings in ten southern states.⁷⁰ Although almost three hundred white people were lynched by mobs, the vast majority of lynching victims were African Americans. Of these victims, ninety-four percent were killed by lynch mobs comprised of white Southerners. Lynching makes a powerful tool for intimidation. However, widespread dislocation, prolonged starvation, and outbreaks of sickness and disease threatened the lives of approximately 4 million African Americans after the Civil War.⁷¹

Following emancipation, many African Americans engaged in sharecropping. George Washington Browning, for example, initially remained with his family on the plantation of his former master. With limited resources or options for employment, Browning worked in exchange for one-sixth of the crop. But after a year, Browning realized that his meager wages were unfair and insufficient to support his family. Browning was forced to abandon his crop and seek out alternative employment to avoid starvation.⁷² The plight of sharecroppers rarely received recognition as violence because a negative outcome was probable as opposed to certain. Moreover, there was not always a

⁷⁰ Tolnay and Beck, *A Festival of Violence*, 269. Tolnay and Beck offer a detailed statistical study of lynching in ten southern states – Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Their work traces the composition of lynch mobs, incidents of lynching, and lynching victims. Determining the exact number of lynchings is difficult, largely because the definition of lynching was open to contestation. Organizations such as the NAACP kept records, but inevitably some lynchings were not recorded.

⁷¹ Jim Downs, *Sick from Freedom: African-American Illness and Suffering During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 21-22.

⁷² *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-3.1: 111-117.

deliberate harmful intent. While many unscrupulous white landowners openly abused sharecroppers, there were some who allowed their sharecroppers relative freedom while simultaneously refusing to pay a living wage. Where harmful intent is less clear, it becomes easier to portray injurious outcomes as mere accidents, despite evidence that the white landowners actively resisted attempts to rectify the unfair practices of sharecropping.

I argue that to encourage a systematic and comprehensive analysis of violence, it is necessary to adopt a definition that focuses on the injuriousness of actions. The social, moral, and legal standing of those actions, while relevant, is of secondary concern. Therefore, I have chosen to adapt the definition of violence provided by the World Health Organization. Violence is defined as “the use of physical force or power, threatened or actual ... that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation.”⁷³ This definition allows for the analysis of all actions that directly inflict injury, as well as those that either threaten or result in incidental injury. Furthermore, this definition does not assume that an injury must be physical in nature. By adopting a definition of violence that is broader than those used in existing studies of racialized violence, it becomes possible to understand the long-term, psychological, and developmental impact of racialized violence on black men and women.

⁷³ World Health Organization, *World Report on Violence and Health*, 5.

Just as scholars have failed to adequately define violence, they have also failed to define resistance in any systematic way.⁷⁴ According to Jocelyn Hollander and Rachel Einwohner, resistance has been variously defined as questioning and objecting, engaging in behaviour despite opposition, and opposing abusive behaviour and control.⁷⁵ Although most scholars seem to agree that resistance involves some kind of oppositional action, there is no clear consensus regarding whether resistance must be intended by the actors, or whether resistance must be recognized by the targets. For my purposes, resistance can be understood as any act that perceivably thwarts an attempt at subjugation. My definition supports a wholistic understanding of resistance. It recognizes that actors, targets, and informed observers all play a role in defining an act as resistance. This is because, as Hollander and Einwohner illustrated, resistance is interactional. Resistance should not be defined only by the actors' perception of their own behaviour, nor should it be defined solely by the targets' recognition of and reaction to this behaviour.⁷⁶

We cannot rely on stated intention to define resistance because actors frequently will not, or cannot, articulate their motives. The Depression-era interviews in the Slave Narrative Collection, for example, are rife with descriptions of theft. Indeed, enslaved people often stole foodstuffs. Was the theft intended as an assertion of the right to

⁷⁴ Scholars have used the term 'resistance' to describe a wide variety of behaviours. Everything from revolutions to mass protests to hairstyles to watching soap operas has been described as resistance. Because of this variation, scholars have struggled to form any kind of consensus regarding how to define resistance. See Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Erik S. Gellman, *Death Blow to Jim Crow: The National Negro Congress and the Rise of Militant Civil Rights* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Rose Weitz, "Women and Their Hair: Seeking Power Through Resistance and Accommodation," *Gender & Society* 15, no. 5 (2001): 667-686; and Mary Ellen Brown, *Soap Opera and Women's Talk: The Pleasure of Resistance* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1994).

⁷⁵ Jocelyn A. Hollander and Rachel L. Einwohner, "Conceptualizing Resistance," *Sociological Forum* 19, no. 4 (December 2004): 533-554.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 548.

subsistence, or was it simply about providing nourishment? Perhaps theft was both an assertion of the right to subsistence and a means of survival at the same time. The majority of the narratives suggest that enslaved people stole because they were hungry. Jenny Proctor stole a biscuit while cleaning the house of her mistress. When questioned about the missing biscuit, she admitted to the theft and explained that she was hungry.⁷⁷ Although there is no mention by Proctor that she committed the theft with any intention to deprive her mistress or to undermine the institution of slavery, we must also remember the limitations of the source. The majority of formerly enslaved people were interviewed by white interviewers. Rather than admit to stealing as a means of resistance, they might have confessed to stealing due to hunger in an effort to evoke sympathy, particularly as the interviews were recorded during the Great Depression when food shortages were a reality for many.⁷⁸

If we cannot rely solely on intention to define resistance, we similarly cannot rely solely on recognition because the targets of resistance may not acknowledge the oppositional nature of an act. In the South, traditional documents frequently described African Americans as unreliable, shiftless, and ignorant. Black men and women were deeply affected by racist stereotypes, which portrayed them as mentally and physically inferior to white people.⁷⁹ Robin Kelley referred to the “Cult of True Sambohood.” This

⁷⁷ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 5.3: 209-210.

⁷⁸ Amrita Chakrabarti Myers similarly acknowledges the difficulty of identifying resistance without stated intention. Amrita Chakrabarti Myers, “‘Sisters in Arms’: Slave Women’s Resistance to Slavery in the United States,” *Past Imperfect* 5 (1996): 149-150. See also James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 291.

⁷⁹ The racist belief that black people were inferior is evident in the slave narratives. See John W. Blassingame, “Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems,” in *The Slave’s Narrative*, eds. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 79-81.

southern, racist ideology ascribed incidents of theft, sabotage, absenteeism, and other such acts to the belief that African Americans were inept and lazy.⁸⁰ According to Kelley, negative descriptions of black workers should be understood as racist comments stemming from the inability of white people to recognize resistance. The “Cult of True Sambohood” was not unknown to African Americans. By carefully manipulating how they were perceived by white Southerners, black workers could use their allegedly inferior status to their advantage.⁸¹ For example, in North Carolina, tobacco workers collaborated to control the pace of work. When black female stemmers had trouble keeping up the pace, those responsible for supplying the tobacco might pack the baskets more loosely.⁸² This would cost the employer profit, as less tobacco could be processed on a given day.⁸³ But to mitigate the threat of punishment for such behaviour, black labourers could feign ignorance and, in this way, engage in clandestine resistance.

For most of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, resistance to racialized violence was unorganized; African Americans relied on clandestine actions with limited risk of reprisal. Black women, in particular, were the frequent instigators of clandestine resistance. This was partially because of the belief that overt resistance was more masculine. According to Robin Kelley, the black community sometimes viewed

⁸⁰ Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 21.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* Often the appearance of silence and accommodation was intended to deceive. Beneath this façade, working-class blacks engaged in a hidden history of unorganized resistance.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 18.

⁸³ Feigning ignorance did not always work to mitigate punishment. In some instances, rural African Americans who denied knowledge regarding the theft of livestock were still lynched. See Table 2-6 in Tolnay and Beck, *A Festival of Violence*, 48.

clandestine resistance as cowardly.⁸⁴ Black women, by contrast, may not have endured the same stigma. The study of clandestine resistance, however, raises the issue of visibility and recognition: must resistance be readily apparent to others? Early work on resistance, often focusing on large-scale protest movements or rebellions, takes for granted that resistance is visible and easily recognized. James C. Scott, however, challenged this conception by drawing attention to informal resistance.⁸⁵ Scott argued that subordinate classes are rarely able to engage in formal resistance. Such activity is not only highly dangerous, but difficult due to lack of resources.⁸⁶ Most forms of clandestine resistance stop short of outright collective defiance. Rather, clandestine resistance includes acts of theft, sabotage, boycotting, and slander.

The contrast between clandestine resistance and more overt forms of resistance illustrates the ways in which acts of resistance can vary. If we define resistance as any act that thwarts an attempt at subjugation, we can further define resistance as being formal, informal, or unwitting.⁸⁷ Formal resistance refers to behaviour that is visible and easily recognized by both the targets and informed resisters. Furthermore, such behaviour is

⁸⁴ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 24.

⁸⁵ Scott uses the term everyday resistance. His definition closely aligns to what I have defined as informal resistance. On everyday resistance, see James C. Scott, "Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance," in *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance in South-East Asia*, ed. James C. Scott and Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet (London: Frank Cass, 1986), 5–35.

⁸⁶ Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, xv; James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 87.

⁸⁷ Scholars have discussed the issue of intent as it relates to resistance in three ways: 1) some suggest that the actor's conscious intent is necessary to classify a behaviour as resistance; 2) some suggest that it is nearly impossible to assess intent because we rarely have access to the actor's internal thoughts; and 3) some scholars suggest that the actor's intentions do not matter and that the actor may not even be conscious that their action could be considered resistance. The rudimentary typology of resistance outlined here attempts to reconcile these three approaches to understanding resistance. It has been borrowed, in part, from Hollander and Einwohner. Hollander and Einwohner defined a seven-part typology of resistance, which also includes target-defined resistance, externally-defined resistance, mixed resistance, and attempted resistance. See Hollander and Einwohner, "Conceptualizing Resistance," 543-545.

intended to be recognized as resistance by the actors. Here we might include acts such as armed rebellions, physical retaliation, or self defense. A black domestic worker fighting off sexual assault by her employer, for example, would be considered an act of formal resistance. Informal resistance encompasses acts that are intended as resistance by the actor yet go unnoticed by the target. Such acts of resistance might include gossip, migration, or sabotage. Finally, unwitting resistance refers to acts that are not intended to be resistance by the actor yet might be recognized as threatening by the targets or other informed observers. In other words, someone feels threatened by the action, even if that was not the intent of the actor.

Together, my definitions of violence and resistance make it possible to reconstruct the experiences of black men and women in the late antebellum and postemancipation period; they are at the core of my analysis and have shaped how I understand racialized violence as a continuum. Generations of African Americans endured the constant threat of individualized and collective incidents of verbal abuse, intimidation, sexual harassment, and physical assault. These manifestations of violence have been explored countless times, especially as scholars have moved beyond the traditional focus on lynching and race riots. Kidada Williams, for example, emphasized the importance of studying everyday violence – seemingly minor altercations that often go unnoticed. Williams’ definition of violence, however, was more restricted than mine. Her work still framed violence primarily in terms of physical violence. My dissertation, then, challenges existing historiography by utilizing a broad definition of violence that makes it possible to

consider the interplay of epistemic violence, structural violence, sexual violence, and physical violence in the late antebellum and postemancipation South.

A broad definition of violence is ineffectual if it is not complemented by a similarly broad definition of resistance. African Americans established a culture of opposition in response to racialized violence. Indeed, they found various ways to resist – theft, sabotage, destruction of property, boycotting, migration – that over time were effective in mitigating racialized violence. White Southerners often failed to recognize such resistance, but many African Americans made both conscious and unconscious decisions to thwart attempts at subjugation through violence. In order to understand how black men and women devised a range of resistance techniques to contest racialized violence in its totality of forms, it is necessary to adopt broad definitions that embrace the varied experiences of those living in the late antebellum and postemancipation.

For much of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the experiences of black people with racialized violence received little attention in mainstream historical debate with the important exception of W. E. B. Du Bois' *Black Reconstruction*.⁸⁸ This can largely be explained by the nationalist and racist consensus within the historical profession prior to 1950.

White historians were discouraged from developing any understanding of the violent dimensions of white supremacy.⁸⁹ Claude Bowers' *The Tragic Era: The*

⁸⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2013). Du Bois, in his discussion of how African Americans experienced Reconstruction, emphasized the prevalence of racialized violence.

⁸⁹ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "Conclusion: Reflections on Lynching Scholarship," *American Nineteenth Century History* 6, no. 3 (September 2005), 401. Brundage offers a detailed historiography of lynching

Revolution After Lincoln (1929), for example, framed Reconstruction as a massive blunder in which “the Southern people literally were put to the torture.”⁹⁰ Bowers focused on the supposed plight of white Southerners after the Civil War, while obfuscating the violence that black men and women endured. At the same time, emerging black historians had to manoeuvre within a white-dominated academy. Therefore, they often employed their talents to work within the existing historiographic debates popularized by white historians. Popular topics included black migration, religion, and education.⁹¹

If racialized violence received any sustained consideration, it was usually by social scientists. In the 1930s and 1940s, a group of sociologists began to study race relations in the postemancipation South. Both white and black, these sociologists wanted to bring attention to the controversial topics that historians had largely avoided. In particular, they were interested in the phenomenon of lynching. The result was Arthur Raper’s *Tragedy of Lynching*, John Dollard’s *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*, Hortense Powdermaker’s *After Freedom*, Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner and Mary R. Gardner’s *Deep South*, and Oliver Cox’s *Caste, Class, and Race*.⁹² These works each

scholarship which I have used here as a starting point to talk about how scholars have approached racialized violence more broadly.

⁹⁰ Claude Bowers, *The Tragic Era: The Revolution After Lincoln* (Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1929), vi.

⁹¹ Brundage, “Conclusion: Reflections on Lynching Scholarship,” 401. See, for example, Carter G. Woodson, *A Century of Negro Migration* (Washington, D.C.: The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1918) and *The Negro in Our History* (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1922). On the scholarly writing of Carter G. Woodson, an early black historian and contemporary of W. E. B. Du Bois, see Jacqueline Goggin, *Carter G. Woodson: A Life in Black History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993).

⁹² Arthur F. Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933); John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937); Hortense Powdermaker, *After Freedom: A Cultural Study in the Deep South* (New York: Viking Press, 1939); Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner, *Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941); and Oliver Cox, *Caste, Class, and Race: A Study in Social Dynamics* (New York: Doubleday, 1948).

considered race relations in the postemancipation South and, in the process, raised awareness about the rise of racialized violence in the form of lynching.

Racialized violence remained under the purview of social scientists into the mid-twentieth century. The presentist orientation of sociology, however, meant that social scientists were primarily interested in studying racialized violence while the phenomenon persisted. In the mid-1920s, incidents of lynching declined rapidly. Only 206 African Americans were lynched in the 1930s, compared to 799 in the 1890s.⁹³ Because most works on racialized violence dealt exclusively with lynching, the decline of lynching meant the decline of sociological studies on racialized violence in the early twentieth century.⁹⁴

It was not until the 1980s that racialized violence began to receive extended consideration from historians. In *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865* (1980), Howard Rabinowitz examined the interactions between white Southerners and the newly freed black population.⁹⁵ Following the abolition of slavery, many black men and women abandoned rural life to settle in urban centres. There they engaged in bitter competition with white people over jobs, housing, and political power.⁹⁶ The notion that African Americans were reaching for both material improvement and social equality created racial uneasiness. Hostile white Southerners turned towards violence to voice their displeasure. A black shopkeeper, for example, risked being lynched if his business

⁹³ Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 202.

⁹⁴ Brundage, "Conclusion: Reflections on Lynching Scholarship," 402.

⁹⁵ Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 186.

competed with that of a white shopkeeper.⁹⁷ Like those early sociologists who first brought attention to racialized violence in the postemancipation South, Rabinowitz found lynching to be the most extraordinary form of violence and, therefore, the most visible.⁹⁸

Although Rabinowitz was not interested in racialized violence specifically, his work paved the way for future scholarship. George Rable, in *But There Was No Peace* (1984), offered the first comprehensive survey of racialized violence in the postemancipation South.⁹⁹ Like Rabinowitz, Rable explored the transition from slavery to freedom. His explicit goal, however, was to elucidate the use of violence by hostile white Southerners to overthrow Republican state government, restore Democratic power, and reaffirm white supremacy. Rable brought much needed attention to the decisive role of violence in the outcome of Reconstruction. White Southerners, resentful of their diminished status, saw Reconstruction as a revolution. When peaceful measures failed to halt this revolution, violence became a powerful counterrevolutionary instrument.¹⁰⁰ Intimidation, physical assault, lynching, and other forms of physical violence were inflicted readily upon the newly freed black population. Hostile white Southerners, especially organized terrorist groups like the Ku Klux Klan, were willing to resort to extraordinary violence to subvert Reconstruction.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ The most famous incident of this was the lynching of Thomas Moss, Calvin McDowell, and Will Stewart in Memphis, Tennessee in 1892. Patricia Schechter, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 75-77. This lynching is discussed in Chapter 4.

⁹⁸ Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 53.

⁹⁹ George Rable, *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1984).

¹⁰⁰ Notably, Rable presented his narrative within a framework of revolution/counterrevolution. Rable, *But There Was No Peace*, ix.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, xv.

Rable broadened the study of racialized violence to include more than just lynching. He faltered, however, in his discussion of how black men and women responded to the violence they endured. The Civil War was a traumatic experience for Americans. An estimated 620 000 soldiers died between 1861 and 1865. The Confederacy, struggling against a more prosperous and populous enemy, experienced the greatest strain on its human capital. Confederate soldiers died at a rate three times that of their Union counterparts; one in five southern soldiers did not survive the Civil War.¹⁰² Moreover, the Civil War resulted in widespread property damage. Major General William Tecumseh Sherman, during his (in)famous March to the Sea, employed a scorched earth policy, destroying military targets along with industry, infrastructure, and civilian property.¹⁰³ Unsurprisingly, trauma caused by the Civil War left many white Southerners fearful of the future. Where physical devastation could be repaired, psychological damage proved more lasting. In his analysis, Rable focused primarily on the experiences of white Southerners; he demonstrated little concern for the actions, thoughts, and feelings of black people.

Herbert Shapiro's *White Violence and Black Response* (1988), in contrast, explicitly considered the lasting impact of racialized violence on the lives of black men

¹⁰² Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), xi. The number of soldiers killed in the Civil War is approximately equal to the total number of American fatalities in the Revolution, the War of 1812, the Mexican War, the Spanish-American War, the First World War, the Second World War, and the Korean War combined.

¹⁰³ On Sherman's March to the Sea, see John Marszalek, *Sherman's March to the Sea* (Abilene, Texas: McWhiney Foundation Press, 2005); Matthew Carr, *Sherman's Ghosts: Soldiers, Civilians, and the American Way of War* (New York: The New Press, 2015); and Lisa Tendrich Frank, *The Civilian War: Confederate Women and Union Soldiers During Sherman's March* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015).

and women.¹⁰⁴ Shapiro described how racism spurred widespread violence against the newly freed black population beginning with Reconstruction. But black men and women, Shapiro insisted, were not submissive. Rather, they endeavoured to protect their lives and assert their dignity as human beings by taking up arms in self defense.¹⁰⁵

Rabinowitz, Rable, and Shapiro moved racialized violence from the periphery to the centre of scholarly consciousness. These works, however, tended to focus on extraordinary physical violence: nightriding, lynching, and rioting. Statistical accounts, photographs, and newspapers rarely chronicled less dramatic incidents of violence. The spectacle of lynching, for example, has been well-preserved in photographs depicting images of mobs, crowds, and victims taken during or just after the violence.¹⁰⁶ The visibility of such violence has, somewhat understandably, kept extraordinary physical violence at the forefront of scholarship on racialized violence. And the study of extraordinary physical violence is important. Nightriding, lynching, and rioting undeniably shaped the lives of millions of African Americans living in the postemancipation South. Nonetheless, the focus on extraordinary physical violence provides a narrow view of racialized violence.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, as Kidada Williams argued in

¹⁰⁴ Herbert Shapiro, *White Violence and Black Response: From Reconstruction to Montgomery* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988). See also Herbert Shapiro, “Afro-American Responses to Race Violence during Reconstruction,” *Science & Society* 36, no. 2 (Summer 1972): 158–170.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, xv.

¹⁰⁶ These photographs, Amy Louise Wood has argued, served as visual proof of ways in which white Southerners embraced public spectacles of torture and death. See Amy Louise Wood, “Lynching Photography and the Visual Reproduction of White Supremacy,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 6, no. 3 (September 2005): 373–99; Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

¹⁰⁷ Lynching, in particular, has dominated scholarship dealing with extraordinary violence. See, for example, W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Tolnay and Beck, *A Festival of Violence*; Michael J. Pfeifer, “The Origins of Postbellum Lynching: Collective Violence in Reconstruction Louisiana,” *Louisiana History: The*

her critique of the study of lynching, the emphasis on extraordinary physical violence risks dehumanizing the victims. Rather than considering the thoughts, feelings, and actions of those who suffered at the hands of hostile white Southerners, sensationalized accounts often reduce the victims to casualty numbers.¹⁰⁸ The victims become mere objects upon which violent acts are committed. This effectively denies them the capacity to respond in meaningful ways.

Nearly a decade after her initial critique, Kidada Williams published *They Left Great Marks On Me* (2012).¹⁰⁹ This book recast the history of racialized violence by making central the experiences of those individuals who personally endured and witnessed individualized and collective acts of violence. Indeed, Williams gave voice to those black men and women who spoke openly about their experiences. By testifying – to friends, family, agents of the Freedmen’s Bureau, and members of Congress – African Americans created a record of the violence they endured. This record, Williams argued, inspired African Americans to form and support campaigns to end racialized violence, such as the antilynching campaign of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples (NAACP). Williams has been one of the major inspirations for my dissertation. I have expanded upon her work, however, by broadening the ways that we talk about racialized violence beyond the physical. Moreover, Williams focused on the

Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association 50, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 189–201; and Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1980-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

¹⁰⁸ Williams, “Resolving the Paradox of Our Lynching Fixation.”

¹⁰⁹ Kidada E. Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me: African American Testimonies of Racialized Violence from Emancipation to World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

postemancipation South, while my work endeavours to link racialized violence during this period to the legacy of slavery.

Efforts to resist racialized violence have received inconsistent consideration from historians. Robert Zangrando, Mary Jane Brown, and Jonathan Markovitz have devoted significant attention to organized resistance against racialized violence, particularly the efforts to secure antilynching legislation.¹¹⁰ The work of reform groups, like the NAACP, is integral to understanding how African Americans responded to racialized violence; however, only a small number of black men and woman belonged to these groups. Robin Kelley and W. Fitzhugh Brundage challenged the focus on organized resistance by elucidating the methods of resistance employed by black men and women in their everyday lives.¹¹¹ In a groundbreaking article published in 1993, Kelley examined the resistance efforts of the black working class in the Jim Crow South. He argued that by ignoring clandestine acts of resistance, historians risked erroneously concluding that African Americans “adopted the line of least resistance.”¹¹² Seemingly passive behaviour, he argued, was merely a method of deceiving white people. Using the appropriate grins and shuffles, black men and women could erect a veil of seeming acquiescence, while in fact engaging in acts of resistance that went unnoticed, such as theft, sabotage, or deliberate work slowdowns.

¹¹⁰ Robert Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909-1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980); Mary Jane Brown, *Eradicating This Evil: Women in the American Anti-Lynching Movement, 1892-1940* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000); and Jonathan Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching: Racial Violence and Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004)

¹¹¹ Robin D. G. Kelley, “‘We Are Not What We Seem’: Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South,” *The Journal of American History* 80, no. 1 (1993): 75–112; Brundage, “The Roar on the Other Side of Silence.”

¹¹² Kelley, “We Are Not What We Seem,” 76.

Brundage brought much needed attention to the clandestine methods of resistance utilized by African Americans. His work, in particular, raised questions about the unique contributions of black women who were often on the frontlines of resistance efforts.¹¹³ Traditionally, where historians have examined the efforts of black women to resist racialized violence, the focus has been on incidents of sexual harassment, assault, and rape. Darlene Clark Hine, for example, investigated the institutionalized rape of black women as a tactic used by hostile white Southerners to exert their dominance over the newly freed black population.¹¹⁴ Just as black women had been raped by their masters during slavery, black women were often raped and otherwise abused by their white employers, neighbours, and even strangers in the postemancipation South. To protect themselves from the trauma of such sexual violence, Hine argued, black women began to shield the truth of their inner lives. While they feigned openness, black women actually crafted a veil of secrecy around their thoughts and feelings, thereby mustering the psychic space and resources necessary to endure and confront oppression.

Sexual violence served as a means to subvert emancipation. Catherine Clinton, Noralee Frankel, and Hannah Rosen, for example, each described the institutionalized rape of black women as a part of a fantasy of subordination in which black fathers and husbands could not prevent violence against their female family members.¹¹⁵ With the

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 280.

¹¹⁴ Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West," *Signs* 14, no. 4 (Summer 1989): 912–920.

¹¹⁵ Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*, 8; Catherine Clinton, "Bloody Terrain: Freedwomen, Sexuality and Violence During Reconstruction," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 332; Noralee Frankel, *Freedom's Women: Black Women and Families in Civil War Era Mississippi*, Blacks in the Diaspora (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 111; Mary Farmer-Kaiser, *Freedwomen and*

advent of freedom, many African Americans anticipated a strengthening of stereotypical gender roles and conventional family structures.¹¹⁶ Black men and women not only wanted to secure political and economic justice, but to craft stable family units free from violence. When hostile white Southerners raped black women, they denied the ability of black men to protect black women.¹¹⁷

Black women were resilient. To achieve self-sufficiency, and to counter the deleterious effects of racialized violence, black women developed informal networks of support; they established institutions that allowed black women to overcome the conditions of abject poverty and servitude while remaining protected from the worst abuses inflicted by white Southerners. Tera Hunter's *To 'Joy My Freedom* (1997) traced the lives of black women who relocated to Atlanta – the economic hub of the newly emerging urban and Industrial South – to build an independent life after the abolition of slavery.¹¹⁸ Women constituted the majority of black residents and half of the black wage-earners. They were responsible for raising children, supporting the family financially, and fostering a sense of community in a new city.¹¹⁹ These women, Hunter argued, were dedicated to achieving liberty and justice, while minimizing the threats of racialized violence that came with living and working in close proximity to a large white population.

the Freedmen's Bureau: Race, Gender, and Public Policy in the Age of Emancipation (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 162.

¹¹⁶ Clinton, *Bloody Terrain*, 332.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* It is not my intention to suggest that sexual violence, especially rape, was solely intended to target men through their women. Rather, my goal is to position sexual violence against black women as part of a larger attack on the black community as a whole. This is discussed in greater detail throughout Chapter 3.

¹¹⁸ Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 49-52.

Hunter's work, although focused most directly on the lives of black women in the postemancipation South, underscored the importance of considering the legacy of slavery when studying racialized violence. She carefully articulated how black women negotiated the meaning of slavery and freedom, maintaining elements of slave culture and adopting those elements that were most useful for their lives after abolition. Enslaved people, for example, embraced dance as a way to mitigate the harsh realities of slavery. Quilting bees, corn-shuckings, and other seemingly routine labour activities became opportunities for celebration. After slavery, black women continued to dance away their troubles, regularly attending jook joints and dives after work.¹²⁰ Hunter's insights regarding the lives of black women inspired my own work. As a result, my dissertation explicitly considers the importance of the antebellum period for studying the black response to racialized violence in the postemancipation South.

Amrita Chakrabarti Myers, in her 1996 study of enslaved women's resistance to slavery, articulated the methods available to black women to resist racialized violence.¹²¹ For many years, historians assumed that enslaved women did not engage in resistance because they were not involved in organized rebellions to the same extent as men. However, as Myers revealed, such a narrow definition ignores the many means by which black women resisted their oppressors.¹²² In resisting their mistreatment at the hands of slaveholders and other hostile white Southerners, enslaved women feigned illness, engaged in sabotage, and behaved insolently. Stephanie Camp echoed these same

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 169-171.

¹²¹ Myers, "Sisters in Arms": Slave Women's Resistance to Slavery in the United States."

¹²² *Ibid.*, 141.

conclusions in 2004 when she asserted that enslaved women created secret spaces from which they could engage in creative expression, recreation, and resistance.¹²³ Such scholarship on the antebellum period is invaluable for understanding clandestine resistance, not only during slavery but after emancipation.

The breadth of scholarship examined here is a testament to the enduring legacy of racialized violence. In the late antebellum and postemancipation South, millions of African Americans endured both physical and psychological trauma at the hands of white Southerners attempting to enact a prior racial hierarchy. There is no denying that racialized violence occurred, nor is it possible to deny that African Americans engaged in resistance efforts.¹²⁴ But there is still work to be done on black resistance to racialized violence. For too long scholars have framed their discussions of violence in terms of physical force, when black men and women endured a much broader spectrum of violence that resulted from relationships of unequal power. Incidents of verbal abuse, threats, neglect, and intimidation should all be recognized as manifestations of racialized violence. Though recent scholarship has shifted its focus from lynching and race riots to discuss violence on a smaller scale, there is still a tendency to equate violence with physical force. Even Kidada Williams, who called for scholars to correct their fixation on lynching and study incidents of everyday violence, remains fixated primarily on acts of violence that stem from the use of physical force, while other pervasive forms of

¹²³ Stephanie Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

¹²⁴ See, for example, Shapiro, *White Violence and Black Response: From Reconstruction to Montgomery*; Brundage, “The Roar on the Other Side of Silence”; Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*; Kelley, “We Are Not What We Seem”; Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*; Mary Farmer-Kaiser, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen’s Bureau*; Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me*.

violence, including epistemic and structural violence, remain largely outside the bounds of her study. Indeed, there is still a tendency to focus on violence that results from physical force due to its apparent concreteness and ease of observation. By reconceptualizing violence, it is possible to consider epistemic violence and structural violence, for example, as part of the broader experience of racialized violence in the late antebellum and postemancipation South.

Moreover, my dissertation moves beyond the traditional focus on organized resistance to understand how black men and women engaged in informal resistance. I do not focus on the formal organizations that were established to confront racialized violence, such as the many antilynching organizations that emerged in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Instead, heeding the call of Kidada Williams for a greater focus on the agency of victims, I have utilized the testimony of both the victims and witnesses of racialized violence to reconstruct a narrative detailing how black men and women responded to racialized violence on a daily basis, and how their responses shaped the violence they endured.¹²⁵ Not only does my dissertation consider types of violence that are rarely discussed in the context of racialized violence – epistemic violence and structural violence – it demonstrates how experiences of violence during slavery changed, and remained the same, after emancipation.

Because my dissertation endeavours to elucidate continuities regarding how black men and women experienced and responded to racialized violence in both slavery and freedom, I have made the decision to organize my chapters thematically. The ebb and

¹²⁵ Williams, “Resolving the Paradox of Our Lynching Fixation,” 324.

flow of racialized violence is complex and does not adhere to a strict chronology. While certain manifestations of violence reached epidemic levels at certain points in time – for example, the number of lynchings increased dramatically in the 1880s and remained high until the 1930s – there was never a point in time when one type of racialized violence dominated the landscape of the late antebellum or postemancipation South to the exclusion of all others. Therefore, in order to understand the broader trends of racialized violence across the South, I have made the decision to arrange my chapters according to different categories of racialized violence: epistemic violence, structural violence, sexual violence and family trauma, and physical violence. In doing so, it is possible to think critically about the continuities of violence and resistance.

The order of the chapters, to some extent, reflects the progression of racialized violence in the United States. However, the order should not be taken to indicate that certain types of violence were more severe than others. As a white woman and a twenty-first century observer, I cannot speak to the experiences of black men and women who experienced racialized violence in the late antebellum and postemancipation South. It is not my place to decide that incidents of physical violence were, for example, more extraordinary – or perhaps traumatizing – than incidents of epistemic violence or structural violence that shaped how black men and women lived their daily lives.

The first chapter begins with an exploration of epistemic violence. Epistemic violence refers to the silencing of marginalized groups. To elucidate the challenges that black men and women faced in recording their experiences, this chapter reviews the three primary sources that underpin my research: 1) the records of the Bureau of Refugees,

Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands; 2) the first-person testimony culled from the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States; and 3) the Slave Narrative Collection of the Federal Writers' Project. By examining these sources, it is possible to understand the ways that black men and women were silenced and their experiences were denied. Black men and women often recorded their experiences in collaboration with state and federal officials. This means that the records considered in this dissertation are mediated constructs that reflect both black and white understandings of racialized violence. They reflect not only the ways that African Americans were silenced, but the ways in which they ensured their voices were heard. Indeed, black men and women did speak about racialized violence. The strikingly similar narratives seen across the three primary source collections considered here demonstrate the consistency of racialized violence across the South, and also suggest that testifying about shared experiences created a sense of community.

Those who spoke about racialized violence often spoke about the atrocities committed by the Ku Klux Klan. But not all hostile white Southerners hid behind masks or the cover of darkness. Indeed, the social structures of the late antebellum and postemancipation South enabled white Southerners to inflict widespread violence by denying African Americans access to adequate wages, decent housing, and basic provisions. The second chapter of my dissertation explores structural violence – the systematic ways that social structures harm or otherwise disadvantage individuals by preventing them from meeting their basic needs. Upset over the abolition of slavery, those who opposed the new racial order of the postemancipation South went to great lengths to

defraud and disadvantage freedpeople. This chapter frames both slavery and the labour practices that emerged following emancipation as manifestations of structural violence. And, in the process, it considers the ways in which black men and women endeavoured to shape the meaning of freedom.

For many African Americans, freedom meant bodily autonomy and family integrity. Long the victims of sexual abuse at the hands of slaveholders, many black women expected to be able to reclaim control of their bodies and reproductive potential. The third chapter of my dissertation explores two interrelated themes: sexual violence and family trauma. Sexual violence, broadly, refers to acts of unwanted sexual contact. This can include lewd jokes or propositions, forced marriage, and, of course, rape. The practice of slave breeding underscores the relationship between racialized violence and sexual coercion that dominated the lives of black men and women both during and after slavery. It therefore serves as the historical backdrop for this chapter. Not only does slave breeding help bring into focus ongoing practices of sexual violence after emancipation, but it helps to frame the importance of family within the black community. Long denied the right to create stable family units free from white interference, family was extremely important to black men and women after emancipation. Many former slaveholders, however, still felt entitled to the labour of black children, resulting in the widespread use of illegal apprenticeships that separated children from their parents. This chapter, then, recognizes the connection between sexual violence and family trauma. Although sexual violence overlaps with physical violence in many ways, I have chosen to devote a chapter

specifically to sexual violence because it is a gendered form of violence experienced differently by men and women.

To understand the ways in which black men and women responded to family trauma after emancipation, we must first acknowledge the legacy of coerced sexual relationships during slavery. Moreover, we must recognize how sexual violence undermined the integrity of black families. During slavery, slaveholders were under no obligation to respect familial relationships. Children might be sold away from their parents; husbands might be forcibly separated from their wives; young girls might be raped and used as breeding vessels. Family integrity, then, became extremely important as black men and women endeavoured to (re)build their lives after slavery. This issue becomes particularly evident when we explore the prevalence of forced apprenticeships in the postemancipation South. Indeed, many children were illegally taken from their parents or guardians and forced to labour for unscrupulous white landowners. Illegal apprenticeships kept black children in bondage and posed a threat to the black family after slavery, forcing parents to go to extreme lengths to reunite their families.

The final chapter of my dissertation continues to explore the importance of bodily autonomy, bringing into the focus the widespread use of physical violence to subjugate African Americans in the late antebellum and postemancipation South. The concreteness and immediacy of physical violence makes it perhaps the most obvious place to study unorganized resistance. The effects of epistemic violence and structural violence, for instance, may not be immediately visible. A black man might not lash out immediately in response to having his testimony denied in court, or a black woman might think carefully

about her options before confronting her employer about stolen wages. Physical violence, however, frequently necessitated an immediate response. When a group of disguised men arrived at the door of a terrified family, a quick response could mean the difference between life and death. This chapter, therefore, underscores the importance of resistance as a means of survival. It also considers the importance of migration and how racialized violence shaped demographics in the South after the Civil War as thousands of black men and women relocated to the North as part of the Great Migration. While this migration often moved people out of the geographic regions covered by my primary sources, the effects of black migration can still be felt by those who made the decision to remain.

In the late antebellum and postemancipation South, racialized violence shaped the lives of African Americans across the United States. Generations of black men and women lived with the constant fear of individualized and collective incidents of verbal abuse, economic suppression, social dislocation, sexual harassment, and physical abuse. Violence was used to impose severe restraints on ambition, and to punish perceived signs of impudence, impertinence, and independence. This fostered an atmosphere of terror and inflicted severe psychological trauma on the newly freed black population. For many, the sight of hooded figures or the sound of bloodhounds evoked terror and a renewed sense of vulnerability.¹²⁶ Yet black men and women continued to resist racialized violence in myriad ways by drawing upon a long tradition of resistance conditioned by the peculiar institution.

¹²⁶ Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 12–15.

The descriptions of racialized violence reproduced in my dissertation will undoubtedly disturb some readers. Saidiya V. Hartman, in her study of racial subjugation during slavery and its aftermath, raised important questions about the value of reproducing such descriptions.¹²⁷ When we reproduce descriptions of violence without self-reflection and empathy, she argued, we risk becoming immured to pain. We are no longer “witnesses who confirm the truth of what happened” but “voyeurs fascinated with and repelled by exhibitions of terror and sufferance.”¹²⁸ When descriptions of racialized violence became familiar or commonplace, they no longer incite indignation. Yet to sanitize the material is equally problematic. Using euphemistic or allusive language makes it possible to deny the atrocities that black men and women endured in the late antebellum and postemancipation South. When black men and women complained to the Freedmen’s Bureau, testified before the Joint Select Committee, or gave interviews with the Federal Writers’ Project, they made important decisions about how to share their experiences with a broader audience. As a result, I have made the decision to respect their original testimony, and to share their experiences as originally transcribed where appropriate. I caution the reader, however, to consider their role as that of a witness and ally, and not as that of a spectator.

Some of the language used in my dissertation will similarly raise concerns. The use of the n-word, in particular, will disturb some readers. Wherever possible, I have avoided using the n-word, though I have made the decision to retain the use of this word

¹²⁷ Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

in certain instances. In particular, where white Southerners have used the n-word in a derogatory sense – as a means to deride black men and women – I have preserved the language as it appears in the original sources. This is because, in accordance with my definition of racialized violence, we should recognize the widespread use of the n-word as part of a larger regime of violence intended to subjugate the newly freed black population. To omit the word, as Eugene Genovese argued in *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, risks anesthetising the subject matter.¹²⁹

The dialect featured in direct quotations also requires a moment of consideration and raises methodological questions about the use of language. In most cases, I have made the decision to transcribe directly from the sources. Those who recorded the testimony of black men and women – often state and federal officials – had significant leeway to record the language as they saw proper. They might alter the testimony for a variety of reasons, including racial bias. These problems are explored in more depth in Chapter 1. Still, efforts were made to ensure the fidelity of the testimony. The Federal Writers' Project, for example, urged its interviewers to report the details of the narratives collected “as accurately as possible in the language of the original statements.”¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), xvii.

¹³⁰ Federal Writers' Project, *Supplementary Instructions to #9-E to the American Guide Manual*, Manuscript/Mixed Material, From Library of Congress, *Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Administrative Files*, xxii, <https://memory.loc.gov/mss/mesn/001/001.pdf> (Accessed 6 January 2020). A detailed memorandum was later released detailing how interviewers should record the language used by formerly enslaved people. The memorandum urged the interviewers to prioritize simplicity and truth of meaning. Only words with notably different pronunciations were to be recorded as heard. Federal Writers' Project, *Notes By An Editor on Dialect Usage in Accounts by Interviews with Ex-Slaves. (To Be Used in Conjunction with Supplementary Instructions 9E.)*, Manuscript/Mixed Material, From Library of Congress, *Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Administrative Files*, xxviii-xxx, <https://memory.loc.gov/mss/mesn/001/001.pdf> (Accessed 6 January 2020).

The language of black people living in the late antebellum and postemancipation South was complex. While some received an education and spoke what we might consider ‘standard English,’ others continued to favour creole languages that incorporated elements of the languages of West and Central Africa – vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure – with English. In South Carolina and Georgia, for example, Gullah remained popular among many black men and women. Often deemed to be broken English, Gullah actually demonstrates the lasting influence of African languages and should be recognized as a full and complete language with its own grammatical structure.¹³¹ It is not my place to belittle the language patterns of those black men and women who endeavoured to share their experiences. The language of some testimony was undoubtedly altered in an effort to make the newly freed black population seem uneducated or intellectually inferior, but I will leave it to the discerning reader to judge the probable accuracy of each rendering.

On 4 August 1871, H. B. Whitfield spoke before the Joint Select Committee about the widespread use of racialized violence against black men and women. A white Democrat and the mayor of Columbus, Mississippi, Whitfield was keenly aware of the abuses suffered by his black constituents. He believed that the widespread use of violence against African Americans would eventually bring about “a collision between the races.”

¹³¹ On the development of creole language among enslaved people, particularly Gullah, see Michael Montgomery, ed. *The Crucible of Carolina: Essays in the Development of Gullah Language and Culture* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008) and Joseph A. Opala, “The Gullah: Rice, Slavery, and the Sierra Leone-American Connection,” *The Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition – Yale University*, <https://glc.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Gullah%20Language.pdf> (accessed 6 January 2020). On the language and dialect represented in slave narratives, see Guy Bailey, Natalie Maynor, and Patricia Cukor-Avila, eds., *The Emergence of Black English: Text and Commentary* (Philadelphia: J. Benjamins Publishing Company, 1991).

This was the only possible outcome, Whitfield argued, because “people cannot submit forever to be beaten and deprived of every right in a free country. If the government cannot protect them, they will have to protect themselves.”¹³² In many ways, Whitfield was wrong. The actions of the Ku Klux Klan never spurred race riots nor did black men and women begin their own retaliatory campaign of terror against white people. Yet he was correct that black men and women would have to protect themselves. This dissertation, therefore, endeavours to elucidate the myriad ways that black men and women responded to racialized violence and how their responses shaped the violence they endured.

¹³² *KKK Testimony*, 5: 427.

Chapter 1: Epistemic Violence: Confronting Practices of Silencing the Black Experience

Mary E. Mebane, an impoverished black woman living in rural North Carolina in the 1930s, felt trapped in a “world without options.”¹ The daughter of a farmer and a factory worker, Mebane lived in poverty along with two brothers, a sickly father, and an emotionally distant mother. With no close friends or support from her family, Mebane spent much of her childhood sitting upon a rock in the backyard. From there she was well positioned to observe the world around her. Even as a small child, Mebane realized that daily life for black men and women was shaped by violence. She listened to the screams of a neighbour being beaten by her husband. She saw the glow of a warehouse burning down in nearby Durham – the aftermath of an altercation in which a white bus driver shot a black soldier who refused to give up his seat. Still a child, Mebane watched and listened. When she tried to speak out, she quickly realized that sharing her experiences could be dangerous: “My problems started when I began to comment on what I saw I insisted on being accurate. But the world I was born into didn’t want that. Indeed, its very survival depended on not knowing, not seeing – and, certainly, not saying anything at all about what it was really like.”²

This chapter explores epistemic violence in the late antebellum and postemancipation South. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak used the term ‘epistemic violence’

¹ An earlier version of part of this chapter was previously published in *The Activist History Review*. See Sarah Whitwell, “‘No’m, I am aint telling no lies. It de gospel truf:’ Historical Memory and the Slave Narrative Collection,” *The Activist History Review* (February 2020), <https://activisthistory.com/2020/02/13/nom-i-aint-tellin-no-lies-it-de-gospel-truf-historical-memory-and-the-slave-narrative-collection/>

² Mary E. Mebane, *Mary: An Autobiography* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 5.

to describe the silencing of marginalized groups.³ According to Spivak, those belonging to the lowest strata of the population are routinely silenced; their knowledge is suppressed or dismissed in favour of alternative epistemic practices. One method of executing epistemic violence is to damage the ability of a given group to speak or be heard. When Mebane endeavoured to speak critically of the South, she found that few were willing to listen. In the United States, the general belief in the inferiority of nonwhite peoples has long been used to ensure that nonwhite claims to knowledge are suppressed.⁴ White missionaries living among the Cherokee, for example, regularly failed to understand the true character of Indigenous peoples because they refused to recognize their humanity and intelligence.⁵ Black men and women, similarly, were perceived to be mentally and physically inferior. As a result, their ability to claim knowledge has long been undermined.

The realities of epistemic violence are seldom acknowledged in the study of racialized violence in the late antebellum and postemancipation South. This is because practices of silencing are, by nature, difficult to locate and make evident. Testimonial smothering, a term coined by Kristie Dotson, refers to the practice whereby a speaker smothers their own testimony when an audience demonstrates that they are unwilling or incapable of processing unsafe or risky testimony. Unlike other forms of epistemic violence, testimonial smothering refers specifically to a kind of coerced, self-silencing: “Testimonial smothering, ultimately, is the truncating of one’s own testimony in order to

³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–316.

⁴ See Charles W. Mills, “White Ignorance,” in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, ed. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 13–38.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

ensure that the testimony contains only content for which one's audience demonstrates testimonial competence."⁶ Because African Americans were widely perceived to be mentally and physically inferior by white people, the ability of black men and women to claim knowledge was severely undermined, especially if that knowledge was not supported by the dominant epistemic authority. Martin Jackson, in an interview with the Federal Writers' Project, described how some enslaved people withheld information when giving testimony. Many would shut the door before they "tell the truth about their days of slavery." According to Jackson, "When the door is open, they tell how kind their masters was and how rosy it all was." This was because many enslaved people were harshly disciplined and feared saying anything uncomplimentary about their former masters. Jackson, however, acknowledged that the life of the average enslaved person was "far from rosy."⁷ Those who claimed otherwise might have been – to use Dotson's term – smothering their testimony.

To understand the challenges that black men and women faced in recording their experiences, this chapter reviews the three primary source collections that underpin my dissertation: 1) the records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands; 2) the first-person testimony culled from the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States; and 3) the Slave Narrative Collection of the Federal Writers' Project. These sources are valuable for studying epistemic violence because they demonstrate how black men and women recorded their

⁶ Kristie Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing," *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 244.

⁷*The Slave Narrative Collection*, 4.2: 189; and S2-5.4: 1904.

experiences despite widespread efforts to silence or deny their testimony. The Freedmen's Bureau, for example, often failed to investigate complaints or downplayed assaults on black women. The Joint Select Committee often challenged descriptions of particularly brutal acts of violence. And the interviewers responsible for compiling the Slave Narrative Collection sometimes omitted descriptions of racialized violence from the final volumes. But these outlets also provided black men and women with new forums to speak publicly. Often for the first time, African Americans made their voices heard and inscribed their experiences into the historical record.

Both during slavery and after emancipation, hostile white Southerners manipulated the legal system to perpetuate their control over African Americans. Rather than protecting black men and women, the legal system was structured to encourage submission. Black men and women endured explicitly and implicitly discriminatory laws, unequal administration of justice, and exclusion from participation in the legal process at all levels. Particularly egregious was the refusal to allow black people to testify against white people in court. As historian Victor B. Howard acknowledged, the denial of testimony by black men and women was one of the principal legal bulwarks of the institution of slavery. African Americans – free or enslaved – could not testify in a legal setting until after the abolition of slavery.⁸ Even then, however, many black men and women struggled to find a receptive audience for their testimony. Daniel H. Smith, a

⁸ States in the North recognized the right of testimony by nonwhite people against white people by 1866. Border states, with the exception of Kentucky, voluntarily followed suit and granted black men and women the right to testify as of 1867. In the South, Congressional Reconstruction and the creation of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands in 1865 ensured that black men and women had the ability to give testimony in court until the end of Reconstruction severely diminished this right as a practical matter. Victor B. Howard, "The Black Testimony Controversy in Kentucky, 1866-1872," *The Journal of Negro History* 58, no. 2 (April 1973), 140-165.

black man who spoke before the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, admitted that he eventually stopped reporting the outrages he witnessed. White people were never punished for whipping or murdering African Americans, he argued, and his efforts to bring the perpetrators to justice had all met with failure.⁹

It is no longer sufficient to understand the past as a fixed entity that can be retrieved intact through acts of memory.¹⁰ Rather than viewing memory as a passive process of recalling lived experiences as objective truths, historians have begun to view memory as an active ordering of the past. The primary function of historical memory is not to preserve the past, but to adapt it so as to manipulate the present and future.¹¹ Indeed, as John R. Gillis, David W. Blight, W. Fitzhugh Brundage, and James Horton and Lois E. Horton, among others, have argued, historical memory does not reflect an objective record of the past, but a highly contested construction subject to constant evolution.¹² This is because “the core meaning of any individual or group identity ... is sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity.” The creation of historical memory, then, is embedded in complex, class, gender, and

⁹ In Mississippi, most Southerners, if they were arrested at all for committing assault or other acts of violence against a black person, could usually secure their release for \$40.00 to \$50.00. In contrast, when black people committed criminal offenses, according to Smith, the court was swift to find them out and punish them severely. *KKK Testimony*, 11: 574.

¹⁰ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2005), 4.

¹¹ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 196 and 210.

¹² John R. Gillis, “Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship,” in *Commemoration: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3–24; Blight, *Race and Reunion*; Brundage, *The Southern Past*; and James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, eds. *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (New York: The New Press, 2006).

power relations that determine what is remembered or what is forgotten, by whom, and for what end.¹³

In the aftermath of the Civil War, Americans faced a daunting task: how to make sense of slavery – a legal institution that reduced, at its height, more than four million African Americans to chattel. Northerners, who had fought to secure the demise of slavery and the freedom of the enslaved, initially adopted an abolitionist perspective. For them, slavery was a great evil. Harriet Beecher Stowe, writing in 1865, expressed a belief that Americans might recognize Nat Turner as a great prophet.¹⁴ For several years after the Civil War, abolitionists aspired to shape how the antebellum South would be remembered. They emphasized racial uplift and drew attention to incidents of racialized violence that plagued the South. But during the late nineteenth century and beyond, after attempts to reconstruct the nation on the basis of equality collapsed, white Southerners seized control of the official state narrative.¹⁵ Convinced of the justice of their cause, white Southerners reinscribed slavery as a benevolent institution. The violence of the postemancipation South, supposedly wrought by belligerent African Americans, they

¹³ Gillis, “Memory and Identity,” 3.

¹⁴ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Chimney-Corner*, ed. Christopher Crowfield (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1868), 295-296. On Nat Turner’s Rebellion, see Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁵ In 1874, the Democrats regained control of the House of Representatives. Strongly opposed to Reconstruction, they secured the withdrawal of federal troops from the South. In exchange, they agreed to support the election of Rutherford B. Hayes as president following the disputed 1876 presidential election. Without the support of federal troops, it was no longer possible to enforce the measures secured by Reconstruction. On the end of Reconstruction, see Keith Ian Polakoff, *The Politics of Inertia: The Election of 1876 and the End of Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973); C. Vann Woodward, *Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); and Nicolas Barreyre, “The Politics of Economic Crisis: The Panic of 1973, the End of Reconstruction, and the Realignment of American Politics,” *Journal of the Gilded Age & Progressive Era* 10, no. 4 (2011), 403-423.

argued, contrasted with the imagined tranquility of the antebellum South.¹⁶ From this ideology emerged a version of memory in which enslaved people happily served indulgent masters; African Americans supposedly longed to return to their former status as enslaved labourers.

In the antebellum South, racialized violence was intimately linked to the defense of slavery. Violence, or the threat of violence, was the standard practice for compelling deference and acceptable behaviour from enslaved people. Yet to admit that slavery was a vile institution was to undermine the supposed virtues of the antebellum South. The majority of ex-Confederates did not believe that they had fought for an unworthy cause, nor did they think that the newly freed black population was capable of survival outside of slavery. This interpretation, known as the Lost Cause, found a receptive audience in both the North and South.¹⁷ As David Blight explained, in an era of tremendous social change and anxiety, the Lost Cause offered a romanticized view of the past complete with orderly and happy race relations. To uphold this nostalgic myth of paternalistic white aristocrats and deferential African Americans, countless white people engaged in a veritable whitewashing of past and ongoing incidents of racialized violence.¹⁸

Widespread practices of epistemic violence made it difficult, and sometimes dangerous, for African Americans to speak openly about their experiences of racialized violence. Some lost faith in the process, believing that efforts to bring forward testimony

¹⁶Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment, and Control of Negro Labour as Determined by the Plantation Regime* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1929).

¹⁷On the Lost Cause, see Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan, eds. *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2010).

¹⁸David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 211.

would only amount to “informing the outside as to these outrages.”¹⁹ Yet many black men and women recognized that there was immense power in testifying regardless of the outcome. When black men and women related their experiences of racialized violence, they were not simply making statements; they were processing their trauma and using testimony as a way to counteract epistemic violence by integrating their experiences into historical memory.

W. Fitzhugh Brundage coined the term ‘discursive insubordination’ to describe a variety of verbal confrontations. Adopted as a means of resistance, discursive insubordination manifested primarily as a rich catalogue of humour with which black people mocked racialized violence. It also included music, taunts, and general denunciations of racialized violence.²⁰ We can understand testimony, then, as a variation of discursive insubordination, as those who testified about racialized violence were not merely giving statements but resisting violence discursively.²¹ It is important to remember, however, that discursive insubordination existed in tension with testimonial smothering; while many black men and women chose to speak openly, others purposefully remained silent.

Family, friends, and neighbours were often the first to bear witness to the suffering of those affected by racialized violence, but increasingly African Americans gained access to forums sponsored by the federal government. The Freedmen’s Bureau,

¹⁹ *KKK Testimony*, 11: 478; see also 12: 861; and 6: 471-472.

²⁰ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, “The Roar on the Other Side of Silence: Black Resistance and White Violence in the American South, 1880-1940,” in *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 273-274.

²¹ Kidada E Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me: African American Testimonies of Racial Violence from Emancipation to World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 6.

the Ku Klux Klan hearings, and the Federal Writers' Project, for example, provided forums where black men and women could process their trauma and make their voices heard. Those who participated engaged in discursive insubordination. By sharing their experiences of racialized violence, as Kidada Williams argued, they created witnesses to the trauma.²²

The Freedmen's Bureau, the Ku Klux Klan hearings, and the Federal Writers' Project provided African Americans with a forum to speak about racialized violence after the Civil War. But even before the Civil War, black men and women found ways to make their voices heard. Indeed, many formerly enslaved people recorded their experiences of slavery for publication. These autobiographies, frequently referred to as slave narratives, were first published in the late eighteenth century and gained widespread popularity in the nineteenth century. Between 1740 and 1865, approximately sixty-five original slave narratives were published.²³ The number of antebellum slave narratives, compared to the

²² *Ibid.*, 5. The interdisciplinary field of trauma theory is useful for understanding how African Americans understood and responded to racialized violence. Trauma theory examines the human consequences of violence, including the physical and physiological injuries that result from experiences ranging from verbal abuse to sexual harassment to lynching to genocide. See Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret Lock, eds. *Social Suffering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Veena Das, Arthur Kleinman, Mamphela Ramphele, and Pamela Reynolds, eds. *Violence and Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Aida Levy-Hussen, "Trauma and the Historical Turn in Black Literary Discourse," in *The Psychic Hold of Slavery: Legacies in American Expressive Culture*, eds. Soyica Diggs Colbert, Robert J. Patterson, and Aida Levy-Hussen (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 195-211;

²³ David W. Blight, *A Slave No More: Two Men Who Escaped to Freedom, Including Their Own Narratives of Emancipation* (Orlando: Harcourt Books, 2007), 11. Of the sixty-five narratives that were published, perhaps the most famous are those by Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, Solomon Northrup, Josiah Henson, Henry Bibb, and Harriet Ann Jacobs. See Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1846); William Well Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1848); Josiah Henson, *The Life of Josiah Henson: Formerly a Slave, Now An Inhabitant of Canada* (Boston: A. D. Phelps, 1849); Solomon Northrup, *Twelve Years a Slave* (New York: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1856); Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave* (New York: MacDonald & Leww Printers, 1849); and

total slave population in the United States, may seem low, but it is important to acknowledge that enslaved people were not only discouraged from reading and writing, but southern legislatures also expressly forbade white people to teach them. Formerly enslaved people interviewed by the Federal Writers' Project for the Slave Narrative Collection regularly described how enslaved people were prevented from learning to read and write. Austin Grant, for example, explained that enslaved people were not allowed access to guns or paper. Owning either guaranteed a severe whipping.²⁴ For many white Southerners, an enslaved person learning to read and write was akin to taking up arms. This point was famously made by Frederick Douglass in his autobiography. Douglass related the opinion of his master, Thomas Auld, that teaching an enslaved person to read would make them unfit to serve as an enslaved labourer. Those who learned to read and write, Auld argued, became unmanageable.²⁵ That Douglass eventually escaped slavery and became a vocal proponent of abolition perhaps confirmed Auld's opinions regarding the alleged danger of allowing enslaved men and women to become educated. Jenny Proctor, an enslaved woman from Texas, suggested that this was because of a pervasive fear that African Americans would "git smarter den dey was" if they had access to education.²⁶

Some enslaved people did learn to read and write, although this remained a largely clandestine affair. Louvinia Young Pleasant, an enslaved woman from Texas, taught herself the alphabet by tracing letters in the dirt. If she had ever been caught, Pleasant

Harriet Ann Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, ed. L. Maria Child (Boston: Boston Stereotype Foundry, 1861).

²⁴ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-5.4: 1536.

²⁵ Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 35.

²⁶ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-5.3-213.

acknowledged, she would have received a harsh punishment from her master and mistress.²⁷

The reality is that the majority of enslaved men and women never wrote letters, kept diaries, or left any other written records. This does not mean, however, that African Americans did not want to record their experiences. Maggie Whitehead Matthews, an enslaved woman from Texas, was keen to be interviewed by the Federal Writers' Project in the 1930s. She lamented her illiteracy because she wanted to write about her life. According to Matthews, she had "lived a long time and seen a lot of devilment."²⁸ She wanted to share her experiences with a wider audience and ensure that her experiences would not be forgotten or erased; she recognized that the Federal Writers' Project offered a unique opportunity to make her voice heard.

Slave narratives published in the antebellum period typically adhered to certain structures and conventions. Virtually all antebellum slave narratives included statements proclaiming a formerly enslaved person to be the 'true author.' Such statements were intended to silence challenges regarding authenticity because black men and women, in both the North and the South, were considered to be incapable of writing an autobiography. Moreover, even if they did possess the necessary literary skills, many white people wrongly believed they were too deviant and immoral to provide a truthful account. Harriet Ann Jacobs, for example, assured readers that her autobiography was "no fiction." Recognizing that her words would be called into question, she insisted that while some of her adventures may seem incredible, there were "nevertheless, strictly true." In

²⁷ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-8.7: 31-2

²⁸ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-7.6: 2625.

addition to Jacobs' own assurances regarding the veracity of her narrative, the editor of the autobiography, L. Maria Child, also wrote a statement endorsing the narrative. Describing Jacobs, Child wrote, "The author of the following autobiography is personally known to me, and her conversation and manners inspire me with confidence." Child assured the reader that she made no changes to the content of the narrative and urged the reader to trust its veracity.²⁹ Other narratives might feature a photograph or engraved portrait of the author. Such portraits were intended to challenge ideas about black degeneracy by emphasizing the humanity, beauty, and respectability of black men and women.³⁰

Abolition societies often sponsored the creation of slave narratives; sometimes they even directed, produced, or ghost-wrote them. To showcase their connection to abolition, it was common for antebellum slave narratives to include appendices containing documents – poems, speeches, newspaper clippings – that argued against slavery. Frederick Douglass, for example, included a poem at the end of his narrative to highlight the legal and religious hypocrisy of slaveholders. This poem condemned slaveholders for enforcing a strict moral code among the enslaved, while ignoring the immorality of their own actions in upholding the institution of slavery:

They'll church you if you sip a dram,
And damn you if you steal a lamb;
Yet rob old Tony, Doll and Sam,
Of human rights, and bread and ham;
Kidnapper's heavenly union.³¹

²⁹ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 5-8.

³⁰ See Deborah Willis and Barbara Krauthamer, *Envisioning Emancipation: Black Americans and the End of Slavery* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013)

³¹ Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 123-125.

Antebellum slave narratives served two purposes: to expose the suffering caused by slavery, and to build a sympathetic picture of the enslaved.³² More engaging than sermons or essays, slave narratives had the ability to expose the national problem of slavery by connecting the peculiar institution to the lives of individual people; they captured the lived experiences of the enslaved. For Douglass, his “little book” was intended to shed light on the horrors of slavery to hasten “the glad day of deliverance to the millions of [his] brethren in bonds.”³³

After the Civil War, black testimony occupied a different place in American culture. No longer necessary to rally Americans to the abolitionist cause, the popularity and public presence of slave narratives declined markedly. The postbellum autobiographies of formerly enslaved people failed to generate the same attention as their predecessors.³⁴ The *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, published in 1845, sold 5000 copies in the first four months of publication. By 1860, the autobiography had sold approximately 30 000 copies. In comparison, the *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, published in 1881, only sold approximately 3000 copies.³⁵ Yet, as Julie Roy Jeffrey argued, African Americans remained committed to preserving the legacy of slavery.³⁶ Unable to secure work with major publishers, many formerly enslaved people resorted to

³² Paul D. Johnson, “‘Goodby to Sambo’: The Contribution of Black Slave Narratives to the Abolition Movement,” *Negro American Literature Forum* 6, no. 3 (Autumn 1972): 79.

³³ Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 125.

³⁴ Mitch Kachun, “Slave Narratives and Historical Memory” in *The Oxford Handbook of the African American Slave Narrative*, ed. John Ernest (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 25.

³⁵ Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*; Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (Hartford, Connecticut: Park, 1881); and Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “The Language of Slavery” in *The Slave’s Narrative*, eds. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), xvi.

³⁶ Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Abolitionists Remember: Antislavery Autobiographies and the Unfinished Work of Emancipation* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 71.

the local press or newspapers to print their narratives. In 1900, Booker T. Washington published a series of articles in *The Outlook*, a Christian newspaper from New York. These articles dealt with incidents from his life, including his experiences during slavery and his later work establishing vocational schools.³⁷

The character of postbellum slave narratives was also different from that of the antebellum. Where antebellum slave narratives chronicled the horrors of slavery, postbellum slave narrative tended to highlight racial uplift and respectability. This is not to say that postbellum narratives ignored experiences under slavery. Rather, they tended to emphasize that black men and women had an identity beyond their status as enslaved labourers. *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* was the third autobiography published by Douglass. It was the only autobiography where Douglass described his life after the Civil War. In particular, he ruminated on his hopes for the future of the United States. He wrote, “America will be the field for the demonstration of truths not now accepted and the establishment of a new and higher civilization.”³⁸ To shape the future, African Americans drew upon their personal experiences of the past. Douglass was concerned that slavery might be forgotten and argued that remembrance of the past was a sign of wisdom, and “the surest incentive to progress and reform.”³⁹ For Douglass, the past was a mirror through which African Americans could discern the future. Forgetting the horrors of slavery, he argued, would mean also forgetting the intelligence, courage,

³⁷ Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1901).

³⁸ Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, iii.

³⁹ Frederick Douglass, “His Address on Emancipation Day in this City,” *Battle Creek Daily Journal* (Battle Creek Michigan), 4 August 1884. Frederick Douglass frequently espoused the importance of memory. See also Frederick Douglass, “Speech at the Thirty-third Anniversary of the Jerry Rescue,” August 1884, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

and heroism of African Americans. Douglass intended his postbellum narrative to shape the nation's memory of slavery and preserve the legacy of racialized violence. Unfortunately, this narrative never received widespread readership.

Efforts by white Southerners to reinscribe slavery as a benevolent institution effectively undermined the published experiences of those who survived the peculiar institution. In many ways, the decline of slave narratives limited the avenues through which African Americans could testify about the horrors they endured. There simply was not a market for this genre of literature. Black men and women, however, embraced new forums after the Civil War; they refused to be silenced.

On 3 March 1865, as the Civil War was coming to a close, Congress attempted to smooth the transition from slavery to freedom by establishing the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands – more commonly known as the Freedmen's Bureau – under the United States Department of War.⁴⁰ This regulatory agency was responsible for “the supervision and management of all abandoned lands, and the control of all subjects relating to refugees and freedmen from rebel states, or from any district or country within the territory embraced in the operations of the army.”⁴¹ To ensure the well-being of thousands of white and black Southerners, whose lives had been irrevocably changed by the Civil War, the Freedmen's Bureau established offices in every former Confederate

⁴⁰ On the Freedmen's Bureau, see Paul A. Cimbala and Randall M. Miller, eds., *The Freedmen's Bureau and Reconstruction: Reconsiderations* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999); Carol Faulkner, *Women's Radical Reconstruction: The Freedmen's Aid Movement* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Barry A. Crouch, *The Dance of Freedom: Texas African Americans During Reconstruction*, ed. Larry Madaras (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007); and Christopher B. Bean, *Too Great A Burden To Bear: The Struggle and Failure of the Freedmen's Bureau in Texas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

⁴¹ “An Act to Establish a Bureau for the Relief of Freedmen and Refugees,” *United States Statutes at Large*, Vol. 13, 38th Cong., 2nd Sess. (1865): 507-509.

state. It provided a number of services, including the construction of schools and hospitals, the distribution of rations, legal aid, and the negotiation of labour contract. The work performed by the Freedmen's Bureau was similar in each state, but the organizational structure of staff might vary from state to state. For example, Georgia and South Carolina initially operated under a single Assistant Commissioner – Brevet Major General Rufus Saxton. He established his headquarters in Beaufort, South Carolina while General Edward A. Wild managed affairs on the ground in Georgia. It was not until September 1865 that the office of the Assistant Commissioner for Georgia was established under Brigadier General Davis Tillson. However, Tillson continued to report to Saxton until December 1865. This division of labour meant that early records on the experiences of freedpeople in Georgia were actually filed with the reports for South Carolina.⁴²

From its inception, the Freedmen's Bureau was a focal point for the newly emancipated. When white-controlled local and state government refused to recognize the rights of African Americans, the Freedmen's Bureau was the only place to seek redress for a variety of complaints. As a result, the Freedmen's Bureau quickly became an agency devoted to the interests of the formerly enslaved.

Prior to the abolition of slavery, black men and women had few interactions with the legal system of the United States. Legislators explicitly deprived black people of the protection of the common law by passing exculpatory acts that granted all white people

⁴² Reginald Washington, *Records of the Field Offices for the State of Georgia, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872* (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 2003), 3-4.

the legal right to beat, whip, and kill enslaved people.⁴³ As human chattel, enslaved people had no rights that white Southerners were bound to respect. After emancipation, however, the law tacitly acknowledged that black people were equal with white people before the law.⁴⁴ Most importantly, through the Fourteenth Amendment and the Civil Rights Act of 1866, African Americans could now lodge formal complaints against the perpetrators of violence. The problem, however, was that civil courts often refused either to fine white Southerners or to impose bonds that would compel them to keep the peace. Where white-controlled local and state governments refused to recognize the rights of African Americans, the Freedmen's Bureau became one of the few places to secure justice.

The efforts of the Freedmen's Bureau demonstrated a commitment to ensuring that black men and women received the same consideration before the law as their white counterparts. Major General Oliver Otis Howard, the first and only commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau, issued a circular outlining the legal rights of African Americans.⁴⁵

He ordered:

⁴³ Andrew Fede, "Legitimized Violent Slave Abuse in the American South, 1619-1865: A Case Study of Law and Social Change in Six Southern States," *The American Journal of Legal History* 29, no. 2 (April 1985), 95-96.

⁴⁴ On 9 April 1866, the House of Representatives overrode the veto of President Andrew Johnson to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1866. This legislation mandated that "all persons born in the United States and not subject to any foreign power, excluding Indians not taxed, are hereby declared to be citizens of the United States." As citizens, persons "of every race and color" were granted "full and equal benefit of all laws and proceedings for the security of person and property." The Act represented the first step towards civil equality for African Americans; however, it failed to protect political rights or social rights, ensuring that African Americans continued to suffer discrimination across the United States. "An Act to Protect All Persons in the United States in Their Civil Rights, and Furnish the Means of Their Vindication," *United States Statutes at Large*, Vol. 14, 39th Cong., 1st Sess. (1866): 27-30.

⁴⁵ O. O. Howard wrote extensively about his life, including his time serving as commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau. See Oliver Otis Howard, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard: Major General, United States Army*, Vol. 2 (New York: The Baker & Taylor Company, 1907), chaps. XLVI – LXI.

In all places where there is an interruption of civil law, or in which local courts, by reason of old codes, in violation of the freedom guaranteed by the Proclamation of the President and the laws of Congress, disregard the negro's right to justice before the laws, in not allowing him to give testimony, the control of all subjects relating to Refugees and Freedmen, being committed to this Bureau, the Assistant Commissioner will adjudicate, either themselves or through officers of their appointment, all difficulties arising between negroes themselves, or between negroes and whites or Indians, except those in Military Service, so far as recognizable by military authority, and not taken cognizance of by the other tribunals, civil or military of the United States.⁴⁶

This circular was quickly distributed to the various offices of the Freedmen's Bureau throughout the South. Assistant Commissioner Edgar M. Gregory, upon his arrival in Texas in September 1865, immediately issued orders to ensure that African Americans received "impartial justice."⁴⁷ Too often local law enforcement did little to aid African Americans who suffered at the hands of white Southerners. Henrietta C. Oppelt, a local teacher in De Kalb County, Mississippi, wrote to the Bureau complaining that emigrants from Texas were stealing books from the black schoolhouse and committing various outrages against African Americans. When she approached the Sheriff for aid, he refused to take any action because, as he stated, "they do not molest me; I have nothing to do with it." Oppelt later learned that the sheriff had claimed he would not help even if the schoolhouse was burning.⁴⁸ Her only hope to secure aid for the local black population was to appeal to the Freedmen's Bureau.

For the Bureau to function effectively in aiding the newly emancipated, it had to ensure that African Americans had a forum where they could share their experiences of

⁴⁶ Circular No. 5, issued by O. O. Howard, 30 May 1865, *Circulars Issued, Subject Index, May 1865 – June 1869*, reel 7, BRFAL (M742).

⁴⁷ Circular No. 1, issued by Edgar M. Gregory, 12 October 1865, *Orders Received, July 1866 – May 1868*, RG 105, reel 19, BRFAL-TX (M821).

⁴⁸ Miss Henrietta C. Oppelt to Captain H. E. Rainals, 26 October 1866, *Miscellaneous Records, 1866-1868*, RG 105, reel 28, BRFAL-MS (M1907).

racialized violence. The structure of the Freedmen’s Bureau required that its agents interact directly with the people the agency served. The commissioner, appointed by the president, directed the agency at a federal level, while the office in each state was headed by an assistant commissioner. The assistant commissioners were expected to make quarterly reports on operations, but otherwise had a great deal of discretion when dealing with matters at a state level. The assistant commissioners were also responsible for appointing the field agents, known as subassistant commissioners, who were responsible for the individual offices located in the major cities and towns of the South.⁴⁹

Bureau agents often had to manage large geographic areas. In Texas, a single agent might have to cover as many as 1500 square miles.⁵⁰ To make a complaint, black men and women travelled great distances to speak directly with an agent who would record complaints, take affidavits, and, on occasion, interview witnesses. Charles F. Rand, the subassistant commissioner of Clarkesville, Texas, regularly surveyed his jurisdiction because he recognized the challenges that many freedpeople faced in trying to reach the Bureau. Those who lived in rural areas might have to travel upwards of fifty miles to make a complaint.⁵¹

The Freedmen’s Bureau faced opposition from hostile white Southerners who claimed that the agency was unconstitutional and encroached on states’ rights. In an effort to keep the peace, agents often directed complaints to local magistrates for settlement; but

⁴⁹ “An Act to Establish a Bureau for the Relief of Freedmen and Refugees,” *United States Statutes at Large*, Vol. 13, 38th Cong., 2nd Sess. (1865): 507-508.

⁵⁰ Barry A. Crouch, “Guardian of the Freedpeople: Texas Freedmen’s Bureau Agents and the Black Community,” in *The Dance of Freedom: Texas African Americans during Reconstruction*, ed. Larry Madaras (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 185.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 189.

usually with a promise that if the magistrates did not act accordingly, then the Bureau would take over the case. Ellen, a freedwoman, contacted George S. Smith, the subassistant commissioner in Columbus, Mississippi, to make a complaint for assault and battery after Miles Manager severely whipped her daughter. She was advised to take her complaint to a local magistrate, but Smith assured her that “if the proper steps are not taken to secure her justice ... this Bureau will take cognizance of it.”⁵² Similarly, George Washington, also known as George Jones, complained that he had been physically assaulted by the overseer on the plantation where he was sharecropping. Judge Quinn, the local magistrate, was only allowed to investigate the case after promising the Bureau that Washington would be dealt with “fairly and justly.”⁵³

The Freedmen’s Bureau, in many ways, served as an intermediary between the black community and local officials. When local officials failed to uphold the rights of freedpeople by refusing to take their testimony or neglecting to prosecute the perpetrators of racialized violence, the Bureau could intervene. Sometimes this meant taking direct action, but in other cases agents might issue stern reminders to the community that African Americans were now citizens. On 20 June 1866, Joseph Ferguson, the subassistant commissioner of San Antonio, Texas, wrote a letter to General William H. Sinclair regarding the mistreatment of freedpeople within his jurisdiction. The civil government had begun persecuting freedpeople following the election in January 1866 in

⁵² George S. Smith to Allen Blewett, 20 July 1867, *Letters Sent Relating to Complaints, July – October 1867*, Vol. 113, RG 105, reel 12, BRFAL-MS (M1907)

⁵³ Complaint of George Washington, 21 July 1868, *Register of Complaints March – November 1868*, Vol. 101, RG 105, reel 11, BRFAL-MS (M1907); Complaint of David Jones, 21 July 1868, *Register of Contracts, June 1865-October 1868*, Vol. 100, RG 105, reel 11, BRFAL-MS (M1907); and Statement of Judge Quinn, 25 July 1868, *Register of Contracts, June 1865 – October 1868*, Vol. 100, RG 105, reel 11, BRFAL-MS (M1907).

which the provisional authorities were removed and largely replaced by white Democrats.⁵⁴ Ferguson wrote, “If I find that injustice has been done, and that I have positive proof that freedmen have been fined or imprisoned for offences of which they are innocent, can I demand of said authorities that such fines be refunded or that prisoners be released?”⁵⁵ In Mississippi, subassistant commissioner George S. Smith was similarly concerned about the treatment of freedpeople by local magistrates. After Henry Simmons, a freedman, complained that James Shivers, a white man, had threatened his life, Smith ordered the local Justice of the Peace to issue a warrant. He lamented that such outrages were becoming more frequent while local officials refused to act. Smith insisted that “it is the duty of all magistrates to take notice.”⁵⁶

By refusing to acknowledge the complaints of black men and women regarding racialized violence, government officials – including sheriffs and local magistrates – committed acts of epistemic violence. They continued to neglect black testimony, downplayed complaints, and thereby silenced the newly freed black population. The

⁵⁴ In June 1865, President Andrew Johnson appointed Andrew J. Hamilton as provisional governor of Texas. As governor, Hamilton was expected to hold a convention in order to nullify the act of secession, abolish slavery, and repudiate Confederate debt. Because attendees were required to take an oath of amnesty, many of the former Confederate leaders in Texas were supposed to be excluded from the convention. This would give the Unionists an opportunity to rise to power. Hamilton, however, failed to prevent the resurgence of the Democrats. On politics in Texas during Reconstruction, see Carl C. Moneyhon, *Republicanism in Reconstruction Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980); Carl C. Moneyhon, *Texas After the Civil War: The Struggle of Reconstruction* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004); and Ryan A. Swanson, “Andrew Johnson and His Governors: An Examination of Failed Reconstruction Leadership,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 71, no. 1 (Spring 2012), 16-45.

⁵⁵ Joseph Ferguson to William H. Sinclair, 6 September 1866, *Letters Sent, June – November 1866, March 1867- December 1868*, Vol. 149, reel 25, BRFAL-TX (M912).

⁵⁶ George S. Smith to F. D. Randel, 31 July 1867, *Letters Sent Relating to Complaints, July – October 1867*, Vol. 113, reel 12, BRFAL-MS (M1907). Smith also wrote to Jonathan P. Norwood, the owner of the plantation where the assault occurred, and requested that he make it known to everyone on his plantation that such actions would be severely punished. See George S. Smith to Jonathan P. Norwood, Esq., 31 July 1867, *Letters Sent Relating to Complaints, July – October 1867*, Vol. 113, reel 12, BRFAL-MS (M1907).

Freedmen's Bureau, then, became an important ally in the struggle to confront practices of silencing the black experience. While freedpeople continued to make complaints and endeavoured to give testimony wherever possible, they often found themselves blocked by obstinate white Southerners who did not want to acknowledge the outbreak of racialized violence plaguing the South. Black men and women relied on sympathetic agents within the Freedmen's Bureau to amplify their voices.

Many Freedmen's Bureau agents worked diligently to support freedpeople in the transition from slavery to freedom. However, not all agents were consistently sympathetic towards the interests of African Americans. Although the majority of agents were from the North and had served in the Union Army, they were not immune to the racial attitudes of the nineteenth century that positioned African Americans as inferior. Indeed, many white Northerners, just like their counterparts in the South, held negative view of African Americans. M. H. Buckham, President of the University of Vermont, wrote extensively about the newly freed black population. He wrote, "Invested with the legal rights of a man, and thus by necessity thrust forward into comparison and competition with other men, [the black man] not only exhibits his inferiority on a conspicuous stage, but manifests some traits which make him repulsive and odious."⁵⁷ The supposed inferiority of the newly freed black population, Buckham suggested, was the result of slavery and not some inherent deficiency of the black race. Nevertheless, pervasive racism meant that many Bureau agents simply could not believe that black men and women were capable of

⁵⁷ M. H. Buckham, "The Negro in the United States," *The Congregationalist*, 12 June 1878.

advocating honestly for themselves, nor could they be trusted to contribute to the reunification of the nation.⁵⁸

The Freedmen's Bureau received thousands of complaints from aggrieved African Americans.⁵⁹ Those African Americans seeking redress, however, ultimately lacked any power to determine how Bureau agents would respond to their complaints, or what actions would be taken to secure their rights. Some Bureau agents dismissed the complaints of freedpeople because of a belief that the complainants were lying or otherwise making false claims. Jim Davis, a freedman living in Mississippi, complained to the Freedmen's Bureau that a white man had stolen his horse. Davis did not know the identity of the thief but hoped that the Bureau could aid him in securing his stolen property. The agent recorded the incident but he decided to dismiss the complaint. Alongside the complaint, he wrote, "I think him foolish – have dismissed him."⁶⁰ Ankny Jefferson complained to the Freedmen's Bureau that Seth Hill had threatened his life. According to Jefferson, Hill drew both a gun and a knife while calling the freedman "a black son of a b—h." Upon investigation, the Bureau agent concluded that Jefferson had used "saucy language" towards Hill. The agent, therefore, decided that Jefferson had prompted the altercation and dismissed the case.⁶¹ Many African Americans who

⁵⁸ Paul A. Cimbala argued that many Bureau agents viewed African Americans as "junior partners in Reconstruction" because of the ignorance supposedly imposed on them by slavery. Paul A. Cimbala, *Under the Guardianship of the Nation: The Freedmen's Bureau and the Reconstruction of Georgia, 1865-1870* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1997), 56.

⁵⁹ Also included in the records are the complaints of white Southerners, particularly those who hired freedpeople as sharecroppers or tenant farmers.

⁶⁰ Complaint of Jim Davis, 7 October 1867, *Registers of Complaints, October 1867 – July 1868*, Vol. 283, reel 48, BRFAL-MS (M1907).

⁶¹ Complaint of Ankny Jefferson, 4 November 1867, *Register of Complaints, February 1866-November 1867*, Vol. 138, reel 24, BRFAL-TX (M1912).

registered complaints found that some Bureau agents were just as likely to blame the victim of racialized violence as the perpetrator.⁶²

Even where subassistant commissioners made every attempt to ensure that men of ability and proven loyalty served the community, some agents were incompetent. Hundreds of cases were dismissed without cause. For example, Tom Pruing, Robb Youngblood, and David Johnson, three freedmen living in South Carolina, complained to the Freedmen's Bureau that they had been terrorized by a group of white men. The white men had broken into their homes, beaten their family members, and stolen some gold. They also threatened to return and kill the freedmen if they did not support the Democrats in the next election. In their complaint, Pruing, Youngblood, and Johnson named the men involved – Luce Casey, John Davis, Toni Myers, and Joshua Bell. Despite giving a detailed account of the incident and naming the perpetrators, nothing was ever done regarding the case and the freedmen were forced to abandon their homes for their own safety.⁶³

Sarah Stagg complained to the Freedmen's Bureau in Mississippi that a son of Mr. McCutcheon had thrown a brick at her, slapped her face, and struck her in the arm with an

⁶² See also, Complaint of Emma Smith, 12 July 1867, *Letters Sent Relating to Complaints, March and May 1866 and July – October 1866*, Vol. 282, RG 105, reel 46, BRFAL-MS (M1907); Complaint of Susan See, September 1867, *Letters Sent Relating to Complaints, March and May 1866 and July – October 1866*, Vol. 282, RG 105, reel 46, BRFAL-MS (M1907); Complaint of Jasper Boswick and Aaron Carian, 25 September 1867, *Letters Sent Relating to Complaints, March and May 1866 and July – October 1866*, Vol. 282, RG 105, reel 46, BRFAL-MS (M1907); and Complaint of George P. Leigh, 11 September 1867, *Register of Complaints, September 1867 – July 1868*, Vol. 248, RG 105, reel 92, BRFAL-SC (M1910)

⁶³ Complaint of Tom Pruing, Robb Youngblood, and David Johnson, 6 October 1868, *Reports of Outrages Committed, 1866 and 1868*, RG 105, reel 33, BRFAL-SC (M1910). See also Complaint of Jenson Logan, 11 June 1868, *Reports of Outrages Committed, 1866 and 1868*, reel 33, BRFAL-SC (M1910); Complaint of Austin Reece, 21 September 1866, *Letters Sent, January – December 1866*, Vol. 143, reel 25, BRFAL-TX (M1912); and Complaint of Tilda Henson, 7 November 1868, *Register of Complaints, November – December 1868*, Vol. 136, reel 24, BRFAL-TX (M1912).

old shoe. After the initial assault, the man continued to intimidate Stagg by riding by her house regularly. Stagg informed the man that if he did not leave her alone, then she would have him arrested. He responded by physically assaulting Stagg again. He also called her a “damned bitch.” Having been physically assaulted, intimidated, and verbally abused, Stagg hoped that the Bureau could help her secure justice. She related her experiences in detail, but the agent simply told Stagg that she should drop the case, as “to push it would make a good deal of trouble and meanness.”⁶⁴ Stagg demonstrated great courage in seeking redress. She undoubtedly knew that filing a complaint would put her at further risk because she had already been assaulted twice; she did not need to be warned by the agent. Stagg understood the risks and consciously engaged in an act of discursive insubordination. But she faced further epistemic violence at the hands of the Bureau agent who silenced Stagg’s voice and dismissed her complaint.

Black women, in particular, faced additional challenges in securing justice through the Freedmen’s Bureau. On occasion, agents found the complaints of black women to be trivial; they frequently recorded complaints with only brief notations. In Texas, Amy Riley and Mary Middleton both complained that their employer, Robb H. Flournoy, owed them for services rendered. Flournoy owed the freedwomen \$105.00 and \$160.00, respectively. Rather than imposing a settlement, the agent simply ordered the complainants and the defendant to settle “in some way satisfactory.”⁶⁵ The most common complaints brought before the Bureau were those for non-payment by white employers.

⁶⁴ Complaint of Sarah Stagg, 23 August 1867, *Letters Sent Relating to Complaints, March and May 1866, and July – October 1866*, Vol. 282, RG 105, reel 46, BRFAL-MS (M1907).

⁶⁵ Complaint of Amy Riley, 10 July 1867, *Register of Complaints, June 1867 – September 1868*, Vol. 108, reel 22, BRFAL-TX (M1912); and Complaint of Mary Middleton, 10 July 1867, *Register of Complaints, June 1867 – September 1868*, Vol. 108, reel 22, BRFAL-TX (M1912).

Black men and women described receiving only partial wages, being run off the land without pay, or otherwise being denied payment for services rendered. Usually, if the agent found the complaint to be credible, he would order a settlement. If the planter still refused to settle, the agent might seize the crop and sell it to cover the debt. While some complaints were dismissed, the decision to have two freedwomen enforce a settlement themselves is highly unusual. The reality is that the experiences of black women did not receive attention equal to that accorded to the experiences of black men despite the conscious efforts of black women to engage in discursive insubordination.⁶⁶

Making a complaint to the Freedmen's Bureau also occasionally exposed black women to racial and gender prejudice. In the antebellum South, slaveholders stood at the pinnacle of system of gender, sex, and racial authority.⁶⁷ Many slaveholders used this position of power to force enslaved women into sexual relationships. This long history of sexual license on the part of slaveholders resulted in the birth of many mixed-race children. While enslaved, black women had no way to force recognition or support for their children. But after emancipation, many black women realized that they could use the Bureau to ensure that fathers had to support their children.⁶⁸ In Georgia, Emma Hurlbert complained to the Freedmen's Bureau that James Selkirk, a white man, would not support his child. Hurlbert demanded that Selkirk be obligated to provide support. Whether the Bureau agent ever acted on the complaint is unclear, but what is notable is the description

⁶⁶ A group of freedmen, led by a man named George, filed a similar complaint for nonpayment with the office in Houston, Texas. In this case, however, the Bureau agent immediately ordered that Fowser pay the freedmen wages owing from 1 June 1865. Complaint of George and Others, 23 December 1865, *Register of Complaints, December 1865 – June 1867*, Vol. 109, reel 22, BRFAL-TX (M912).

⁶⁷ Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 24.

⁶⁸ Sexual violence and the importance of family integrity are discussed at length in Chapter 3.

of Hurlbert. The agent described Hurlbert as “a very pretty colored woman.”⁶⁹ Less concerned with aiding Hurlbert in her complaint, the agent felt compelled to further objectify Hurlbert as a sexual object.

Still, the Freedmen’s Bureau regularly alternated between positions that favoured white Southerners and positions that favoured freedpeople. Although devoted to aiding freedpeople in the transition from slavery to freedom, the Bureau believed strongly in the need to establish a cooperative labour force in the South. Accomplishing this meant that agents never sided unilaterally with the beleaguered freedpeople who sought assistance. In some situations, agents imposed harsh punishments upon hostile white Southerners. When J. D. Solen, for example, brutally whipped a freedman working on his farm, he received a \$500.00 fine.⁷⁰ Williams Riggs was arrested for striking a freedman and bound over for the substantial sum of \$2000.00.⁷¹ It was not uncommon, however, for agents to impose non-punitive settlements on white Southerners. John Calahan was charged with aggravated assault and battery upon the freedwoman Sally Ann Burnell. When the defendant was found guilty, he was only fined \$20.00.⁷² When R. Rogers beat Martha Williams with a board to the point that the board broke, he was fined only \$15.00. The

⁶⁹ Complaint of Emma Hurlbert, June 1865, *Register of Complaints, June-Sept. 1865*, Vol. 158, reel 48, BRFAL-GA (M1903).

⁷⁰ Thomas Anderson vs. J. D. Solen, *Register of Complaints, October 1866 – February 1867 and October – December 1868*, Vol. 115, RG 105, reel 21, BRFAL-TX (M1912).

⁷¹ Complaint of Davis Mazzok, *Registers of Complaints, “Cases Referred to Civil Authorities for Settlement,” March 1867 – February 1868*, Vol. 241, RG 105, reel 89, BRFAL-SC (M1910).

⁷² State of Texas vs. John Calahan, 6 April 1868, *Register of Letters Received and Endorsements, May 1867 – November 1868*, Vol. 63, RG 105, reel 13, BRFAL-TX (M1912). See also State of Texas vs. William Black and John Calahan, 11 July 1867, *Registers of Letters Received and Endorsements, May 1867 – November 1868*, Vol. 63, RG 105, reel 13, BRFAL-TX (M1912).

agent concluded that Rogers had treated Williams humanely before the assault.⁷³ To preserve the economic relationship between the white man and his black labourer, the agent imposed a trifling fine.

Moreover, when the agents decided against freedpeople, they sometimes took the opportunity to reprimand black men and women, hoping to instill in them a desired subservient behaviour. Mary Jane Washington not only found the Freedmen's Bureau unwilling to support her claim for owed wages but was also lectured for her behaviour. When Washington complained that David Beer refused to pay her for services rendered, the Bureau agent summoned Beer to make a settlement. Both Washington and Beer appeared at the office, but the agent determined that there was no cause for the complaint and dismissed the case "with caution to the freedwoman that she must be more careful in regard to her language and not to be so exorbitant in her demands for wages."⁷⁴ Washington did not receive any aid from the Bureau. She also received a lecture on the proper behaviour expected of a black woman in the South. She was not to assert herself, claim her rights, or challenge white Southerners.⁷⁵

Black men were similarly subjected to warnings from Bureau agents about proper behaviour. James Boswick and Aaron Carian lodged a complaint against F. C. Kiser for

⁷³ Affidavit of Martha Williams, 11 April 1868, *Affidavits and Settlements, July 1867 – September 1868*, RG 105, reel 14, BRFAL-TX (M1912); and Affidavit of Martha Williams, 16 April 1868, *Affidavits and Settlements, July 1867 – September 1868*, RG 105, reel 14, BRFAL-TX (M1912).

⁷⁴ Complaint of Mary Jane Washington, 29 August 1867, *Register of Complaints, August 1867 – December 1868*, Vol. 194, reel 30, BRFAL-MS (M1907).

⁷⁵ See also Complaint of Emma Smith, 12 July 1867, *Letters Sent Relating to Complaints, March and May 1866 and July – October 1866*, Vol. 282, reel 46, BRFAL-MS (M1907). Emma Smith complained to the Freedmen's Bureau that Mr. Townsend had physically assaulted her by striking her with a hoe and horsewhip. Townsend also threatened to split Smith's head open with an axe. According to the Bureau agent, Townsend was able to prove that he had treated the freedwoman humanely. The case was dismissed and Smith was advised to behave properly.

abuse. Kiser had ordered Boswick to bring some corn in from the field by night, but Boswick refused, telling the white man to “kiss my ass.” Kiser then attempted to whip the obstinate labourer and, after being halted by Carian, retrieved his pistol to shoot Boswick. Although Boswick attempted to hide, he was eventually found and beaten. The Bureau agent, however, laid the blame for the incident only on Boswick and Carian. The two freedmen were ordered to return to the plantation and “behave like men and not use any such language.” There is no indication that Kiser was reprimanded for beating his labourers.⁷⁶

There were, of course, some cases that were dismissed for valid reasons. Sarah Bennett, a freedwoman in Georgia, complained to the Freedmen’s Bureau that Johnson McLean owed her \$13.00 for labour. She asked for help securing a settlement. Upon investigating the agent overseeing the case found that Bennet had overdrawn her account and was therefore not entitled to additional money. The case was dismissed.⁷⁷ In Mississippi, a group of freedmen complained to the Freedmen’s Bureau that Gaulty Matthews refused to provide payment for labour conducted between 1866 and 1867. The freedmen insisted “that they dare not go to Mr. Matthew’s place, even to carry a letter.” The agent who heard the complaint, therefore, wrote a letter to Matthews directly from the office seeking an explanation. Matthews agreed to speak with the agent and revealed that he had already settled with the freedmen. The freedmen, when this was discovered, admitted that they had lied. They had registered a false complaint in the hopes of

⁷⁶ See also Complaint of Peter Burres, 12 November 1866, Register of Complaints, October 1866 - February 1867 and October - December 1868, Vol. 115, reel 21, BRFAL-TX (M1912).

⁷⁷ Complaint of Sarah Bennett, 28 May 1868, *Register of Complaints, January – October 1868*, Vol. 249, RG 105, reel 60, BRFAL-GA (M1903).

recovering some money in order to settle their debts with a local merchant.⁷⁸ These cases suggest that some freedpeople endeavoured to use the Bureau to cheat their employers, believing that the Bureau would support their claims over those of former slaveholders.

As much some Freedmen's Bureau agents tried to advance the position of African Americans in the South, widespread hostility from white Southerners required a careful balancing act. Samuel Jones, a freedman, reported William Anderson for physical assault. According to Jones, Anderson had struck him with a piece of wood. Jones defended himself, striking the white man with a rock. Fearing that Anderson would attack him again, Jones reported the incident. Even though an investigation concluded that everything had happened exactly as Jones described, the complaint was dismissed. This was because Anderson only agreed to leave Jones alone if the Bureau agent dismissed the complaint.⁷⁹ In some situations, Bureau agents favoured the demands of white Southerners in an effort to secure sustained peace. Had the Bureau agent pursued the complaint against Anderson, likely issuing a fine for the assault, the white man would have inflicted further violence on Jones.

There is no denying that the Freedmen's Bureau engaged in epistemic practices that silenced African Americans. However, the majority of agents still worked diligently to provide African Americans with a forum to record their experiences. Throughout the agency's existence, especially at the beginning and end of the agricultural season, dozens of freedpeople arrived at the offices each day. Sometimes they would arrive before

⁷⁸ Complaint of Arter Hooker, Jerry Chase, Elijah White, and Adam Richison, 23 March 1868, *Register of Complaints, March – November 1868*, Vol. 101, RG 105, reel 11, BRFAL-MS (M1907).

⁷⁹ Complaint of Samuel Jones, 4 September 1868, *Register of Complaints, January – October 1868*, Vol. 249, reel 60, BRFAL-GA (M1903). See also, for example, Complaint of John Browe, 6 August 1868, *Register of Complaints, January – October 1868*, Vol. 249, RG 105, reel 60, BRFAL-GA (M1903).

sunrise to petition agents even before they were fully dressed.⁸⁰ Securing settlement for a single case could involve hours of discussion. More often than not, a complaint could only be settled over multiple sessions as the agents had to summon the defendants to the offices.⁸¹ Sometimes the defendants would arrive to answer the complaint, but oftentimes they would simply ignore the summons.⁸² The only way to enforce these summonses was by utilizing federal troops, but there simply were not enough troops to respond to every complaint filed. As a result, some complaints were ignored, trivialized, or dismissed because of structural problems plaguing the daily operations of the Bureau. During the busiest seasons, a Bureau agent might work fourteen hours a day, seven days a week.⁸³ This left little time to investigate the hundreds of complaints that were filed by both white and black people each month.

James Davison, an agent in Georgia, admitted, “I am tired out broke down. Every day for six months, day after day, I have had from 5 to 20 complaints, generally trivial and of no moment, yet requiring consideration and attention coming from both black and white.” Surprisingly, Davison claimed that white Southerners were actually lodging the most complaints in his district, making it difficult for him to devote adequate time to the concerns of African Americans. As the Freedmen’s Bureau increasingly struggled to deal with the large number of complaints being registered every day, some freedpeople

⁸⁰ Cimbala, *Under the Guardianship of the Nation*, 64.

⁸¹ See, for example, Complaint of Jerry Wilson, September 1867, *Register of Complaints, September 1867 and May – December 1868*, Vol. 128, RG 105, reel 24, BRFAL-TX (M1912); Complaint of Carolina Ryan, 14 January 1866, *Letters Sent, January – December 1866*, Vol. 143, RG 105, reel 25, BRFAL-TX (M1912); Complaint of Samuel Jones, 3 June 1868, *Register of Complaints and Orders Sent to Local Citizens, May – June 1868*, Vol. 189, RG 105, reel 51, BRFAL-GA (M1903).

⁸² See, for example, Complaint of Pinckney Suttle, 8 August 1867, *Letters Received and Register of Complaints, 1867 – 1868*, Vol. 285, RG 105, reel 66, BRFAL-GA (M1903).

⁸³ Cimbala, *Under the Guardianship of the Nation*, 64.

eventually decided it was not worth the effort to testify about the violence they endured. Too often the Bureau lacked the manpower to adequately address complaints. While Bureau agents might be sympathetic, their options were limited. The Freedmen's Bureau, almost from its inception, was hampered by the structural and cultural limitations of a bureaucracy that was demonized in the South. From its inception, President Andrew Johnson had opposed the Freedmen's Bureau. His outspoken disapproval galvanized opposition to the Bureau, encouraging hostile white Southerners and Democrats to challenge the agency.⁸⁴

Black men and women continued to use the Freedmen's Bureau as a forum to voice their complaints and share their experiences, but this did not always mean they received satisfaction. The Freedmen's Bureau was often overwhelmed by efforts to silence the black population and force the agency from the South. As Davison articulated, "Without either thanks or pay the wheel begins to screech and the machine runs hard."⁸⁵ Whether agents supported freedpeople or not, however, it is important to recognize the records of the Freedmen's Bureau as an expression of the pain endured by black men and women in the postemancipation South. Despite the challenges of testifying, thousands of freedpeople registered complaints. In doing so, these black men and women resisted violence discursively by verbally confronting those who would see them silenced and ensuring that their experiences were inscribed in the historical record.

⁸⁴ Andrew Johnson, "Veto of the Freedmen's Bureau Bill," in *Andrew Johnson, President of the United States, His Life and Speeches*, ed. Lillian Foster (New York: Richardson, 1866), 226-241.

⁸⁵ J. Davison to W. W. Deane, 4 June 1866, *Unregistered Letters Received, D-F, 1866*, RG 105, reel 26, BRFAL-GA (M798).

In June 1872, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands ceased operations across the South. All agents, clerks, and other employees were discharged with the exception of those retained by the Secretary of War to continue the payment of bounties, or other moneys due to black soldiers, sailors, and marines.⁸⁶ The decision to abolish the Freedmen's Bureau was contentious. White Southerners and Democrats had opposed the interference of the agency in the South, but African Americans relied on the assistance of the Freedmen's Bureau to voice their experiences and secure justice. The Freedmen's Bureau did not establish good will between white Southerners and the newly freed black population, nor did it guard its work from the interference of paternalism. The Freedmen's Bureau, however, did secure the recognition of African Americans within the legal system. Moreover, despite its own shortcomings, the Freedmen's Bureau allowed African Americans to resist epistemic practices intended to whitewash the existence of racialized violence. As Du Bois concluded, "Its successes were the result of hard work, supplemented by the aid of philanthropists and the eager striving of black men. Its failures were the result of bad local agents, inherent difficulties of the work, and national neglect."⁸⁷

⁸⁶ The Freedmen's Bureau had already halted the majority of operations by 1869 when Congress failed to renew funding. From 1869 to 1872, only the agency's education and bounty departments were still operational. "An Act Making Appropriations for Sundry Civil Expenses of the Government for the Fiscal Year Ending June Thirtieth, Eighteen Hundred and Seventy-Three, and for Other Purposes," *United States Statutes at Large*, Vol. 17, 42nd Cong., 2nd Sess. (1872): 366. The initial bill to abolish the Freedmen's Bureau was introduced on 5 February 1872. See United States Congress, House of Representatives, *A Bill Abolishing the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, and providing for the continuance of the Freedmen's Hospital in the District of Columbia*, HR 1359, 42nd Cong., 2nd Sess., introduced in House 5 January 1872.

⁸⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Freedmen's Bureau," *Atlantic Monthly* 87 (March 1901), <https://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/issues/01mar/dubois2.htm> (accessed 6 April 2019).

While the Freedmen's Bureau helped black men and women secure a degree of economic autonomy, education, and social independence, hostile white Southerners formed their own organizations intended to subjugate the newly freed black population. From 1866 to 1871, the Ku Klux Klan inflicted tremendous violence in the name of preserving white supremacy. Historian Shawn Leigh Alexander described the Ku Klux Klan as "the military arm of the Democratic party and those who wanted the restoration of white supremacy."⁸⁸ Frequent targets included black schools, churches, and homes, as well as teachers, students, Republican politicians, and those African Americans who seemingly benefitted from the new racial order in the South. The Klan was particularly active in those areas where the black population outnumbered the white population, as in parts of South Carolina. The goal was to undermine Reconstruction and destroy the Republican Party's infrastructure in the South. The Ku Klux Klan inflicted great violence upon the black population. Part of this campaign involved silencing the black experience by preventing them from testifying, engaging in politics, or securing justice through the legal system.

The ambitions of the Ku Klux Klan were widely recognized. Robert Gleed, a black senator from Columbus, Mississippi, explained that the purpose of the outrages committed against African Americans was "to remand the colored men of the country to as near a position of servitude as possible." By inflicting violence upon African Americans, the Klan sought "to break down the spirit of independence in the black

⁸⁸ Shawn Leigh Alexander, *Reconstruction Violence and the Ku Klux Klan Hearings*, The Bedford Series in History and Culture (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2015) 5.

man.”⁸⁹ Edward Holman, a white farmer and critic of the Ku Klux Klan, similarly described the organization as striving “to regulate things.” The Klan wanted to regulate affairs in the South “to suit themselves.” For example, if a black man was doing something that the Klan did not approve of, like working a certain plot of land, the man would be driven off his property to “keep the state of affairs according to their notion.”⁹⁰

The newly freed black population did not question that the use of racialized violence was intended to perpetuate white supremacy. Hostile white Southerners tacitly acknowledged this primary function, too. However, they framed the Klan as a necessary organization to protect white Southerners stripped of their rights at the hands of unruly African Americans and unscrupulous Republicans. Samuel J. Gholson, a Representative from Mississippi and a former Confederate general, described the Klan as a protector of “women and children in the country against the colored race.” Gholson spoke critically of the state of affairs in the South following emancipation, claiming that white Southerners “were disfranchised and outlawed ... by the Federal Government.”⁹¹ Only the Klan was capable of promoting “the success of the white man.”⁹²

Although the majority of Southerners did not participate in criminal behaviour, racialized violence thrived in the South because a significant percentage of the white population ignored or dismissed the outrages being inflicted upon the black community.

B. Hargrove, an attorney in Rome, Georgia, admitted that it was difficult to uncover and

⁸⁹ *KKK Testimony*, 12: 722.

⁹⁰ *KKK Testimony*, 11: 346.

⁹¹ *KKK Testimony*, 12: 854.

⁹² *KKK Testimony*, 12: 859. Some white Southerners, particularly older citizens, made excuses for the Ku Klux Klan. These men argued that the Klan did not intend to do anything wrong. Klan apologists upheld the Klan as a necessary organization. On the perceived plight of white Southerners and the necessity of the Klan, see 6: 23; 7: 791-798; 11: 91; 11: 195; 11: 567; 12: 820; and 12: 1139.

prosecute those committing acts of racialized violence.⁹³ The Klan, along with other vigilante organizations, murdered an estimated twenty thousand black people and maimed, wounded, or terrorized an even greater number.⁹⁴ Very few perpetrators were ever punished for their actions. Alexander K. Davis, a black law student and member of the state legislature, knew of several attempts to investigate outrages committed by the Klan in Mississippi, but none of these investigations ever succeeded in obtaining a conviction. Witnesses might go before the grand jury to report the perpetrators of racialized violence only to find the perpetrators, or people otherwise connected to the Klan, gathered to investigate the outrage. This would prompt some witnesses to recant their statements, an overt form of testimonial smothering.⁹⁵ The legal system offered little protection to African Americans because it was difficult to secure a grand jury that did not include a member of the Klan, or someone sympathetic to the Klan.⁹⁶ And even if it was possible to secure an indictment, finding a petit jury willing to convict was unlikely. Very few white Southerners had any interest in “ferreting out the perpetrators of these crimes.”⁹⁷

It was not until 1870, four years after the formation of the Ku Klux Klan, that Congress finally acknowledged the growing concerns regarding the use of violence to disenfranchise African Americans and disrupt elections in the South. On 31 May 1870,

⁹³ *KKK Testimony*, 6: 80.

⁹⁴ Alexander, *Reconstruction Violence and the Ku Klux Klan Hearings*, 8.

⁹⁵ *KKK Testimony*, 11: 478-479; and 11: 591.

⁹⁶ *KKK Testimony*, 12: 721.

⁹⁷ *KKK Testimony*, 12: 787-788.

Congress passed the Enforcement Act of 1870.⁹⁸ The Act declared that all citizens qualified by law to vote would be allowed to participate in elections “without distinction of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” The Act further banned the use of “force, bribery, threats, intimidation, or other unlawful means” to prevent any citizen from voting. Although the language of the Act acknowledged the rights of all enfranchised citizens, Republicans understood that the frequent targets of voter intimidation were African Americans. As a result, the Act specifically guaranteed the rights of those whose suffrage was secured or guaranteed by the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. Perhaps more important, however, was the section specifically prohibiting the actions of disguised people who violated, injured, or otherwise, oppressed those who attempted to exercise their voting rights. This meant that members of the Ku Klux Klan, along with other terrorist organizations, if prosecuted, could face a fine of up to \$5000.00 and ten years in prison.⁹⁹

The federal government hoped that simply having legal measures in place would serve as a deterrent against racialized violence.¹⁰⁰ The Enforcement Act of 1870, however, failed to effect meaningful change. As a result, further efforts were made to implement federal oversight for local and state elections. The Enforcement Act of 1871 provided for the appointment of two supervisors for any election in areas with a

⁹⁸ Formally known as “An Act to Enforce the Right of Citizens of the United States to vote in the several States of this Union, and for other Purposes.”

⁹⁹ “An Act to Enforce the Right of Citizens of the United States to Vote in the Several States of This Union, and for Other Purposes,” *United States Statutes at Large*, Vol. 16, 41st Cong., 2nd Sess., (1870): 140-146.

¹⁰⁰ Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 385.

population of over 20 000 people.¹⁰¹ These supervisors were supposed to ensure that white Southerners could not commit unlawful acts in an effort to prevent African Americans from voting. As reports of racialized violence continued to emerge from the South, President Ulysses S. Grant decided the authority of the president needed to be broadened to allow for effective intervention. To this end, on 20 April 1871, Congress passed the Ku Klux Klan Act.¹⁰² The Ku Klux Klan Act authorized the president to intervene “in all cases where insurrection, domestic violence, unlawful combinations, or conspiracies” threatened to deprive any group of people of “the rights, privileges, or immunities, or protection named in the Constitution.”¹⁰³ To combat racialized violence, the president could mobilize local militias, or the land naval forces of the United States, to secure the rights of African Americans. Moreover, the Act allowed for the suspension of habeas corpus to aid in the suppression of violence, a power that Grant used in South Carolina in October 1871 to protect the civil and political rights of freedpeople.

Along with the Ku Klux Klan Act, Congress made provisions for an investigation into the problem of racialized violence.¹⁰⁴ The Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, popularly known as the Ku Klux

¹⁰¹ “An Act to Amend An Act Approved May Thirty-One, Eighteen Hundred and Seventy, entitled ‘An Act to Enforce the Rights of Citizens of the United States to Vote in Several States of This Union and for Other Purposes’,” *United States Statutes at Large*, Vol. 16, 41st Cong., 3rd Sess., (1871): 433-440.

¹⁰² Formally known as “An Act to Enforce the Provisions of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, and for Other Purposes,” *United States Statutes at Large*, Vol. 17, 42nd Cong., 1st Sess., (1871): 13-15.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ “An Act Making Appropriations to Supply Deficiencies in the Appropriations for the Service of the Year ending June Thirtieth, Eighteen Hundred and Seventy-One, and for Additional Appropriations for the Service of the Year Ending June thirtieth, Eighteen Hundred and Seventy-Two, and for Other Purposes,” *United States Statutes at Large*, 42nd Cong., 1st sess. (1871): 7; and “An Act Making an Appropriation to Supply a Deficiency in the Appropriation for Expenses of the Joint Select Committee on Alleged Outrages in the Southern States,” *United States Statutes at Large*, Vol. 17, 42nd Cong., 1st sess. (1872): 27.

Klan hearings, was comprised of twenty-one senators and congressmen. Of the twenty-one members, there were five Republicans and two Democrats from the Senate, and eight Republicans and six Democrats from the House. Six of the members were from former Confederate states, while three others were from slaveholding states that had remained within the Union.¹⁰⁵

From April 1871 to February 1872, the congressional committee gathered testimony from public officials, army officials, and the victims of violence. The hearings began in Washington D. C. in May and continued until September. At the same time, a subcommittee comprised of three men visited South Carolina. Additional subcommittees traveled to Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Tennessee during the fall and winter. Some less concerted efforts were also made to collect evidence from individuals in Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, and Virginia.¹⁰⁶ Individuals from every segment of the population were subpoenaed to testify, while others came forward voluntarily to share their experiences. The stated goal of the committee was “to ascertain ... the condition of affairs ... as to peace, order, and the execution of the law [in the South]; whether offences are committed there which are not punished, whether laws against crime are enforced or not, and especially whether any crimes have been committed ... by bodies of men going about in disguise.”¹⁰⁷

The Ku Klux Klan hearings are notable because the federal government made a concerted effort to gather the testimony of those who directly experienced racialized

¹⁰⁵ Alexander, *Reconstruction Violence and the Ku Klux Klan Hearings*, 9-10.

¹⁰⁶ Alexander, *Reconstruction Violence and the Ku Klux Klan Hearings*, 10-11; and Trelease, *White Terror*, 392.

¹⁰⁷ *KKK Testimony*, 11: 224.

violence. While some African Americans approached the congressional committee because they believed it was the only way to educate a wider public about their plight, many were subpoenaed to appear. That some people were subpoenaed should not detract from their bravery and agency, as speaking before the congressional committee was dangerous for anyone, regardless of why they initially appeared.

From the beginning, the congressional committee was subject to internal conflict, as Republicans and Democrats disagreed about the true purpose of the hearings. When the hearings began, the Ku Klux Klan Act was in the process of being made into law. Many Democrats saw this legislation as “a hostile measure against the South.”¹⁰⁸ The *Rome Courier* likened the hearings to the Spanish Inquisition, describing both as disgraceful, dangerous, and rotten.¹⁰⁹ Because the Ku Klux Klan Act enabled the president to suspend the writ of habeas corpus, some questioned its constitutionality.¹¹⁰ For many Democrats, the hearings seemed to be a ploy to manufacture tales of outrage that could be used to secure Republican support for the 1872 presidential campaign. This is not to say that Republicans did not see the political value of tales of outrage, but they had no need to manufacture them. Hundreds of African Americans came forward to testify about the violence they experienced at the hands of hostile white Southerners, particularly those who travelled the country roads at night in disguise. It is more likely, then, that many Republicans saw the hearings as an opportunity to confirm the necessity of the Ku Klux Klan Act. To this end, many informants were questioned about the significance of the

¹⁰⁸ *KKK Testimony*, 11: 57.

¹⁰⁹ *Rome (G.A.) Courier*, 24 October 1871, in *KKK Testimony*, 7: 674; see also 11: 303.

¹¹⁰ *KKK Testimony*, 11: 449.

legislation. According to Robert Gleed, prior to the Ku Klux Klan Act, “there was not a child of eight years that would not threaten us in the streets, and all over this country, with these midnight assassins.”¹¹¹

The testimony gathered by the congressional committee was politically charged. Unsurprisingly, suspected members of the Ku Klux Klan denied membership in the organization, some going as far as to deny having knowledge of the violence plaguing the South. Nathan Bedford Forrest, a former Confederate general, was widely recognized as a member of the Ku Klux Klan. Despite admitting that he received fifty to a hundred letters each day about activities of the Klan, Forrest denied any involvement in the organization. Moreover, he at times denied the organization’s very existence. When asked if he knew about white Southerners gathering for the purpose of violating the law or preventing the execution of the law, Forrest responded negatively. But almost immediately after this statement, Forrest acknowledged that the Klan was necessary to suppress dangerous African Americans. He stated, “Since [the Klan’s] organization, the [Union Leagues] have quit killing and murdering our people.”¹¹² Forrest, along with many of his colleagues, frequently withheld testimony, evaded questions, and claimed to have poor memory.¹¹³ It is also impossible to discount the practice of outright lying, especially where the testimony of suspected Klan members and the victims of violence do not quite align.

¹¹¹ *KKK Testimony*, 12: 721.

¹¹² *KKK Testimony*, 13: 3-41.

¹¹³ See *KKK Testimony*, 3: 208-209; 6: 70-72; 6: 122-125; 7: 720; and 11: 1-3; and 11: 439.

African Americans, once they appeared before the congressional committee, were generally willing to engage in discursive insubordination. Black men and women detailed the horrors inflicted upon them even as efforts were made to silence their testimony. Amzi Rainey, a black man from South Carolina, described being terrorized by the Ku Klux Klan. One night, a group of disguised men approached Rainey's house. Because he saw them approaching, Rainey immediately retreated to the loft. Rainey's wife answered the door, but she was immediately beaten. The disguised men struck the black woman four or five times before even saying a word.¹¹⁴ As Rainey recounted the terrors his family endured, Reverdy Johnson, a member of the congressional committee, firmly objected. He refused to recognize the veracity of Rainey's testimony. A conservative Democrat, Johnson had long refused to recognize black people as credible witnesses. Although aligned with the Union during the Civil War, Johnson did not support the abolition of slavery, nor did he respect the rights of free African Americans. Indeed, Johnson became famous for representing John F. A. Sandford in *Dred Scott vs. Sandford*. Johnson also defended Ku Klux Klan members who were indicted under the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871.¹¹⁵ When black men and women did not choose to smother their testimony, Johnson endeavoured to silence their voices; he was unwilling to recognize incidents of racialized violence despite consistent testimony describing the outrages committed upon the newly freed black population.

¹¹⁴ *KKK Testimony*, 13: 1744-1746.

¹¹⁵ On Reverdy Johnson, see Bernard C. Steiner, *Life of Reverdy Johnson* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1970).

Where apologists could not obscure the existence of the Klan or defend its actions, the alternative was to try and silence those who would speak against the terrorist organization. Such epistemic practices were common. Alexander K. Davis, a black lawyer from Mississippi, spoke openly about the challenges of bringing the Klan to justice. As Davis explained, it was nearly impossible for African Americans to register testimony in open court because members of the Klan frequently were integrated into the criminal justice system. A black man might go to testify about being beaten by the Klan, only to find the perpetrator sitting on the grand jury. Indeed, members of the Klan found positions as jurors, prominent lawyers, and sometimes even as law enforcement officials. This made it nearly impossible for some black men and women to testify, forcing them to smother their testimony for their own safety.¹¹⁶

The postemancipation South experienced “a complete reign of terror” as white Southerners used violence as an instrument of social control aimed at black citizens and any others who threatened the prior social and racial hierarchy.¹¹⁷ Speaking out against this violence was highly dangerous and carried a significant risk of retribution. Because the proceedings of the hearings were published in local newspapers and widely available, there was no guarantee of anonymity. Robert W. Flournoy, an election worker, revealed that one man, whose name he refused to provide, was afraid to speak before the congressional committee.¹¹⁸ There was a pervasive fear that speaking against the Klan would only result in further violence. James T. Wilson, Sr. described an attack on a local

¹¹⁶ *KKK Testimony*, 11: 478-479.

¹¹⁷ *KKK Testimony*, 11: 95.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

black woman in Mississippi. Although she was not killed, the attack left her seriously injured. Wilson warned her, “Old lady, you are not killed; you keep your mouth shut about any of the party. You know how things are in this country, and if you don’t the next thing you will be killed. Now keep your mouth shut, and don’t you say a word to a living human in the neighborhood. If you do you may be gone up.”¹¹⁹

Fear of retaliation caused some black men and women to withhold their testimony, but testimony remained an important, albeit often dangerous, method of resistance. Letty Mills, for example, related an attack on her family by the Ku Klux Klan. One night, while she was in bed, a group of disguised men broke into her house and forced her, her husband, and a hired hand to strip off their clothes to receive “a good beating.” Mills was struck on the head with a pistol, an assault which left lasting damage. When Mills’ infant daughter began to cry, one of the men threatened to “mash” the child if she was not silenced. Mills immediately recognized this man’s voice as that of William Felker. Before they left, the men threatened to hang her husband if anyone spoke against them. Although Mills was too frightened to say anything at the time of the attack, she identified her attacker freely in court.¹²⁰ Caroline Smith was similarly targeted by the Klan. After being stripped naked and whipped, her attackers asked if she could identify them. Smith lied, claiming that she did not know any of the men present. This was a calculated decision to protect herself; when speaking before the committee, however, Smith was able to confidently identify several of the men involved.¹²¹ The decision to

¹¹⁹ *KKK Testimony*, 12: 1146.

¹²⁰ *KKK Testimony*, 6: 465-468. See also 6: 468-470.

¹²¹ *KKK Testimony*, 6: 400-403

testify about racialized violence was never done without careful consideration. These examples illustrate that many African Americans, especially black women, understood when to hold their tongues and when to openly name their attackers. Such actions must be understood as a resistance to both epistemic violence and physical violence.

The attack on Caroline Smith came about because she had supposedly spoken out of turn. Enslaved people had long expressed their discontent through acts of discursive insubordination. In some situations, the mere threat of action was enough to dissuade slaveholders from acting against African Americans. Delicia Patterson, a formerly enslaved woman interviewed in St. Louis, Missouri, was taken to the auction block at age fifteen. There she saw Judge Miller, a wealthy and notoriously cruel slaveholder. When Judge Miller attempted to bid on Patterson, she brazenly announced that she would cut her throat “from ear to ear” before she would allow herself to be owned by such a cruel man. The threat of self-harm was successful, and Judge Miller withdrew his bid. Patterson was then purchased by another slaveholder who respected her outspoken behaviour.¹²² From this example, it is clear that some enslaved people bravely spoke out for their own best interests. Outbursts by enslaved people were often met with amusement, as white Southerners considered black men and women to be inherently inferior.¹²³ After emancipation, however, verbal confrontations were no longer viewed as humorous. Those who stood up for their rights were regarded as insolent.¹²⁴ African Americans were

¹²² *Slave Narrative Collection*, 11.8: 270-271.

¹²³ Delicia Patterson, for example, was described as being ‘sassy.’ This was a description commonly reserved for African Americans. Patterson, however, used the racist epithet to her advantage. She manipulated how she was perceived by the white slaveholders and, as a result, managed to seize some minor control over her fate. See also, *Slave Narrative Collection*, 5.4: 191.

¹²⁴ *KKK Testimony*, 12: 723.

expected to show deference.¹²⁵ As she was being beaten, the Klan told Smith that they did not want to hear any “big talk” and that she was not to “sass any white ladies.”¹²⁶ Sarah Ann Sturtevant was also warned about the importance of knowing her place.¹²⁷ And yet these women resisted efforts to silence their voices.

White men and women were aware of the power of discursive resistance. For this reason, the Ku Klux Klan made concerted efforts to silence those African Americans who would speak out against them. In some situations, this spawned an increase in racialized violence. Bully Jack, a black man, was supposedly killed because he testified before a grand jury investigating violence perpetrated by Klan. Although his wife recognized some of the perpetrators, she claimed ignorance when she was brought to testify because she was afraid she might face the same fate as her husband.¹²⁸ Aleck Hughes, another black man, instituted a suit for damages after being whipped by a group of disguised men. He made the decision to testify because he recognized some of the perpetrators, but then relocated from Mashulaville to Holly Springs, Mississippi for his safety. Hughes left behind a flourishing cotton crop.¹²⁹ In light of the increased violence that testifying could bring about, it is important to recognize the bravery and tenacity of those who did come forward. Hundreds of black men and women took advantage of the hearings to speak bluntly about the issue of racialized violence.

¹²⁵ Even after emancipation, many African Americans continued to call white people “master and mistress” because they would be whipped if they did not. *KKK Testimony*, 7: 610-611.

¹²⁶ *KKK Testimony*, 6: 400-403.

¹²⁷ *KKK Testimony*, 6: 463.

¹²⁸ *KKK Testimony*, 11: 472; 11: 515-516; 11: 550; 11: 576-577-579.

¹²⁹ *KKK Testimony*, 11: 473-474.

Mary Brown travelled from White County to Fulton County, Georgia to give her testimony against the Ku Klux Klan. On 21 May 1871, a group of disguised men had visited Brown's house. In an attempt to ease her fear, Brown kept reminding herself, "I have not done anything; I have not stolen anything, or murdered anybody; so I will not be scared." The Klan, however, believed that Brown had testified against the organization. For this alleged offense, she was stripped naked and beaten. Having already suffered for allegedly testifying against the Klan, Brown recognized that she had nothing to lose if she actually made the journey to speak before the congressional committee. In revealing "they left great marks on me," she spoke for hundreds of African Americans who had endured similar injustices.¹³⁰ Black women often did not receive equal attention with black men when testifying. They testified in smaller numbers, their experiences span fewer pages of text, and many were only interviewed as a means of corroborating the testimony of their husbands or fathers. Yet black women insisted on expressing the harsh realities of life in the South. They reflected on the trauma of being forced to "show their nakedness" and having their every action called into question.¹³¹ Black women used the hearings as a way to force the federal government to recognize their plight, and to recognize that women, as well as men, were worthy of protection as citizens.

The Ku Klux Klan hearings yielded thirteen volumes of testimony. While fear of reprisals meant that many incidents of violence were likely not reported, many brave black men and women came forward to describe being forced from their homes, beaten,

¹³⁰ *KKK Testimony*, 6: 375-377. Kidada Williams cited this same example in the introduction to her study of racialized violence. Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me*, 7.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

and sexually assaulted. The testimony reveals how racialized violence shaped the lives of average African Americans. The minority report to the congressional committee, however, made a final attempt to minimize the voluminous evidence of violence and lawlessness in the South. Frank P. Blair, a Democratic senator from Missouri, submitted a report that condemned the results of black suffrage and black political activity in the South, arguing that Republican governments had allowed African Americans to exert their influence unjustly over white Southerners.¹³² In an act of epistemic violence, those who testified were ridiculed and their experiences were dismissed. Proponents of the minority report argued that only they were willing to expose the truth about the conditions in the postemancipation South. They stated:

The atrocious measures by which millions of white people have been put at the mercy of the semi-barbarous negroes of the South, and of the vilest of the white people, both from the North and South, who have been constituted the leaders of this black horde, are now sought to be justified and defended by defaming the people upon whom these unspeakable outrage has been committed.¹³³

White Southerners were supposedly the victims in this narrative. While the South was undoubtedly experiencing a period of “wickedness and infamy” it was the white population, the proponents of the minority argued, that endured the greatest suffering.¹³⁴ Using their power as congressmen, these white men challenged the credibility of the black men and women who testified by trying to justify the actions of the Ku Klux Klan and minimizing the trauma endured by the newly freed black population.

¹³² The minority report was signed by Frank P. Blair, T. F. Bayard, S. S. Cox, James B. Beck, P. Van Trump, A. M. Waddell, J. C. Robinson, and J. M. Hanks. These men were all Democrats. See *Testimony*, 1: 289-588.

¹³³ *KKK Testimony*, 1: 289.

¹³⁴ *KKK Testimony*, 1: 515.

The minority report linked the spread of violence to the alleged deficiencies of Republican governments in the South. While the Ku Klux Klan undeniably existed, its actions could be explained as the result of bad government: “It is an axiomatic truth that bad government will produce bad men among the best people on earth.” Proponents of the minority report argued that it would be a waste of time and money to try and gather countervailing testimony regarding the outrages; they did not deny that the outrages occurred. They did, however, suggest that black men and women had grossly exaggerated, claiming that the outrages never reached an “extravagant extent” as many African Americans claimed.¹³⁵

The majority report, in contrast, used the evidence collected during the hearings to confirm the existence of widespread violence and lawlessness in the South.¹³⁶ For the first time, many African Americans spoke openly about the trauma they had experienced. Samuel Simmons, one of the Klan’s many victims in South Carolina, had been told that he would be murdered and tortured if he testified. Despite these threats, Simmons chose to speak openly before the congressional committee.¹³⁷ This testimony, along with the testimony of hundreds of other African Americans, forced the federal government to recognize African Americans as human beings. In South Carolina, the particularly egregious outrages described by black men and women pushed President Ulysses S. Grant to declare a state of lawlessness in nine counties – Spartanburg, Union, York,

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ The majority report was submitted by Luke P. Poland, Vermont’s Republican representative. It was signed by senators John Scott, Z. Chandler, Benjamin F. Rice, John Pool, Daniel D. Pratt, and representatives Horace Maynard, Glenni W. Socfield, John F. Farnsworth, John Coburn, Job E. Stevenson, Benjamin F. Butler, and William E. Lansing. These men were all members of the Republican Party. See 1: 1-100.

¹³⁷ *KKK Testimony*, 3: 402-407.

Chester, Laurens, Newberry, Fairfield, Lancaster, and Chesterfield. Federal prosecutors travelled to South Carolina to indict hundreds of men accused of belonging to the Ku Klux Klan. It was no longer possible to ignore the threat posed by racialized violence, although only South Carolina experienced such a drastic response. While the majority of the congressional committee acknowledged that racialized violence in the south threatened “the execution of the laws and the security of life and property,” any corrective measures in Georgia and Mississippi were ultimately limited in scope.¹³⁸

The majority report recognized the dangers posed by vigilante organizations like the Ku Klux Klan. It also called into question the logic motivating racialized violence generally. Regarding the newly emancipated black people of the South, the report stated:

Having the rights of a citizen and a voter, neither of those rights can be abrogated by whipping him. If his political opinions are erroneous he will not take kindly to the opposite creed when its apostle comes to inflict the scourge upon himself, and outrage upon his wife and children. If he is ignorant, he will not be educated by burning his schoolhouses and exiling his teachers; if he is wicked, he will not be made better by banishing to Liberia his religious teachers. If the resuscitation of the State is desired by his labor, neither will be secured by a persecution which depopulates townships and prevents the introduction of new labor and capital.¹³⁹

Armed with the testimony of hundreds of witnesses and supported by the measures outlined in the Ku Klux Klan Act, the federal government could now begin to stem the tide of racialized violence in the South. Federal grand juries issued more than three thousand indictments. Hundreds of defendants pled guilty to secure suspended sentences, while thousands of others fled the South to escape prosecution. At the same time, however, the Justice Department dropped the charges against nearly two thousand others

¹³⁸ *KKK Testimony*, 1: 2.

¹³⁹ *KKK Testimony*, 1: 99.

because the court dockets were filled to capacity. Of those brought to trial, only about six hundred were convicted. The majority of these men received relatively light sentences or fines, proving once again that the legal system was not adequately equipped to secure justice for African Americans.¹⁴⁰

As both Eric Foner and Allen W. Trelease have argued, the federal government's enforcement campaign "broke the back" of the Klan.¹⁴¹ This did not mean that racialized violence came to end. Indeed, lynchings, race riots, and scattered incidents of nightriding continued into the twentieth century. African Americans continued to experience verbal abuse, epistemic injustice, economic suppression, social dislocation, and sexual harassment. The conclusion of the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, however, closed an important chapter in the history of black testimony. While avenues persisted for African Americans to file complaints and record their experiences, the Ku Klux Klan hearings marked the last large-scale, federally supported project to gather the testimony of African Americans for over fifty years. The testimony gathered, though limited by epistemic practices intended to silence African Americans, represents one of the few comprehensive primary source collections in which black men and women spoke openly about the abuse they suffered at the hands of white Southerners and the Ku Klux Klan.

When the Ku Klux Klan hearings concluded, the federal government no longer actively sought out the testimony of African Americans. But avenues persisted where

¹⁴⁰ Alexander, *Reconstruction Violence and the Ku Klux Klan Hearings*, 14-16; and Trelease, *White Terror*, 399-418.

¹⁴¹ Trelease, *White Terror*, 418. Eric Foner, *Reconstruction*, 458-459.

they could make their voices heard. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), for example, was formed in 1908 following a deadly race riot in Springfield, Illinois. Appalled at the rampant violence plaguing the United States, this civil rights organization aimed to secure for all people the rights guaranteed by the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution. As part of this mission, African Americans were encouraged to write letters describing their experiences to the main office in New York, as well as branch offices in cities such as Boston, Baltimore, Kansas City, and Washington. These letters later became an integral part of the NAACP's mission to eradicate racialized violence, particularly lynching.¹⁴²

In addition to the NAACP, aggrieved African Americans regularly wrote to local officials. They wrote to members of Congress and their senators. Black men and women never remained silent and thus created their own record of racialized violence in the late antebellum and postemancipation South. After the 1870s, however, the onus was largely on the victims to make their voices heard.

It was not until the 1930s, as the last generation of formerly enslaved people grew elderly, that the United States experienced a renewed interest in black testimony. On 27 July 1935, President Roosevelt established the Federal Writers' Project under the Works

¹⁴² On the NAACP and its campaign against racialized violence, see Herbert Shapiro, *White Violence and Black Response: From Reconstruction to Montgomery* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988); Jonathan Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching: Racial Violence and Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Charles Flint Kellogg, *NAACP: A History of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1909-1920* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1967); and Robert Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909-1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980). Kidada Williams, in her study of black testimony regarding racialized violence, uses the records of the NAACP as one of her major primary source collections. See Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me*.

Progress Administration. Among its most important tasks was the collection of firsthand biographies.¹⁴³

The Slave Narrative Collection originated when three states – Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina – recorded interviews with formerly enslaved people as part of a larger project to gather the experiences of ordinary Americans.¹⁴⁴ These interviews were undertaken spontaneously, as preliminary plans for the Federal Writers' Project did not include provisions for gathering the recollections of formerly enslaved people. Once these first interviews were completed, however, folklorists recognized their value. As a result, the pilot project became a far more ambitious southern regional project designed to systematically interview the formerly enslaved population.¹⁴⁵ On 22 April 1937, Federal Writers' Project fieldworkers in seventeen states received a standard questionnaire to help facilitate the collection of additional slave narratives. The questionnaire directed interviewers to ask about biographical information, personal recollections of slavery, and attitudes towards prominent white and black men.¹⁴⁶ Although the narratives were

¹⁴³ The Federal Writers' Project also appealed to economic interests. There was a growing market for authentic folk culture among publishers, record companies, and radio networks. The Federal Writers' Project, therefore, was an economically viable project that utilized the skills of unemployed white-collar workers. On the history of the Federal Writers' Project, see Jerre Mangione, *The Dream and the Deal: The Federal Writers' Project* (Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1972); Monty Noam Penkower, *The Federal Writers' Project: A Study in Government Patronage of the Arts* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977); and Jerrold Hirsch, *Portrait of America: A Cultural History of the Federal Writers' Project* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

¹⁴⁴ Federal Writers' Project, Introduction to *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves*, Manuscript/Mixed Material, From Library of Congress, Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project Administrative Files, <https://memory.loc.gov/mss/mesn/001/001.pdf> (accessed 5 January 2020).

¹⁴⁵ The process of interviewing formerly enslaved people was overseen by folklorist Jon A. Lomax. Katherine H. Davidson, ed. *Records of the Federal Writers' Project: Work Projects Administration, 1935-44* (Washington: The National Archives, 1953), 5.

¹⁴⁶ Henry G. Alsberg, Director to State Directors of the Federal Writers' Project, 30 July 1937, Manuscript/Mixed Material, From Library of Congress, *Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project Administrative Files*, <https://memory.loc.gov/mss/mesn/001/001.pdf> (accessed 5 January 2020).

ostensibly about slavery, those interviewed frequently utilized the narratives as an opportunity to detail how they understood and resisted subjugation.

The Slave Narrative Collection does not deal consistently with the issue of racialized violence. The interviews conducted by the Federal Writers' Project coincided with the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Civil War.¹⁴⁷ Few white Southerners wanted to mar the anniversary by drawing attention to the violence inflicted upon African Americans. As a result, many interviewers directed their informants to speak about folkways. On the list of recommended questions provided to interviewers there are no questions which specifically address the issue of violence.¹⁴⁸ Descriptions of violence inevitably surfaced in the interviews, but this was not the primary objective of the Slave Narrative Collection.

As numerous historians have acknowledged, the circumstances of the interviews shaped the narratives being told. For example, the presence of white interviewers might compel elderly African Americans to relate positive recollections. Occasionally formerly enslaved people were interviewed by the children or family friends of their former masters. Ben Leitner, interviewed by W. W. Dixon in South Carolina, acknowledged that he had known the interviewer since Dixon was “knee-high.”¹⁴⁹ In an effort to placate their

¹⁴⁷ Catherine A. Stewart, *Long Past Slavery: Representing Race in the Federal Writers' Project* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 28.

¹⁴⁸ Only one question asks if informants ever saw or heard about the Ku Klux Klan or Nightriders in the years immediately following emancipation. Notably, this same question asks if informants knew of any schools for African Americans. Federal Writers' Project, Supplementary Instructions to #9-E to the American Guide Manual, Manuscript/Mixed Material, From Library of Congress, Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Administrative Files, xxii, <https://memory.loc.gov/mss/mesn/001/001.pdf> (Accessed 20 April 2019) .

¹⁴⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 3.3: 100.

interviewers, some informants might palliate the horrors of slavery and the epidemic of racialized violence that followed emancipation.¹⁵⁰

Further complicating the situation were the hardships of the Great Depression. As John Blassingame argued, the vulnerability of African Americans to white oppression was painfully evident in the Depression South. Many African Americans lived in areas where debt was perpetual, travel restricted, and violence ubiquitous.¹⁵¹ In the face of widespread social and economic dislocation, many informants mistook their interviewers, who identified themselves as government employees, for relief workers. Impoverished African Americans were dependent on government employees to help them obtain old-age pensions. Believing that the interviewers were assessing their situation for the purposes of allocating welfare funds, a number of informants might have altered their narratives accordingly.¹⁵²

The majority of interviewers were white. These men and women held varied assumptions about black identity and the black experience, which frequently came into conflict with the perspective of African Americans. Indeed, many of these white interviewers upheld the nostalgic myth of paternalistic white aristocrats and deferential

¹⁵⁰ For a detailed examination of these problems, please see the following: John Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems," *The Journal of Southern History* 41, no. 4 (November 1975), 473-492; Norman R. Yetman, "The Background of the Slave Narrative Collection," *American Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (1967), 534; Norman R. Yetman, "Ex-Slave Interviews and the Historiography of Slavery," *American Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (1984), 181-210; Norman R. Yetman, "An Introduction to the WPA Slave Narratives," *Library of Congress*, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/articles-and-essays/introduction-to-the-wpa-slave-narratives/> (accessed 12 June 2020); Donald M. Jacobs, "Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives as Source Materials: Slave Labor as Agricultural Labor," *Agricultural History*, 57, no. 2 (1983), 223-227; and George P. Rawick, *From Sunup to Sundown: The Making of the Slave Community*, v. 1 of *The American Slave*, xvii-xviii.

¹⁵¹ John Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems," 482.

¹⁵² See, for example, *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 2.1: 300; 3.3: 100; 4.2: 226-227; S1-4.2: 349; S1-4.2: 383-386; and S1-11: 237.

African Americans. It was not uncommon for white interviewers to question descriptions of racialized violence, to frame slaveholders in a positive light, and to otherwise undermine the testimony of black informants who were deemed to be unreliable.

Black interviewers were excluded in virtually all southern states except Virginia, Louisiana, and Florida, each of which established a segregated Negro Writers' Unit.¹⁵³ As of 1937, the Federal Writers' Project employed a total of 4500 writers, of which only 106 were black.¹⁵⁴ State directors often claimed the dearth of black writers was directly attributable to the lack of qualified applicants. Such claims, however, have no factual basis. Catherine Stewart, in her study of the Federal Writers' Project, revealed that a number of qualified black writers applied to the Federal Writers' Project in Georgia. These applicants were passed over in favour of hiring unemployed white people. Furthermore, when budget constraints forced a reduction in staff, black employees were the first to be cut. The majority of interviews, as a result, were conducted by white Southerners. To each interview, they brought their own ideas about how the past would be remembered and how it would be used in the future. The Slave Narrative Collection, then, became a site of contestation in which white Southerners and African Americans struggled over the creation of historical memory.

Every recorded interview had two authors: the informant and the interviewer. Yet the role of the interviewers is often obscured. Because the narratives gathered by the Federal Writers' Project are presented as verbatim testimony, the interviewers often appear absent. The editors of the Federal Writers' Project frequently removed comments

¹⁵³ Davidson, ed. *Records of the Federal Writers' Project Work Projects Administration, 1935-44*, 5.

¹⁵⁴ Stewart, *Long Past Slavery*, 124-126.

by interviewers that might lead the reader to think about the narrative as an interview between two individuals. The interview of Isaac Stier represents a rare example of a narrative that includes the list of questions asked by the interviewer.¹⁵⁵ In most cases, the editors wanted the narratives to appear as objective and authentic articulations of the slave experience, rather than as subjective accounts of interactions between white Southerners and formerly enslaved people.¹⁵⁶ Interviews with Susan Hamlin and Susan Hamilton, however, offer rare insight into the role of the interviewers. This is because Susan Hamlin and Susan Hamilton were actually the same person interviewed twice by two different interviewers. The striking differences between the two interviews reveal the extent to which interviewers could shape the testimony being given.

Jessie A. Butler, a white interviewer with the Federal Writers' Project, sat down with Susan Hamlin at 17 Henrietta Street, Charleston, South Carolina in the 1930s. As an enslaved woman, Hamlin had worked as a nanny. According to the terms of her contract, she received seven dollars a month which she gave directly to her master Mr. Fuller. While many African Americans, after emancipation, believed that the hallmark of freedom was to retain the rewards of their labour, Hamlin proclaimed this arrangement to be entirely fair: "Course it been fair. I belong to him and he got to get something to take care of me." Hamlin did not express any belief that she was entitled to the wages she earned as a nanny. Moreover, she offered high praise for her former master. Her master, Hamlin argued, "just git his slaves so he could be good to dem." Hamlin acknowledged

¹⁵⁵ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-10.5: 2048-2059.

¹⁵⁶ Sharon Ann Musher, "'The Way the Almighty Wants It': Crafting Memory of Ex-Slaves in the Slave Narrative Collection," *American Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (March 2001): 18.

that some masters could be wicked, but she insisted that her master had been a good man. Hamlin, like many formerly enslaved people, never moved away from the area where she lived during slavery and regularly returned to her former household on St. Phillips Street. Speaking to the white interviewer Hamlin recalled many joyous days.¹⁵⁷

Augustus Ladson, a black interviewer with the Federal Writers' Project, sat down with Susan Hamilton at 17 Henrietta Street, Charleston, South Carolina in the 1930s. Ladson recorded that Hamilton worked as a nanny in exchange for seven dollars a month; she belonged to Mr. Fuller; and she lived on St. Phillips Street during slavery. Hamilton and Hamlin were clearly the same person. Hamilton, however, did not wax nostalgic about slavery. Instead, she described the brutal conditions that enslaved people were forced to endure. Whenever an enslaved person was whipped, for example, the other enslaved people present were forced to watch. Hamilton witnessed "women hung frum de ceilin' of buildin's an' whipped" until "dere wusn't breath in de body." Hamilton also recalled the psychological trauma of being treated as chattel. Regarding the sale of enslaved people, she revealed: "All time, night an' day, you could hear men an' women screamin' to de tip of dere voice as either ma, pa, sister, or brother wus taken without any warnin' and sell." Hamilton unequivocally condemned the peculiar institution, describing slavery as a "terribly bad" experience in which enslaved men and women lacked the power to confront their masters.¹⁵⁸

If Susan Hamlin and Susan Hamilton were the same person, as their identical biographical information suggests, then the differences in their interviews must be

¹⁵⁷ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 2.2: 226-232.

¹⁵⁸ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 2.2: 233-236.

attributed to the interviewer.¹⁵⁹ Jessie A. Butler, like the majority of interviewers employed by the Federal Writers' Project, was white. When she interviewed Hamlin, the black woman believed she had come from the welfare office. Butler made no effort to correct this assumption and hid her true purpose: to record Hamlin's experience of slavery. That Hamlin believed Butler could secure her pension undoubtedly coloured her recollections. Hamlin, like many formerly enslaved people, was elderly, unable to work, and dependent on charity. If Butler appeared to be from the welfare office, it is likely that Hamlin would have attempted to ingratiate herself. Moreover, Butler was not subtle in her questioning. She explicitly asked Hamlin to make moral judgements about the actions of white Southerners. When asking if slavery was fair, she commented, "If you were fed and clothed by him, shouldn't he be paid for your work?"¹⁶⁰ It is not surprising, then, that Hamlin recalled slavery fondly, as this was the record that Butler attempted to induce.

This example makes it clear that the presence of white interviewers had the power to distort and limit the testimony of African Americans. Fearing the repercussions of speaking out against white Southerners, many claimed to remember very little or, like Hamlin, presented a rose-coloured interpretation of the past. But Hamilton's interview reveals that black men and women wanted to record their experiences; they wanted to share the abuses they endured during slavery. The tone the Hamilton interview can also be largely explained by the role of the interviewer as author. Susan Hamilton was interviewed by Augustus Ladson, one of seven African American interviewers identified

¹⁵⁹ The interview between Jessie A. Butler and Susan Hamlin includes an editorial note acknowledging that her name is Hamlin not Hamilton. The emphasis on stating the correct name suggests that editors were aware this black woman was interviewed twice under different names. See *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 2.2: 232.

¹⁶⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 14.2: 236.

by the Library of Congress.¹⁶¹ In a culture where black people were expected to address white people respectfully, it is doubtful that Hamilton would have articulated such consistently anti-white content to a white interviewer.¹⁶² She would never have risked retaliation by describing the white race as overtly cruel. Where Hamlin refrained from criticizing white Southerners in her interview with Butler, Hamilton felt free to speak critically.

The Federal Writers' Project often employed writers who had little experience with the art and science of interviewing. This, of course, was because the underlying goal was to provide work for the white-collar unemployed.¹⁶³ Nonetheless, it resulted in greater difficulty obtaining reliable information. Few interviewers addressed cues indicating a tendency towards ingratiation, or corrected assumptions that interviewers represented the welfare office. The lack of discipline among interviewers also resulted in a more sinister tendency: the outright denial of the testimony of African Americans. Lula Cottonham Walker, for example, described in her interview the various reasons that an African American might be whipped: running away, praying, singing, laziness, and disobedience. Her interviewer, however, committed an act of epistemic violence by

¹⁶¹ Norman R. Yetman, "Appendix II: Race of Interviewers," *Library of Congress*, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/articles-and-essays/introduction-to-the-wpa-slave-narratives/appendix-race-of-interviewers/> (accessed 12 April 2019).

¹⁶² For example, Hamilton describes how an enslaved woman, upset over the sale of her daughter, called her master a "damn white, pale-faced bastard." *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 14.2: 236.

¹⁶³ Davidson, ed., *Records of the Federal Writers' Project*, 1.

recommending that the editor omit the account of whipping for praying and singing, calling it preposterous.¹⁶⁴

Dora Brewer's interview was subject to similar interjections. Brewer told her interviewer that she witnessed an enslaved woman being "thrown across a log and beaten until huge whelps were obvious." The interviewer, perhaps trying to counterbalance this description of violence, inquired if enslaved people were ever allowed to frolic. Brewer, however, firmly stated that enslaved people "were never allowed any freedom whatsoever." She related a narrative of great cruelty, and the interviewer acknowledged this. Yet the narrative concluded with a patronizing comment: "It is unfortunate that in some instances the negroes were not treated kindly. However, this was seldom true."¹⁶⁵ In this way, the interviewer rejected Brewer's memory in an effort to invalidate her experience.

Some interviewers went to great lengths to dismiss the testimony of African Americans. Interviewed in the 1930s, Reverend W. B. Allen, a black preacher living in Georgia, condemned the treatment of African Americans at the hands of white Southerners. For example, he described the lingering horrors of the interstate slave trade. Black men and women would be driven long distances "until they fell from exhaustion." Those who could not keep up "were literally slashed to ribbons." On farms and plantations, enslaved people were forced to work from dawn until dusk. Those who objected were whipped. Particularly cruel slaveholders might even rub salt and red pepper

¹⁶⁴ This interview represents another rare example where the interviewer included a personal note about the interview. The note by the editor appears as an aside at the end of the narrative. *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-1.1: 434.

¹⁶⁵ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-1.6: 201-203.

into the wounds, causing the victim to go into convulsions. According to Allen, many African Americans fell into a state of coma that could last for several days as a result of their injuries.¹⁶⁶

Although J. R. Jones, the interviewer, faithfully recorded Allen's descriptions of the abuses suffered by African Americans during slavery, he felt compelled to include a lengthy diatribe dismissing the majority of these claims: "The Reverend's stories of the cruelties of slave drivers, it is here suggested, should be discounted." According to the Jones, irrespective of moral turpitude, no intelligent slave trader would ever drive their "valuable personal property" to the point of exhaustion because this would risk depreciating the value. He further argued that Allen had "grossly exaggerated" his descriptions of the punishments inflicted on enslaved people. The horrific descriptions of whipping, particularly the use of salt and pepper as a method of torture, were "not confirmed by any other local antebellum Negroes or Whites interviewed."¹⁶⁷ Although it is possible that Jones did not record any similar instances of physical abuse in the interviews he conducted, many other formerly enslaved men and women described the same kinds of violence being utilized as a way to enforce control over African Americans.¹⁶⁸ More likely, then, the interviewer was attempting to mitigate descriptions of violence that might undermine a nostalgic view of the antebellum South.

Given the influence of multiple actors in creating the narratives, it may seem as if African Americans lacked agency in the interview process; their recollections were

¹⁶⁶ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-3.1: 4-7.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 10-11.

¹⁶⁸ See, for example, *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-4.2: 350; 2.1: 162; S2-3.2: 891; S2-3.2: 799; S2-4.3: 1121-1122; 5.3: 209-210; S2-2.1: 25; 2-6.5: 2338; and 13.3: 202.

frequently called into question by interviewers and editors. Historian Catherine A. Stewart, however, contended that understanding the narratives as a dialogue between interviewers and informants is vital for recovering the authorship and agency of African Americans.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, black men and women were aware that white interviewers might challenge their testimony. Yet they still made the decision to record their experiences, sometimes emphasizing particularly traumatizing experiences that were likely to be received with skepticism. Lydia Jefferson, a freedwoman interviewed in Texas, bitterly recalled the punishments inflicted on enslaved women. She described how enslaved women were stripped naked and whipped. Sometimes the overseer would make these women sit naked on the largest ant beds he could find. Jefferson, anticipating that her recollections might be challenged, insisted on her truthfulness. “Now dis’ is de truth what I tells you and what my eyes has seen.”¹⁷⁰

In the instructions issued by the federal office, interviewers were instructed to record “the details of the interview ... as accurately as possible in the language of the original statements.”¹⁷¹ Interviewers were also not supposed to take sides, nor were they supposed to censor any material collected, regardless of the content.¹⁷² Jefferson’s interview, however, reveals that African Americans were aware that white interviewers might challenge or modify narratives that undermined a nostalgic view of the antebellum South. Many formerly enslaved men and women insisted on relating their experiences

¹⁶⁹ Stewart, *Long Past Slavery*, 201.

¹⁷⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-6.5: 1943.

¹⁷¹ Federal Writers’ Project, *Supplementary Instructions to #9-E to the American Guide Manual*, Manuscript/Mixed Material, From Library of Congress, *Federal Writers’ Project: Slave Narrative Project, Administrative Files*, xxii, <https://memory.loc.gov/mss/mesn/001/001.pdf> (Accessed 14 April 2017).

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, xx.

and, in the process, resisted epistemic violence by demanding that interviewers record their truth.

The recollections of African Americans functioned as a type of cultural capital. Cultural capital refers to accumulated cultural knowledge that confers power and status. African Americans, for example, were able to position their knowledge of slavery as a desirable commodity capable of advancing their own position in society.¹⁷³ Formerly enslaved people, upon emancipation, had little more than their freedom, but they claimed ownership of their personal narratives. Black women, in particular, recognized that their recollections were valuable and desirable. If folklorists wanted to preserve the folkways of African Americans, they needed the cooperation of black informants. Even white Southerners, if they wanted to craft a nostalgic view of the antebellum South, needed documentary evidence to advance their cause. This placed African Americans in a position of power where they could attempt to negotiate the exchange of their knowledge. Nancy Thomas, for example, described her life to the Federal Writers' Project. She gave a brief interview emphasizing that she was sassy and independent. She spoke at length about her work as a "house girl." When her interviewer made additional efforts to try and secure more information, Thomas demonstrated her independence by refusing to cooperate. Indeed, she demanded money in exchange for her participation.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ The term 'cultural capital' was popularized by Pierre Bourdieu as a way to explain differences in the performance and academic achievement of children within the educational system of France in the 1960s. Chris Barker, *The Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2004); Pierre Bourdieu, "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction" in *Knowledge, Education, and Cultural Change: Papers in the Sociology of Education*, ed. Richard Brown (London: Tavistock, 1973), 71-112; and Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory of Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986), 46-58.

¹⁷⁴ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-9.8: 3806-3807.

Minnie Davis similarly refused to cooperate without receiving something in exchange for testimony.¹⁷⁵ When Mrs. Sadie B. Hornsby arrived at the black schoolteacher's home in Athens, Georgia, Davis declined to be interviewed. Understanding that her recollections had value, she instigated a bargaining process with her interviewer. Davis might consider speaking "if she had a little something to eat." Unwilling to walk away empty handed, Hornsby provided some money for provisions. The money was used to purchase a pint of milk and some cinnamon rolls. Once she had eaten, Davis finally began talk. But even then, Hornsby noted that "every word was carefully weighed before it was uttered."¹⁷⁶ Davis shrewdly negotiated with her interviewer to secure compensation for her recollections. She further maintained a position of power by controlling the narrative. Nothing was shared that Davis did not want her interviewer – and white Southerners more broadly – to know.

Even those who believed that their interviewers were assessing their situation for the purposes of allocating welfare funds were engaging in a kind of bargaining process, leveraging their personal experiences in exchange for possible material benefit. Mollie Kinsey spoke at length about the negative treatment of African Americans by white Southerners: "You don't know the tortures the slaves went through." She held nothing back, describing in detail how her sister was sexually assaulted by three white men. Kinsey cannot be accused of altering her narrative to reflect positively on slavery. Yet she

¹⁷⁵ Catherine A. Stewart discussed the narrative of Minnie Davis at length. She similarly described how some African Americans bargained with their interviewers in exchange for economic compensation, but she speaks almost exclusively about the market value of the narratives. She identifies a long tradition of rural black people using their oral performances as commodities. What she fails to recognize is the ability of this bargaining process to advance the social position of African Americans as well by shaping the way that their narratives were shared publicly. See Stewart, *Long Past Slavery*, 197-202.

¹⁷⁶ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 12.1: 252-253.

still concluded her interview with a request for help securing a pension. Without a pension, she argued, she would not be able to survive. In exchange for her testimony, she expected aid from her interviewer.¹⁷⁷ Easter Jones also lambasted white Southerners for the treatment of black people during slavery. Her interviewer described her as being “very bitter about those years during which she was held as a slave.” Jones described nothing but hard work and cruel treatment. Then, at the end of her interview, she requested help securing a pension.¹⁷⁸

Few black men were ever as brazen as Jefferson, Davis, Kinsey or Jones. They did not engage in bargaining practices to the same extent that black women did. That does not mean, however, that they did not recognize the potency of their testimony. Ed Jackson spoke bitterly about his treatment at the hands of white Southerners. He admitted that his life “wa’nt so sweet.” His body bore the evidence of his mistreatment, but he refused to speak openly. He stated, “I jest rathah not talk about it. The white fo’ks don’t always treat you right – you can’t tell now – iffen I tell you ‘bout it – you might turn and use it agin’ me.”¹⁷⁹ Other men only agreed to share their testimony if they could speak their truth. Wesley Burrell described in detail the punishments inflicted upon enslaved people. Despite having specifically asked Burrell to speak about slavery, his interviewer balked at his narrative. She said that she “didn’t want to hear dat stuff.” Burrell, however, refused to be censored, describing his recollections as “de half hadn’t been told” and “if she didn’t want to hear dat, it wasn’t nothing to tell.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-4.2: 383-386.

¹⁷⁸ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-4.2: 349-351. See also 2.1: 300.

¹⁷⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-5.4: 1888.

¹⁸⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-3.2: 537.

The contest over memory was both subtle and overt. Some interviewers exerted their influence by their mere presence, while others explicitly inserted themselves into the narratives. An interviewer's comments might appear integrated into the text of an interview, as with Hamlin and Brewer, or the comments might appear at the end in the form of editorial notes, as with Walker and Allen. Because there is limited information regarding the exact production of the narratives, especially between different state offices, it is often difficult to determine when such revisions occurred. In 1939, the interview project was terminated before completion. Control of the Federal Writers' Project passed from the federal government to the state governments, and the completed interviews were deposited at the Library of Congress.

It is possible that some revisions were made after the interviews were deposited at the Library of Congress, but it is also possible that revisions were made before the transition. Sharon Ann Musher, in a study of how the interviews were produced, reveals that some states, notably Texas and Mississippi, made extensive revisions before submitting their interviews to the national office.¹⁸¹ The narrative of Charlie Moses, for example, originally condemned the institution of slavery as a whole.¹⁸² But the version of the narrative submitted to the national office, had an additional line: "If all marsters had been good like some, the slaves would all a-been happy. But masters like mine ought never been allowed to own Niggers."¹⁸³ This line changed Moses' wholesale condemnation of slavery to the condemnation of a single master. In doing so, the editors

¹⁸¹ Musher, "Contesting 'The Way the Almighty Wants It,'" 2-3.

¹⁸² *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-9.4: 1601

¹⁸³ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 7: 117.

made it seem as though the relationships between enslaved people and slaveholders were typically positive, and that Moses' experience was atypical.¹⁸⁴

The interviews conducted in Mississippi and Texas were subject to considerable editorial misconduct. In Texas, the revisions were intended “to make the narratives conform more closely with the accepted version of proper race relations of the time.”¹⁸⁵ Stylistically, interviews were shortened and logistical information was removed. Sometimes the name of the interviewer was omitted, making it difficult hold the interviewer accountable for the form and content of the interview. Some editors went as far as to remove evidence of slaveholders treating their enslaved labourers poorly, of black soldiers contributing to war effort, and of encounters between African Americans and the Ku Klux Klan.¹⁸⁶

In both Mississippi and Texas, editors allowed some interviews to languish in the state files. Despite multiple requests from the national office to send the complete collections, editors in Mississippi submitted only twenty-six interviews.¹⁸⁷ In Texas, 316 interviews were never submitted.¹⁸⁸ As a result, *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves* was first published by the Library of Congress without the missing interviews.¹⁸⁹ It was not until the 1970s that

¹⁸⁴ Sharon Ann Musher speaks at length about the manipulation of Charlie Moses interviews. Musher, “Contesting ‘The Way the Almighty Wants It’,” 1-3; and 24-25.

¹⁸⁵ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-2.1: xxxix. Rawick wrote extensively about the editorial changes made to the Slave Narrative Collection in Texas in the introduction to Supplementary Series 2.

¹⁸⁶ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-2.1: xxxi-xxxix. Like Musher, Rawick compared some of the narratives that had been submitted to Washington with the original narratives held in Texas. His analysis is not exhaustive, but he concludes that editors rewrote a total of 275 narratives.

¹⁸⁷ Musher, “Contesting ‘The Way the Almighty Wants It’,” 3.

¹⁸⁸ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-2.1: xxxi-xxxix.

¹⁸⁹ Federal Writers' Project, *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves*, 17 Vols., Manuscript, From Library of Congress, *Born in Slavery: Slave*

George P. Rawick, wary of the limited number of interviews available for Mississippi, began to search for missing narratives. Working with civil rights and political activists Ken Lawrence and Jan Hillegas, Rawick uncovered an additional 2400 pages that had never been submitted to Washington.¹⁹⁰ These narratives were published as a second series of twelve volumes in 1977. Over the next two years, an additional ten volumes followed. These volumes were comprised almost entirely of the narratives that had been withheld from Texas. By withholding so many narratives Texas acted in bad faith and attempted to quash this record of the experiences of African Americans.

The records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, the first-person testimony culled from the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, and the Slave Narrative Collection of the Federal Writers' Project are unique sources in that they simultaneously perpetuated epistemic violence and served as a forum to resist epistemic violence. In the antebellum South, the ability of African Americans to testify was severely limited. Unjustly judged as unreliable and shiftless, black people were excluded from the legal process. They could not testify and therefore had few avenues through which to share their experiences. After the Civil War, however, African Americans gained access to new forums. The Freedmen's Bureau, the Ku Klux Klan hearings, and the Federal Writers' Project marked a unique opportunity for black men and women to share their experiences with support from the federal government. Black men and women could detail the abuses they suffered

Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/about-this-collection/> (Accessed 14 April 2017).

¹⁹⁰ Musher, "Contesting 'The Way the Almighty Wants It,'" 3.

at the hands of white Southerners and made the decision to speak publicly in open defiance of efforts to silence them. Even when the white Southerners involved in these projects tried to undermine, mitigate, or otherwise silence the testimony of African Americans, thousands persisted to help shape the historical memory of the South during this period. As a result, we now have access to a heterogeneous and diverse collection of primary sources detailing how black men and women viewed life in the South and, more importantly, how they responded to racialized violence and understood acts of resistance.

Although the collections considered in this dissertation constitute a valuable resource, it is important that we remember the unique problems they present to scholars. The Slave Narrative Collection, in particular, has been subjected to significant scrutiny by historians who argue that the interviews are problematic for a variety of reasons already discussed: the fact that personal recollection of the past is a highly subjective phenomenon and susceptible to modification and distortion; that the interviewers had no consistent methodology regarding their questions; that some writers and editors revised, altered, or censored the narratives; and that etiquette and southern race relations likely affected how informants responded, as the interviewers were overwhelmingly white.¹⁹¹ Many of these same concerns should be applied to the records of the Freedmen's Bureau and the testimony from the Ku Klux Klan hearings. But these concerns do not warrant a

¹⁹¹ Scholars who have acknowledged these limitations include Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems," 473-492; Yetman, "The Background of the Slave Narrative Collection," 534-553; Yetman, "Ex-Slave Interviews and the Historiography of Slavery," 181-210; Yetman, "An Introduction to the WPA Slave Narratives," *Library of Congress*, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snintro00.html>; Jacobs, "Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives as Source Materials," 223-227; and George P. Rawick, *From Sunup to Sundown: The Making of the Slave Community*, v. 1 of *The American Slave*, xvii-xviii.

wholesale indictment of these sources; every kind of historical document has its own strengths and limitations for providing an understanding of the past.¹⁹²

Recognizing the problems inherent in the primary sources under consideration in this dissertation ultimately allows us to develop a more complete understanding of racialized violence and its manifestations, especially epistemic violence. The records of the Freedmen’s Bureau, the testimony from the Ku Klux Klan hearings, and the Slave Narrative Collection are especially valuable because they are both a site of resistance and a site of violence. In recording their experiences, black men and women across the South became witnesses, creating testimony about their trauma. They refused the efforts of hostile white Southerners to whitewash incidents of racialized violence within the historical record. But in recording their experiences, black men and women still experienced epistemic violence as they found that some government officials did not want to record testimony that might challenge a nostalgic view of the plantation South. We must read these sources, in this chapter and throughout the dissertation, with a critical eye and awareness that not all black men and women were able to speak freely.

There are, of course, those black men and women who voluntarily withheld their testimony. Lonie Knox, a black woman interviewed in South Carolina in the 1930s, was “very suspicious and extremely cautious.” Very quickly, her interviewer realized “there is something she is trying to hide.”¹⁹³ In the postemancipation south, thousands of African Americans described incidents of racialized violence, speaking in a variety of settings where they could share their experiences. We must assume, however, that there are

¹⁹² Yetman, “Ex Slave Interviews and the Historiography of Slavery,” 189.

¹⁹³ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-11: 237.

additional incidents that were never recorded. According to Leander A. Bigger, who testified at the Ku Klux Klan hearings, many African Americans were taken from their homes and whipped by disguised men. But when interviewed, they refused to provide details. The victims might admit to being taken from their homes, but they would not specify what had been done to them. When asked if these silences had been ordered, Bigger simply responded that the black population was “in terror.”¹⁹⁴

It is because of widespread terror that we may never be able to fully evaluate the true extent of racialized violence in the South. Even efforts to quantify extraordinary violence, like lynching, are problematic because of disputes over how to recognize violence. Organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People kept records, but inevitably some lynchings were not recorded. Moreover, recording only the direct victims of lynchings fails to acknowledge the trauma inflicted by such violence on witnesses and the community as a whole.¹⁹⁵

The issue of testimonial smothering, to use the term coined by Kristie Dotson, should not detract from efforts to study racialized violence, nor should it be understood solely as a manifestation of epistemic violence. While Dotson frames silencing practices in a wholly negative light, we might also view testimonial smothering as a method of resistance. Instead of testimonial smothering, then, we might use the term testimonial restraint to acknowledge that silences can represent the agency of oppressed people. Just

¹⁹⁴ *KKK Testimony*, 3: 275.

¹⁹⁵ Amy Louise Wood argues that lynching held a singular psychological force, which generated a level of fear and horror that overwhelmed all other forms of violence. The use of photographs to disseminate images of lynchings ensured that African Americans were constantly aware of the danger they faced at the hands of angry mobs. The spectacle of extraordinary violence, and the resulting trauma, will be discussed further in Chapter 4. Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 2.

as Lydia Jefferson and Minnie Davis withheld their testimony until their interviewers met certain demands, some African Americans undoubtedly made the decision to withhold their testimony entirely in order to protest efforts by white Southerners to claim ownership of their narratives. The challenges of widespread illiteracy meant that many African Americans could only record their experiences in collaboration with white state and federal officials. To do so meant relinquishing, to some extent, ownership over their experiences. It created a space for white Southerners to change the narrative and exert their influence. For this reason, we might also read silences in the record as moments of agency, and not actions driven by fear of violence.

Racialized violence occupies a unique place in historical memory. When black men and women spoke openly about their experiences, they worked to process their trauma, integrate their experiences into the historical record, and discursively resist white supremacy. However, we will never have an entirely accurate record of the extent of racialized violence in the late antebellum and postemancipation South. What we can say, however, is that those who filed complaints with the Freedmen's Bureau, testified before the congressional committee, and sat for interviews with the Federal Writers' Project made the decision to resist discursively

They spoke of all manners of racialized violence, including verbal abuse, economic suppression, social dislocation, sexual harassment, and physical abuse. And we must recognize their decisions to testify, often in the face of epistemic violence, as resistance. But those who did not speak – the thousands of African Americans who suffered at the hands of white Southerners and never shared their experiences – should

not be condemned for their silence. Instead, we should acknowledge that the decision to remain silent can also be a manifestation of agency, thereby broadening our understanding of the ways that African Americans processed the trauma of racialized violence in the late antebellum and postemancipation South.

Chapter 2: Structural Violence: Economic Exploitation and the Value of Black Labour

On 3 January 1868, a large group of black labourers crowded the offices of the Freedmen's Bureau in Albany, Georgia. With the crops harvested and prepared for market, it was now time for those men and women who worked as field hands to receive their wages.¹ The problem, however, was that freedpeople had to rely on their employers to settle with them fairly. While labour contracts often included stipulations for wage deductions based on goods purchased, time missed, or disobedience of orders, it was also common practice for employers to secure deductions through schemes of fraud. C. C. Hicks, an agent of the Freedmen's Bureau in Albany, lamented the reality that the free labour system established following emancipation fostered "circumstances which give to employers at this particular time a tremendous and dangerous advantage over these poor creatures."² No matter how successful the crop, white planters tended to move slowly when it came to settling with their accounts with freedpeople. Freedpeople, if they wanted to collect their wages, often needed help from the Freedmen's Bureau.

¹ Labour contracts between white planters and freedpeople could vary greatly. Some planters and freedpeople preferred to make sharecropping arrangements whereby freedpeople tended to the fields in exchange for a share of the final crop. With sharecropping arrangements, the planter might sell the entire crop and then divide the profits, rather than giving the labourer a portion of the crop itself. Other popular arrangements included the payment of a monthly wage, but this wage might only be paid at the conclusion of the year due to a lack of available capital on the part of the planter. On the various types of labour arrangements and their application, especially sharecropping, see Donald G. Nieman, ed., *From Slavery to Sharecropping: White Land and Black Labor in the Rural South, 1865-1900* (New York: Garland, 1994); T. J. Byres, ed. *Sharecropping and Sharecroppers* (London: Routledge, 2005); and Bruce E. Baer and Brian Kelly, eds., *After Slavery: Race, Labor, and Citizenship in the Reconstruction South* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2013).

² C. C. Hicks to Lieutenant Howard, 3 January 1868, *Letters Sent, March 1867 - December 1868*, Vol. 2, RG 105, reel 37, BRFAL-GA (M1903). As discussed in Chapter 1, it was not uncommon for agents of the Freedmen's Bureau to hold views that positioned black men and women as inferior. Paternalistic statements such as this can be found throughout the records of the Freedmen's Bureau.

White planters, according to Hicks, regularly ordered freedpeople to vacate their household, farms, or plantations before settling accounts. This was ostensibly to make room for new employees. If the current labourers wanted to remain, they had to sign a contract for the following year. And because winter brought with it inclement weather, few labourers had the opportunity at this crucial juncture to seek out more favourable terms for employment, forcing many freedpeople “to sign contracts which they would not have done had the employer fulfilled his contract.”³ It was common knowledge in the postemancipation South that employers would threaten to oust freedpeople when they wanted to force them to sign unfair contracts or, more commonly, when they wanted to avoid paying them for services rendered.⁴

Unfair deductions also allowed employers to control the rate of pay by abusing the stipulations outlined in the contract. In 1868, Hicks recorded a complaint from a freedman stating he had been deducted \$45.00 for nine days of missed work. The freedman, according to his contract, was only to receive \$150.00 for the entire year, meaning that the deductions for nine days amounted to thirty percent of his total wages. Indeed, the schemes to defraud freedpeople were calculated and varied. Hicks concluded that hostile white Southerners, upset over the abolition of slavery, had embraced a simple mantra: “Damn ‘em, keep ‘em poor, and we can keep ‘em under.”⁵

This chapter explores structural violence in the late antebellum and postemancipation South. Johan Galtung used the term “structural violence” to describe

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Miss Henrietta C. Oppelt to Captain H. E. Rainals, 26 October 1866, *Miscellaneous Records, 1866-1868*, RG 105, reel 28, BRFAL-MS (M1907).

⁵ C. C. Hicks to Lieutenant Howard, 3 January 1868, *Letters Sent, March 1867 - December 1868*, Vol. 2, RG 105, reel 37, BRFAL-GA (M1903).

the systematic ways that social structures harm or otherwise disadvantage individuals by preventing them from meeting their basic needs.⁶ This aligns with the broad definition of violence outlined at the beginning of this dissertation, as structural violence involves the use of power on the part of white Southerners to deprive black men and women of their basic needs, resulting in psychological harm and maldevelopment. The institution of slavery, for example, can be described as a manifestation of structural violence because it enshrined the subjugation of black men and women by stripping them of the basic rights and freedoms granted to citizens by the Constitution. The antebellum South, as historian David W. Blight articulated, was a slave society – a society “where whites and blacks, in this case – in America in a racialized slavery system – grew up, were socialized by, married, reared children, worked, invested in, and conceived of the idea of property, and honed their most basic habit and values under the influence of a system that said it was just to own people as property.”⁷ Once established, slavery in the antebellum South enjoyed the widespread support of the white population while inflicting great harm upon black men and women.

Structural violence results from the unequal distribution of both power and resources by repressive structures. As scholars have acknowledged, one of the main consequences of slavery involved the denial of resources – foodstuffs, housing, education,

⁶ Johan Galtung, “Violence, Peace, Peace Research,” *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 170-171. Structural violence is sometimes referred to as institutional violence. See, for example Newton Garver, “What Violence Is,” in *Philosophy for a New Generation*, ed. James A. Gould and A. K. Bierman (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970), 361-362.

⁷ David W. Blight, quoted in Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Slave Society Defined,” *The Atlantic*, 6 September 2011, <https://www.theatlantic.com/personal/archive/2011/09/the-slave-society-defined/244581/> (accessed 4 February 2020).

medical services – to black men and women.⁸ Enslaved people, despite labouring endlessly, were denied compensation; they relied on the paternalistic benevolence of their masters to ensure their basic needs for survival. Betty Powers, an enslaved woman from Texas, explained that her master managed the distribution of all rations on the plantation where she was enslaved. Sometimes these rations were reduced to save costs, leaving many enslaved people hungry and malnourished.⁹

With the abolition of slavery, those who had been enslaved had to provide for their own survival, but they were still denied access to necessary resources. White Southerners, in an effort to approximate the conditions of slavery, maintained strict control over the labour of African Americans, making segregation, disfranchisement, and peonage the common lot of most black men and women. Rose L. Pollard, a freedwoman reflecting on the transition from slavery to freedom, complained that the government should have aided African Americans in securing employment. She argued, “They could have given us a better deal than they did.” Formerly enslaved people were turned loose like “a bunch of wild cattle, no jobs, no money, nothing to eat or wear.”¹⁰ As those who had benefitted from the labour of enslaved people continued to assert their dominance over the newly freed black population, black men and women struggled to achieve a better quality of life. The legacy of slavery, however, ensured that the black men and women continued to face constraints, particularly as they tried to labour for their own benefit and to maintain a moral economy in which employers contracted fairly.

⁸ H. F. V. Cardoso et al. “The Impact of Social Experiences of Physical and Structural Violence on the Growth of African Enslaved Children from Lagos, Portugal (15th – 17th Centuries),” *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 168 (2019): 210.

⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-8.7: 3136-3137. See also S2-9.8: 3764.

¹⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-8.7: 3125-3126.

It is not possible for a single chapter to adequately explore every manifestation of structural violence in the late antebellum and postemancipation South. Labour, however, represents an important case study. Studying labour allows us to understand how black men and women responded to structural violence both during slavery and emancipation. Slavery forced black men and women to labour for slaveholders without compensation. Daily life for enslaved people was centred around labour, whether it was in the fields, in local businesses, or in the houses of white Southerners. After emancipation, labour remained equally important as freedpeople endeavoured to secure fair employment. Now black men and women were able to labour for their own benefit, but still found themselves exploited by hostile white Southerners who wanted to replicate the conditions of slavery. Studying labour, then, allows us to analyze the continuities regarding structural violence between slavery and freedom.

Studying labour also demonstrates the interconnectedness and interdependency of the various manifestations of structural violence. In attempting to secure employment as free labourers, many freedpeople also found themselves confronting issues regarding access to education, housing, and medical services. Contract negotiations between freedpeople and planters were far-reaching. A single contract might include stipulations securing the education of children, provisions for housing and farming implements, and even access to medical treatment.

Because daily life for black men and women revolved around labour, we are fortunate to have access to an abundance of records detailing their experiences both during slavery and after emancipation. The Slave Narrative Collection features numerous

references to the kinds of work conducted by African Americans and their experiences interacting with hostile slaveholders and employers. These records, of course, will never be complete; as previously discussed, many black men and women would not, or could not, speak freely about the hardships they endured. Especially when reflecting on slavery, many formerly enslaved people found it preferable to withhold testimony that challenged nostalgic views of the South. Instead they kept these narratives to themselves as they tried to move forward as free citizens. But the Records of the Freedmen's Bureau, in particular, allow us to reconstruct the experiences of black men and women related to labour. These records contain complaints about labour disputes, and also copies of contracts negotiated between labourers and employers. These records, less concerned with personal experiences and more focused on the basic facts needed to complete reports and legal documents, allow us to uncover experiences that might otherwise have gone unrecorded. Somewhat depersonalized, black men and women spoke openly about their struggles to find fair employment after slavery.

For many African Americans, slavery was characterized by long hours spent labouring in the fields. Enslaved people were variously occupied cultivating tobacco, rice, sugar, and cotton. Slavery, however, was not the same everywhere. In mixed-farming regions enslaved people laboured at a variety of seasonally defined tasks. This was especially true in areas dominated by the production of rice, such as the lowcountry of Georgia and South Carolina. Such work required a flexible schedule and greater freedom of movement. As a result, some enslaved people were allowed to cultivate their own

garden plots, raise livestock, hunt and fish, and/or accumulate personal property.¹¹ Others were even hired out to work as blacksmiths, carpenters, tailors, or cobblers. The majority of enslaved people, especially those in Mississippi and Texas, however, worked from morning to night in closely supervised gangs producing tobacco, cotton and sugar. These enslaved people had little time to pursue their own interests, as all their time and labour was directed towards the interests of the slaveholders.¹²

Regardless of the exact nature of economic production in any given region, life under slavery was characterized by a general lack of freedom. Slavery denied African Americans the right to control their persons, subjected them to arbitrary and violent treatment, and allowed slaveholders to expropriate the rewards of their labour. Martin Jackson, an enslaved man from Texas, admitted to being treated with relative kindness; he was never whipped and he received adequate rations. Still, Jackson also acknowledged that he spent most of his time planning to run away. In his interview with the Federal Writers' Project, he recognized the unjustness of slavery, and that life for the average

¹¹ See, for example, *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 5.3: 54-55 and S2-7.6: 2545. See also David K. Wiggins, "Sport and Popular Pastimes: Shadow of the Slavequarter," *Canadian Journal of History of Sport & Physical Education* 11, no. 1 (May 1980): 61-88; Larry E. Hudson Jr., ed. *Working Toward Freedom: Slave Society and Domestic Economy in the American South* (Rochester, New York: University of Rochester Press, 1994); Betty Wood, *Women's Work, Men's Work: The Informal Slave Economies of Lowcountry Georgia* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1995); Leslie Schwalm, *A Hard Fight For We: Women's Transition from Slavery To Freedom in South Carolina* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), chap. 2; Barbara J. Heath, "'The Little Spots Allow'd Them': The Archeological Study of African American Yards," *Historical Archaeology* 34, no. 2 (2002): 38-56; and Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), chap. 1.

¹² See, for example, *The Slave Narrative Collection* 5.3: 265-267 and S2-10.9: 3953. Ira Berlin et al. *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Lower South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 8-9.

enslaved person was characterized by “plenty of cruel suffering.”¹³ No amount of kindness could make up for the lack of freedom that defined slavery.

Enslaved people found various ways to resist their oppressors; they regularly thwarted attempts at subjugation. Occasionally collective plans to resist slavery erupted into overt rebellions, but these rebellions were often put down harshly.¹⁴ Enslaved people more commonly turned towards unorganized resistance on a daily basis. Individuals could resist slavery – particularly efforts to control their labour – in seemingly small ways, which over time were effective in mitigating the power of slaveholders. Enslaved people verbally challenged their masters, feigned illness, engaged in sabotage, withdrew their labour, and fled north to freedom.¹⁵ In response to structural violence, we see a greater tendency among black men and women towards informal resistance, as white Southerners often failed to recognize verbal altercations, feigning illness, sabotage, or migration as resistance.

Verbal confrontations were among the most common methods of resistance. Various described as impertinence, impudence, or discursive insubordination, enslaved

¹³ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 4.2: 189. Martin Jackson spoke frankly with his interviewer. He admitted that many enslaved people were afraid to speak critically of slavery in front of white interviewers because they feared retribution. His testimony is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1.

¹⁴ On slave revolts in the United States, see Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979); Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: International Publishers, 1983); Brian Gabriel, “From Haiti to Nat Turner: Racial Panic Discourse during the Nineteenth Century Partisan Press Era,” *American Journalism* 30, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 336-364; and Vincent Carretta, “Dreadful Acts of Liberty,” *Eighteenth Century: Theory & Interpretation* 56, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 517-520.

¹⁵ On resistance to slavery by enslaved people, see Ella Forbes, “African Resistance to Enslavement,” *Journal of Black Studies* 23, no. 1 (September 1992): 39-60; Amrita Chakrabarti Myers, “‘Sisters in Arms’: Slave Women’s Resistance to Slavery in the United States,” *Past Imperfect* 5 (1996): 141-74; Camp, *Closer to Freedom*; Dea H. Boster, “An ‘Epeleptick’ Bondswoman: Fits, Slavery, and Power in the Antebellum South,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 83, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 271-301; Kelly Houston Jones, “‘A Rough, Saucy Set of Hands to Manage’: Slave Resistance in Arkansas,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 71, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 1-21; Manisha Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

people were unafraid to express their discontent using insults, humour, and music.¹⁶ Lulu Wilson, a formerly enslaved woman interviewed by the Federal Writers' Project in Mississippi, described how her mother regularly quarreled with their master. She was, according to Wilson, not afraid to curse. Indeed, she gained such a reputation for her combative nature that efforts to discipline the enslaved woman repeatedly failed; no one was willing to subject themselves to the fiery woman's wrath long enough to try and control how she went about her work in the field.¹⁷ Nancy Thomas, who worked as a house girl during slavery, similarly found ways to assert control over her daily labour by utilizing her "sassy" personality. She might refuse to complete tasks or verbally challenge her master.¹⁸ Relying on white assumptions that African Americans were ill-mannered and lazy, Thomas manipulated the expectations of her master.¹⁹ When she acted combatively, her behaviour was not necessarily perceived by her master as an act of

¹⁶ Amrita Chakrabarti Myers used the terms "impertinence" and "impudence" to describe how enslaved women expressed their discontent regarding slavery through verbal confrontations and indirect relation. W. Fitzhugh Brundage utilized the term "discursive insubordination" to describe the language of dissent employed by black men and women to oppose mob violence. Myers, "'Sisters in Arms': Slave Women's Resistance to Slavery in the United States," 147; and W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "The Roar on the Other Side of Silence: Black Resistance and White Violence in the American South, 1880-1940," in *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 274.

¹⁷ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 5.4: 191.

¹⁸ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-9.8: 3806-3807.

¹⁹ On racial prejudice towards black people in the antebellum period, see Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Towards the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); George M. Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972); Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), chap. 4; Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), chap. 1; and Lydia Ferguson, "Pro-Slavery Appropriations and Inadvertent Agencies: The Elder(ly) 'Uncle' in Plantation Fiction," *American Studies* 58, no. 1 (2019): 49-72.

resistance.²⁰ Rather, her behaviour was simply seen as an inherent racial flaw requiring management.²¹

While some enslaved people found that verbal confrontations offered a relatively safe way to resist oppression, others faced severe reprisals for their behaviour. Notably, after speaking positively about her own sassiness, Thomas revealed that her father had been killed for exhibiting similar behaviour.²² The reality is that black men and women had to carefully weigh the risks of speaking openly. While many white Southerners failed to recognize verbal confrontations as resistance, others refused to tolerate such outspoken behaviour. Where verbal confrontations were not possible, then, African Americans found solace in music. Historian Raymond Gavins argued that oppressed people often turn towards their cultural, ethnic, or religious roots to find resources for survival.²³ Music provided a way to circumvent the system of oppression inherent in slavery, especially because music did not seem to pose a direct threat to the peculiar institution. James Bolton, interviewed in Georgia, revealed the integral role that music played in the lives of enslaved people. Sometimes, he stated, enslaved people “got happy an’ started singin’.” Other times, they would sing if they “felt sad an’ low down.”²⁴ Harriet Miller, an enslaved woman from Mississippi, similarly described how enslaved people found comfort in music, singing in the fields and after work to help make their arduous labour

²⁰ Robin D. G. Kelley, “‘We Are Not What We Seem’: Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South,” *The Journal of American History* 80, no. 1 (1993): 93–95.

²¹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-9.8: 3806-3807.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Raymond Gavins, “North Carolina Black Folklore and Song in the Age of Segregation: Toward Another Meaning of Survival,” *The North Carolina Historical Review* 66 (1989): 415.

²⁴ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-3.1: 86-87. See also 12.1: 100.

bearable.²⁵ Affie Singleton, an enslaved man from South Carolina, argued that the “rough treatment” of slavery made enslaved people “put greater expression into their songs.” When Singleton’s master and mistress beat their enslaved labourers, many responded by singing spirituals as a way of coping with the abuse.²⁶

African Americans developed a rich repertoire of music during slavery. They sang songs about religion; about celebrating family; about hoping for freedom; or about coping with racialized violence. Of particular importance were songs that dealt with the restrictions to their freedom of movement. Enslaved people were not allowed to travel off their plantations without a written pass.²⁷ Those who attempted to visit family or friends on neighbouring plantations frequently found themselves running afoul of the patrollers. These organized groups of armed white men monitored the roads and stripped, whipped, or otherwise abused those who were caught without a pass.²⁸ To cope with the humiliation caused by such treatment, enslaved people often composed folk songs. The most popular, with some regional variation, advised running from the patrollers: “Run, Niggah, run, de Patty Rollers’ll git you, / Run, Niggah, run, you’d bettah git away.”²⁹

²⁵ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-9.4: 1502.

²⁶ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-11: 283. See also S1-10.5: 2361.

²⁷ Enslaved people who travelled from place to place were required by law to carry a pass. Those who did not carry a pass risked being arrested, jailed, and detained as fugitives. For an example of a slave pass, see Slave Pass for Benjamin McDaniel to Travel from Montpelier to New Market, Shenandoah County, Virginia, June 1, 1843, From Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts and Archives Division,

http://www.inmotionaame.org/gallery/detail.cfm?migration=2&topic=5&id=299131&type=image&metadata_a=show&page= (accessed 2 February 2020).

²⁸ On the slave patrol system see J. Michael Crane, “Controlling the Night: Perceptions of the Slave Patrol System in Mississippi,” *Journal of Mississippi History* 61, no. 2 (June 1999): 119-136 and Sally E. Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003). See also, for example, *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 3.3: 16; S1-3.1: 185; S1-6.1: 34; S1-8.3: 820; and S2-10.9: 4060.

²⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 12.1: 143. The Slave Narrative Collection is rife with variations of this particular folk song. See also 3.3: 152; 5.3: 222; 7-2: 161-162; 5.3: 126; 5.4: 105; 5.4: 152; S1-3.1: 96; S1-

Songs about patrollers were extremely popular among enslaved people in the South. The patrollers represented a concentrated effort by white Southerners to control enslaved people, ensuring slaveholders were able maximize their labour. Harre Quaris, an enslaved man in Texas, described a particular version of the song that emphasized the triumph of the enslaved over their oppressors by adding the line, “White man run, but nigger run faster.”³⁰ Such songs seemingly make light of the indignities that African Americans endured under slavery, but they also provided warnings and informed enslaved people about how to confront violence. In some situations, enslaved people even stretched vines across the road to aid in their escape from the patrollers. John F. Van Hook, an enslaved man from Georgia, described this as “a favourite sport of slaves.”³¹

African Americans developed an arsenal of creative resistance strategies that allowed them to seize more personal autonomy. The majority of these strategies were centred around sites of labour – white households, small farms, and large plantations. Regardless of where they worked, enslaved people spent the majority of their time working and, consequently, sites of labour were where they could best demonstrate their displeasure at the treatment they received. Although enslaved people did not have any rights that white people were legally bound to respect, their labour was foundational to the economy of the South. Without enslaved labour, the small farms and large plantations that dotted the landscape of the antebellum South could not produce cash crops on a large

3.1: 185-186; S1-6.1: 47; S1-7.2: 646; S1-9.4: 1428; S1-9.4: 1589; S1-9.4: 1897; S2-2.1: 304; S2-4.3: 1391; S2-6.5: 2048; S2-7.6: 2812; S2-8.7: 3213-3214; S2-9.8: 3758; S2-10.9: 4023; S2-10.9: 4114; and S2-10.9: 4357.

³⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 5.3: 222.

³¹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 13.4: 79-80; See also S1-9.4: 1749; S1-8.3: 1187; and S1-3.1: 8.

scale.³² African Americans, realizing this, found power in withholding their labour. While there were many ways that this could be achieved, one of the most popular methods was to feign illness.

In order for slaveholders to profit from the labour of enslaved people, they had to keep their human chattel in relatively good health. Those who were sick might occasionally be given some time off work to recover. Slaveholders generally approved of such medical care because it saved money and required little effort on their part. Enslaved people appreciated the opportunity to seize control of their labour. Recognizing that a minor illness would never be treated by a white doctor, due to the general belief that black lives were not worth the expense, many enslaved people feigned illness as a way to avoid work. Lou Turner, an enslaved woman in Texas, revealed that she frequently pretended to be sick to avoid having to work; she wanted to stay in bed. Turner continued this scheme until eventually her mistress began to seek treatment for the woman's frequent bouts of illness, prescribing "bee' foot oil." It is unclear if the mistress was concerned for Turner's health, or if she suspected that the enslaved woman was lying. Either way, the herbal remedy tasted so foul that Turner eventually returned to work.³³

On larger plantations, an enslaved woman familiar with herbalism might be responsible for administering herbs, roots, and other natural remedies to treat a variety of

³² A relatively small number of enslaved people lived and worked on large plantations. According to the 1860 census, only one-third of all Southern families owned enslaved labourers. In Mississippi and South Carolina, where labour intensive crops dominated the agricultural landscape, the number approached one-half. In terms of distribution, eighty-eight percent of all slaveholders owned fewer than twenty enslaved labourers. This means that relatively few enslaved labourers worked on large plantations. See "Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census, Under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior, 1864," *The United States Census Bureau*, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1864/dec/1860a.html> (accessed 5 February 2020).

³³ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-10.9: 3897.

minor illnesses.³⁴ Because of their position as informal practitioners of medicine on plantations, enslaved women had significant power to facilitate feigning illness as a method of resistance. John McAdams, enslaved as young boy in Texas, described a tendency among enslaved people to feign illness. If the illness was minor, then one of the older black women on the plantation was ordered to tend to the afflicted. This allowed enslaved people to feign illness without fear of repercussion. If anyone came under suspicion, or made the mistake of feigning an illness severe enough to warrant a visit from the white doctor, then certain herbs could be used make the person feigning illness seem legitimately sick.³⁵ Tucker Smith, an enslaved man from Texas, described a special tea that could be given to those who “played sick” in order to induce actual symptoms before the white doctor arrived.³⁶

Beyond feigning illness, the most common form of workplace resistance was arguably theft. As mentioned in the introduction, theft often goes unnoticed as an act of resistance because the actors often do not articulate their motives. Especially regarding the theft of foodstuffs, it is often impossible to know whether theft was intended as an assertion of the right to subsistence, or if it was simply about providing nourishment. Regardless, most black men and women who spoke about theft linked it to structural violence, commenting on the failure of slaveholders to meet the basic needs of enslaved

³⁴ On medical practices during slavery, see Todd L. Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery: The Diseases and Health Care of Blacks in Antebellum Virginia* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981); Sharla Fett, *Working Cure: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); and Herbert C. Covey, *African American Slave Medicine: Herbal and Non-Herbal Treatments* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2007).

³⁵ According to Elige Davison, an enslaved labourer in Texas, many slaveholders would pay for a doctor if they feared losing their investment. He stated, “slave was worth too much to let die if he could save him.” See *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-4.3: 1111 and 1116; and S2-7.6: 2462.

³⁶ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-9.8: 3680-3681. See also 12.2: 53.

people. Luvenia Coleman, a formerly enslaved woman living in Mississippi, cited theft as a common practice among enslaved people. Her master had so many hogs and cattle that the enslaved people on the plantation often stole the animals for food. Notably, Coleman argued that if the master noticed that his animals were missing, he never attempted to find the thief.³⁷ It was common knowledge that enslaved people needed to steal to supplement their meager rations. According to Betty Powers enslaved people stole for their own survival. Although they might be punished if caught, Powers acknowledged that those who were too weak from hunger to work would be punished anyway; it was better to be whipped on a full stomach than an empty one.³⁸ Others, like Richard Caruthers, argued that it was not technically stealing if the slaveholders did not provide adequate rations in the first place.³⁹

Crops and livestock, however, were not the only targets of theft. Enslaved people, especially enslaved women, stole a wide variety of goods that they saw as justified compensation for their labour. Because enslaved women were more likely to work within the confines of the plantation house, many had unique access to the personal property of slaveholders. While enslaved men primarily stole crops and livestock because they worked in the fields, enslaved women might steal foodstuffs or personal items from within the plantation house. Hattie Sugg, for example, described how her mother stole soap. Serving as a laundress in the confines of the plantation house, Sugg's mother was responsible for making soap for the washing. Upon completion of her task, she always

³⁷ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-7.2: 436.

³⁸ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-8.7: 3136-3137. See also, for example, 2.2: 37; S1-9.4: 1388-1389; S1-8.3: 1305-1306; S2-5.4: 1656; S2-7.6: 2545; and S2-9.8: 3764.

³⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 4.1: 198. See also S2-3.2: 630.

stole a gourd full of soap to wash her own laundry.⁴⁰ For Sugg's mother, theft was not about survival; stealing the soap did not satiate her hunger or advance for social position. But by stealing, she did reclaim the product of her labour.

Occasionally slaveholders tried to stop enslaved men and women from stealing using moral arguments. On plantations where the enslaved labourers were allowed to attend church or hold religious meetings, white preachers might deliver sermons on the importance of obedience and subservience. Enslaved men and women were urged to obey their masters if they wanted to go to heaven.⁴¹ But many enslaved people recognized the hypocrisy of white efforts to halt theft. Josephine Howard, an enslaved woman from Texas, noted the irony that white Southerners spent a lot of time telling enslaved people it was wrong to steal considering they had committed the first theft by stealing people from Africa for sale into slavery.⁴² Howard's comment highlights the unjustness and injuriousness of slavery; few white Southerners would have recognized slavery as being immoral, but Howard makes this clear by linking the peculiar institution to theft of human beings.

While many enslaved people actively resisted subjugation from within sites of labour, others made the difficult decision to extricate themselves entirely from the exploitative labour practices that defined slavery. As a result, thousands of enslaved people made the decision each year to flee. Thomas Johns, an enslaved man from Texas, explained, "Slaves was nearly all time runnin' 'way from mahsters what didn't treat 'em

⁴⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-10.5: 2076

⁴¹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-8.3: 1083 and S2-4.3: 1262.

⁴² *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-5.4: 1807. See also 7.2: 136.

right.”⁴³ Some runaways travelled to the woods and remained in hiding for weeks, months or years; others made the difficult journey north to free states or even beyond the borders of the United States to Canada. Regardless of the destination, the decision to flee was never made lightly. Slaveholders, unwilling to forfeit their economic investment, devoted significant resources to retrieving fugitives. Many slaveholders kept bloodhounds on their property for tracking purposes, patrollers guarded the roads at night, and rewards frequently enticed average white Southerners to join in the hunt.⁴⁴ Although the risks were considerable, many African Americans resented being forced to labour for the benefit of another, and made the decision to strike out on their own regardless of the consequences.

Frederick Douglass, in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, described how he arrived at the decision to escape:

In the early part of the year 1838, I became quite restless. I could see no reason why I should, at the end of each week, pour the reward of my toil into the purse of my master. When I carried him my weekly wages, he would, after counting the money, look me in the face with a robber-like fierceness, and ask, “Is this all?” He was satisfied with nothing less than the last cent. He would, however, when I made him six dollars, sometimes give me six cents, to encourage me. It had the opposite effect. I regarded it as a sort of admission of my right to the whole. The

⁴³ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-6.5: 1971.

⁴⁴ The Fugitive Slave Law, enacted as a part of the Compromise of 1850, made it especially difficult for enslaved people to escape. The law required that all U.S. citizens and U.S. marshals assist in the capture of runaways. Anyone who refused to aid in the capture of a runaway, interfered with the arrest of an enslaved person, or tried to free an enslaved person already in custody was subject to a heavy fine and imprisonment. Moreover, the law stipulated that any African American – regardless of status – could be sent to the South solely on the affidavit of any white person claiming to be his or her owner. “An Act to amend, and supplementary to, the Act entitled ‘An Act respecting Fugitives from Justice, and Persons escaping from the Service of their Masters,’” *United States Statutes at Large*, Vol. 9, 31st Cong. 1st Sess. (1850): 462-465. See also Stanley W. Campbell, *The Slave Catchers: Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850-1860* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011); David G. Smith, *On The Edge of Freedom: The Fugitive Slave Issue in South Central Pennsylvania, 1820-1870* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012); and R. J. M. Blackett, *The Captive’s Quest for Freedom: Fugitive Slaves, The 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, and the Politics of Slavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

fact that he gave me any part of my wages was proof, to my mind, that he believed me entitled to the whole of them. I always felt worse for having received any thing; for I feared that the giving me a few cents would ease his conscience, and make him feel himself to be a pretty honorable sort of robber. My discontent grew upon me. I was ever on the look-out for means of escape; and, finding no direct means, I determined to try to hire my time, with a view of getting money with which to make my escape.⁴⁵

Douglass' decision was motivated by his realization that slavery was inherently unfair. While some enslaved people had benevolent masters, few found enslavement preferable to freedom. Thomas Johns argued that anyone who spoke favourably of slavery was "telling a lie." In other words, those who spoke favourably of slavery were withholding their testimony for their own safety. There is something about freedom, according to Johns, that "makes up for all de hardships."⁴⁶

Both enslaved men and women withdrew their labour through absenteeism, although the nature of gendered labour meant that women were less likely to become fugitives. Indeed, scholars agree that women were less likely to run away for extended periods of time.⁴⁷ This was partly because enslaved women had fewer opportunities to leave the plantation for the purposes of work. While some black men were hired out to work as blacksmiths or carpenters off the plantation, the majority of black women were confined to the fields or worked in the plantation house. More restrictive, however, were the gender ideals among the enslaved. As historian Stephanie Camp argued, community sanctions against women abandoning their children limited the number of female

⁴⁵ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1846), 87-88.

⁴⁶ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 4.2: 204. See also, for example, 13.3: 50 and S2-6.5: 2302-2303.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Myers, "'Sisters in Arms': Slave Women's Resistance to Slavery in the United States," 162-67; Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, Revised Edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 70-76; Camp *Closer to Freedom*, chap. 2.

fugitives who escaped north. Women were expected to be the primary caregivers for children.⁴⁸ To run away meant leaving those children alone, especially in situations where their father was deceased or lived on another plantation. Taking children along was not a reasonable option either, as children greatly increased the likelihood of recapture. Tom Mason, interviewed by the Federal Writers' Project in Mississippi, claimed that an enslaved woman threw an eight-month-old baby into a well when making her escape because she did not want to be hindered by the infant.⁴⁹ The child, fortunately, did not drown and was rescued from the well.

The journey north was not only physically demanding beyond what most children could endure, the sight of a woman with child(ren) was far more conspicuous on the road. Enslaved women, as a result, were forced to confront what Linda Krumholz termed their “incompatible roles as a slave and as a mother.”⁵⁰ Few enslaved women were willing to jeopardize the safety of their children by becoming fugitives. While the unnamed woman described by Mason purportedly sacrificed her child to escape slavery, this was an unusual case. Examples of infanticide persist in literature on resistance to slavery, but this was often done as a last resort in which enslaved women believed that death was preferable to slavery.⁵¹ Infanticide was, as Cheryl Janifer LaRoche argued, often

⁴⁸ Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 36–37.

⁴⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-9.4: 1449.

⁵⁰ Linda Krumholz, “The Ghosts of Slavery: Historical Recovery in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” *African American Review* 26, no. 3 (Autumn 1992): 396.

⁵¹ Margaret Garner is perhaps the best-known example of an enslaved woman committing infanticide. For a detailed discussion of her actions, see Chapter 3.

committed as a way of sabotaging the perpetuation of slavery by denying slaveholders access to future generations of enslaved labourers.⁵²

Most enslaved women, motivated by a maternal desire to remain with their children, favoured short-term absences. For example, one enslaved woman ran away after being whipped by her mistress. She hid for several days in the woods, returning each night to nurse her children.⁵³ Anne Lee, an enslaved woman in Texas, similarly ran away to escape physical punishment. She found refuge in a large cave where several other enslaved people were hiding. Each night, the runaways would return to their plantations to secure food. Lee used these excursions to nurse her young son before returning to the cave for the day.⁵⁴

Physical violence drove many enslaved women to withdraw their labour temporarily. Celestia Avery belonged to a particularly cruel master. He would whip his enslaved labourers mercilessly “and in most cases unnecessarily.” According to Avery, her grandmother was a frequent target of Heard’s anger. Every morning the unnamed woman would pray. Heard hated to hear anyone praying because he believed “they were only doing so that they might become free.” Avery’s grandmother, as a result, was whipped on a daily basis. On one occasion, Heard tied the pregnant enslaved woman to a tree and whipped her repeatedly. Heard left her tied up and her husband was only able to cut her down after nightfall. Severely injured, the enslaved woman then retreated to the

⁵² Cheryl Janifer LaRoche, “Coerced But Not Subdued: The Gendered Resistance of Women Escaping Slavery,” in *Gendered Resistance: Women, Slavery, and the Legacy of Margaret Garner*, ed. Mary E. Frederickson and Delores M. Walters (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 53.

⁵³ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 13.4: 257.

⁵⁴ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 2-6.5: 2314.

woods to hide and heal. She stayed away for two weeks and gave birth to twins during her absence.⁵⁵

Such short-term absences were largely made possible by communal efforts to support runaways. Avery's grandmother was only able to escape with the aid of her husband. Moreover, as a result of her poor condition, she would not have been able to gather food; she would have needed to rely on those who remained on the plantation. It was common practice for those who went into hiding to return each night in search of food. Anne Lee, in addition to nursing her son, also gathered food from her friends. Mary Smith described how Jack Gist ran away from his plantation and lived in a cave for five months. He would sneak back at night to visit his friends and gather food. When he was eventually caught, his captors found in his possession a hog, two geese, two chickens, and some meat.⁵⁶ The individual act of running away often had a collective basis and allowed enslaved people to work together to resist oppression.

Enslaved women, as Stephanie Camp argued, never made up the majority of truants.⁵⁷ The decision to run away on a short-term basis, however, remains important because comparatively few enslaved women made the longer journey north. Enslaved men, on the other hand, often took advantage of their greater freedom of movement to slip away from the plantation on a more permanent basis. Thomas Cole, an enslaved man in Texas, feared being whipped by his cruel master and, therefore, made the decision to

⁵⁵ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 12.1: 24-25. As much as the children of enslaved women were valuable to slaveholders, it was rare that slaveholders exempted pregnant women from punishment. In fact, many slaveholders and overseers went to great lengths to punish pregnant women who were disobedient. See, for example, S1-10.5: 1927; S1-10.5: 2337; S1-10.5: 2402; S2-3.2: 536; and S2-6.5: 1943. See also Chapter 3.

⁵⁶ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 3.4: 113.

⁵⁷ Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 39.

escape. Cole waited until his master ordered him to go hunting and then used the opportunity to disappear. When Cole began his journey he immediately headed north to “de free country, where dey ain’t no slaves.” Always wary of being caught, Cole travelled at night. And while he never made it to Canada, he eventually encountered a group of Union soldiers. He enlisted and found his freedom.⁵⁸

The Civil War provided new opportunities to escape slavery. On 6 August 1861, Congress passed the First Confiscation Act which allowed the government to seize all property belonging to the Confederacy, including human chattel.⁵⁹ Although this legislation did not recognize the rights of enslaved people as human beings, it did provide a new opportunity for those seeking to remove themselves from slavery, as those who managed to escape to the Union lines could eventually become free. This opportunity was further solidified by the Emancipation Proclamation, which, in addition to manumitting enslaved people in states under active rebellion, allowed the Union to formally arm runaways and muster them into the army.⁶⁰ In the Sea Islands of South Carolina, for example, approximately ten thousand enslaved men and women reached the Union simply by remaining in place as slaveholders fled from the advancing Union Army and Navy in November 1861. In most places, however, enslaved people needed to travel to

⁵⁸ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-3.2: 805-811. On black soldiers and the Union army, see James M. McPherson, *Marching Toward Freedom: The Negro's Civil War* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1982); Schwalm, *A Hard Fight For We*, chap. 3; Noralee Frankel, *Freedom's Women: Black Women and Families in Civil War Era Mississippi* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), chap. 2; Michelle Wartman, “Contraband, Runaways, Freeman: New Definitions of Reconstruction Created by the Civil War,” *International Social Science Review* 76, no. ¾ (2001): 122-130; and Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010), chap 6.

⁵⁹ “An Act to Confiscate Property Used for Insurrectionary Purposes,” *United States Statutes at Large*, Vol. 12, 37th Cong. 1st Sess. (1861): 319.

⁶⁰ Emancipation Proclamation, January 1, 1863; Presidential Proclamations, 1791-1991; Record Group 11; General Records of the United States Government; National Archives.

reach the Union Army and secure their freedom. John Finnely, watched ten enslaved men successfully escape from a plantation in Alabama and then decided to try his own luck and become a fugitive. After slipping away, Finnely travelled at night for a long period of time. He watched carefully for patrollers, stayed off the roads, and hid in the thicket when necessary. Eventually Finnely reached a military camp near Bellefonte, Pennsylvania. He then found employment alongside many other runaways working on a number of building projects for the Union Army.⁶¹

Occasionally black women, along with their children, made their way to the front lines. Where black men were warmly welcomed, however, black women and children often received a cool reception. Unable to serve in the military, black women and children appeared to be a drain on resources. In the southwest, Quartermaster Carr of the Union Army complained, “There is a perfect ‘Cloud’ of negroes being thrown upon me for Sustenance & Support.” Of approximately fifty runaways, only twelve were capable of being put to work in the army; the rest were women and children.⁶² With few explicit instructions regarding how to handle the influx of runaways, Union officers tried their best to discourage migration.

Of the states considered in this dissertation, Mississippi experienced the greatest number of runaways during the Civil War. While it is impossible to know the exact

⁶¹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-4.3: 1347-1349. See also Ira Berlin et al., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867: The Black Military Experience*, Ser. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), especially Part 3; and Thavolia Glymph, “Noncombatant Military Laborers in the Civil War,” *OAH Magazine of History* 26, no. 2 (April 2012): 25-29.

⁶² B. O. Carr to F. S. Winslow, 24 July 1862, #2360 1862, Letters Received, ser. 4676, Army of the Southwest, RG 393, Pt. 2 No. 299 [C-245], reprinted in Ira Berlin et al., eds., *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Lower South*, ser. 1, vol. 3, *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 659-660.

number of enslaved men and women who reached Union lines, the Freedmen and Southern Society Project estimated that approximately half a million enslaved men and women laboured for the Union Army. Of the total, roughly 125 000 were located in the Mississippi Valley.⁶³ In 1863, as Union forces besieged Vicksburg, Mississippi, hundreds of enslaved people from the surrounding area made their escape via the Mississippi River. The number of fugitives became so overwhelming that Adjutant General L. Thomas ordered that women and children should be advised to remain on their plantations wherever possible.⁶⁴ Those who had already escaped and refused to return to the South typically took up residence within or just outside army lines.

While the Emancipation Proclamation effectively transformed the Civil War into a war of liberation, those serving in the Union Army were generally not concerned with rights of African Americans. Even as enslaved people fled from slavery and sought refuge with the Union Army, white Northerners were more concerned with securing labour than abolition. General Benjamin F. Butler, for example, abandoned the Fugitive Slave Act when he refused to return a group of runaways to the South: “As a military question ... it would seem to be a measure of necessity to deprive their masters of their services.” It was Butler who famously described those enslaved people who escaped slavery as

⁶³ Ira Berlin et al., *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Upper South*, ser. 1, vol. 2, *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 77-78.

⁶⁴ Special Orders No. 45, 18 August 1863, L. Thomas Letters & Orders, Generals' Papers & Books, ser. 159, RG 94 [V-17], reprinted in Ira Berlin et al, eds., *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Lower South*, vol. 3, 3 vols., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 719-720.

“contraband” of war.⁶⁵ Not necessarily viewed as human beings seeking liberty, runaways were often crowded into unsanitary camps where they had limited access to food, water, or medicine.⁶⁶

Escape from slavery, perhaps more than any other form of resistance, undermined the powers of slaveholders. As slaveholders struggled to preserve the institution of slavery, they found their authority over the black population undermined as increasing numbers of men and women fled. Not only did slaveholders struggle to complete tasks normally conducted by enslaved labourers, they had to contend with growing unrest among the enslaved labourers who remained. Those who remained were more likely to openly disrespect or disobey their masters. According to Squire Irvin, an enslaved man from Mississippi, white Southerners attempted to maintain order when escapes escalated.⁶⁷ Some slaveholders made enslaved people wear bells so that they could not sneak off at night. These bells would be suspended on a brace so they could not be removed, nor could the wearer simply hold the clapper.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, large numbers of patrollers monitored the roads for runaways. Ultimately, however, these efforts were no longer sufficient; enslaved people fled slavery in increasing numbers leading up to emancipation.

⁶⁵ Benjamin Butler to Lieutenant General Winfield Scott, May 24, 1861, Butler Papers, quoted in Amy Murrell Taylor, *Embattled Freedom: Journeys through the Civil War's Slave Refugee Camps* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018), iii.

⁶⁶ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-8.3: 1343. On the conditions in refugee camps, more commonly referred to as contraband camps, see Amy Murrell Taylor, *Embattled Freedom: Journeys through the Civil War's Slave Refugee Camps* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018). Even on the home front in the South, conditions were not favourable. Albert Hamilton, a formerly enslaved man and soldier during the Civil War, returned home on furlough and found much suffering and starvation. See *The Slave Narrative Collection* S1-8.3: 908-909.

⁶⁷ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-8.3: 1084. See also S2-4.3: 1034.

⁶⁸ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-5.4: 1444-1445. See also 5.4: 25.

General Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox Court House on 9 April 1865. In Texas, however, enslaved people did not learn of their emancipation until two months later. Slavery persisted in Texas longer than anywhere else in the Confederacy because it was the most remote slave state. It was not until 19 June 1865 that General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston to announce the abolition of slavery. He declared:

The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with the proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and hired labor. The freedmen are advised to remain quietly at their present homes and work for wages. They are informed that they will not be allowed to collect at military posts and that they will not be supported in idleness either there or elsewhere.⁶⁹

Although news of emancipation had reached other parts of the South more quickly, it was on “Juneteenth” that news of emancipation reached the entire former Confederacy.⁷⁰ Of course, some slaveholders took advantage of the slow rate at which news travelled and hid word of emancipation for even longer. Annie Huff’s master, for example, refused to tell his enslaved labourers that they were free. He supposedly “hated the thought of a Negro being able to wear a starched shirt.” African Americans, however, had long established networks of communication between plantations and eventually Huff learned

⁶⁹ “General Orders No. 3,” *The Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph* (Houston, Texas), Vol. 31, No. 41, 23 June 1865.

⁷⁰ According to Melinda Pollard, an enslaved woman, this meant that African Americans in Texas ended up celebrating freedom more than those who had been enslaved elsewhere. The term ‘Juneteenth’ was coined in response to the announcement in Texas, but it was adopted more widely to celebrate freedom and independence, especially in the southwest. See *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-8.7: 3114. On end of slavery in Texas, see Randolph B. Campbell, “The End of Slavery in Texas: A Research Note,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 88, no. 1 (July 1984): 71-80; and Shennette Garrett-Scott, “‘When Peace Come’: Teaching the Significance of Juneteenth,” *Black History Bulletin* 76, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2013): 19-21.

of the abolition of slavery. Upon learning of her freedom, one black girl shouted, ““I’m free! I won’t stay here at all!”⁷¹

The abolition of slavery, unsurprisingly, was a joyous occasion for millions of African Americans. Hamp Santee, a black man living in Mississippi, recalled extended periods of dancing, shouting, and general merriment as those who had been enslaved learned of their emancipation. One group of freedpeople, according to Santee, took out a rope and began to cut off small pieces. Each freedperson received a piece of the rope to serve as a reminder of the struggles that they had overcome. Santee explained, “When ever dey look at de rope dey remembers dat dey is free from bondage.”⁷² For many, emancipation represented the culmination of hundreds of years of struggle against oppression. One woman, upon learning of her freedom, cried exuberantly, “De yoke of bondage is off’n our necks.”⁷³

While the importance of emancipation was undeniable, few knew exactly what freedom would entail. As scholars have variously explained, some African Americans expected to have complete control over their persons and progeny. They expected protection against arbitrary and violent treatment. They expected to retain the rewards of their personal labour. African Americans, by and large, wanted to organize their lives

⁷¹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 12.2: 236. For additional examples of slaveholders withholding news of emancipation, see 2.1: 21; 3.3: 170; 4.1: 98; 12.2: 55; 12.2: 133; 13.3: 212; S1-3.1: 102; S1-10.5: 2397; S1-10.5: 2359; S2-7.6: 2644; S2-8.7: 3114; and S2-8.7: 3336.

⁷² *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-10.5: 1918.

⁷³ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-5.4: 1861.

based on their own needs and desires, establish and protect their families as independent units, and labour for their own benefit.⁷⁴

The ownership of land was central to how African Americans understood freedom. To own productive property meant self-sufficiency. Following emancipation, rumours quickly circulated that rebel land in the South would be confiscated and redistributed to formerly enslaved people. Indeed, many African Americans expressed a fervent belief that they would be granted forty acres and a mule. On 16 January 1865, General William Tecumseh Sherman had issued an order providing for the confiscation of approximately 400 000 acres of land along the coast of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. This land was to be divided into parcels not exceeding forty acres and settled by formerly enslaved people.⁷⁵ Ultimately, Sherman's order had little impact. While hundreds of black families did settle on confiscated land, they were ultimately removed when President Andrew Johnson ordered that planters be allowed to reoccupy their plantations after the Civil War.⁷⁶ Yet rumours persisted that those who had suffered under

⁷⁴ On the transition from slavery to freedom see, for example, Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980); Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997); Schwalm, *A Hard Fight For We*; Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Rene Hayden et al., eds., "Land and Labor, 1866-1867," in *Land & Labor, 1866-1867*, vol. 2, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 1–60; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, Updated Edition (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2014); Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*.

⁷⁵ Special Field Orders, No. 15, Headquarters Military Division of the Mississippi, 16 Jan. 1865, Orders & Circulars, Series 44, Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, National Archives, reprinted in Ira Berlin et al., eds., *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Lower South*, vol. 3, 3 vols., Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 338-340.

⁷⁶ Manuel Gottlieb, "The Land Question in Georgia During Reconstruction," in *From Slavery to Sharecropping: White and Black Labor in the Rural South, 1865-1900*, ed. Donald Nieman (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994), 120; Paul A. Cimbala, "The Freedmen's Bureau, the Freedmen, and Sherman's Grant in Reconstruction Georgia, 1865-1867," in *The Freedmen's Bureau and Black Freedom*, ed. Donald Nieman (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994), 21–56.

slavery would be granted land.⁷⁷ Ike Pringles, when interviewed by the Federal Writers' Project, was one of many to describe these rumours. However, he revealed, "When I got my mule, I bought him."⁷⁸

In some ways, steadfast belief in the rumours surrounding land distribution left freedpeople vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous white Southerners. Reverend W. B. Allen described how his father was swindled by a white man who told him that if he wanted to receive his forty acres and a mule, then he needed to pay a fee of \$20.00 to make out the papers. The man kindly offered to complete the land transfer. After paying, however, the freedman did not receive any land or a mule. Because he was illiterate, he could not read the deed that the white man had given him. He eventually took the deed into town where someone was able to read the contents: "This is to certify that this Negro has been able to secure a piece of paper called a deed to forty acres and a mule, and I hope that he gets both some day."⁷⁹

Uncertainty was not a feeling unique to African Americans in the postemancipation South. Neither they nor their former masters knew what freedom for African Americans would look like. With the abolition of slavery, many white Southerners felt that their economic and social expectations were being challenged. Former slaveholders interviewed by the Federal Writers' Project expressed a belief that African Americans were more akin to livestock than people, and that freedpeople were

⁷⁷ The exact origins of this rumour are unclear. It is also unclear how the rumour was circulated so widely as there are references to it in nearly every state where the Federal Writers' Project gathered testimony. Hahn suggests that the rumours may have been an attempt to influence federal policy in the postbellum South. Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2003), 129-130.

⁷⁸ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-9.4: 1764.

⁷⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-3.1: 8-9.

not capable of supporting themselves and required the benevolent guidance of white Southerners to survive.⁸⁰ The notion that black people were now equal with white people was particularly galling. Mrs. Betty Elizabeth Brooks, whose family owned approximately forty enslaved labourers in Texas at the time of emancipation, argued that her family were “real southern people.” They were not fond of work and “didn’t think white people should do it.” Instead, they relied on enslaved labourers to secure their fortunes and manage their daily household needs. Yet despite this reliance on the labour of enslaved people, Brooks argued that African Americans “were certainly an ignorant bunch of people to turn loose to be their own.”⁸¹ Brooks, like many white Southerners, refused to recognize the ability of African Americans to succeed outside of slavery. She believed that black men and women would be better off if they were kept in bondage.

Of particular concern was the assimilation of the newly freed black population into the free workforce of the South.⁸² White Northerners, as they flocked to the South, brought with them important ideas about labour. Emancipation, Amy Dru Stanley explained, supposedly destroyed all traces of bondage by granting formerly enslaved people “the right to own themselves and to enter into voluntary relations of exchange.”⁸³ This meant that if former slaveholders wanted to retain their labour force, they had to negotiate terms and pay wages. Labour relations were no longer to be conceived as one of

⁸⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-10.9: 4327. A small number of former slaveholders were interviewed in Texas. These interviews were published in Supplementary Series 2.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 3.

⁸³ Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4.

“submission and dominion.”⁸⁴ To retain the labour of black men and women, white Southerners now had to negotiate and abide by contracts created by citizens who were equal under the law.

Although many white Southerners signed contracts to secure the labour of African Americans, they did not believe that the abolition of slavery necessarily required a drastic change to longstanding labour management techniques. Accustomed to unchecked control over the persons and labour of African Americans, few former slaveholders were willing to surrender the authority they had previously enjoyed. They intended to maintain – by whatever means necessary – a cheap, tractable, and dependent labour supply.⁸⁵ As a result, freedpeople and their employers came into frequent conflict over myriad matters, including the rate of compensation, access to resources, pace of labour, and modes of discipline. The workplace, although somewhat changed from slavery, remained a common site of resistance because structural violence did not disappear after emancipation. Hostile white Southerners continued to control the distribution of both of power and resources, making it difficult for black men and women to meet their basic needs for survival.

Initially, African Americans occupied a position of relative power in the free labour market. No longer required to toil endlessly without benefit, a large number of

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸⁵ Donald G. Nieman, “Introduction to From Slavery to Sharecropping: White Land and Black Labor in the Rural South,” in *From Slavery to Sharecropping: White Land and Black Labor in the Rural South* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994), vii. See also Walter T. Howard, *Lynchings: Extralegal Violence in Florida during the 1930s* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1995), 26; Paul Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and Racial Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); and Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York: Knopf, 2005).

African Americans declined to sell their labour; they wanted to labour independently for their own benefit. Some believed that the government was going to provide land. They did not want to become trapped by a yearlong contract when the government finally provided them with assistance. Others simply did not believe that contracts between white planters and black labourers would ever be fair. M. Howard, a freedman living in Mississippi, complained that white planters seemed determined to subjugate African Americans. While white planters argued that freedpeople were refusing to contract without cause, Howard revealed that the real problem was the refusal of planters to support a large body of free labourers versus enslaved labourers. Some planters explicitly told African Americans that they were not welcome on their plantations if they expected their freedom.⁸⁶ Unsurprisingly, few freedpeople were willing to sign contracts with the foreknowledge that doing so would effectively return them to slavery. Howard wrote, “I thought when a man was once free he was free indeed and entital [sic] to all the laws and rights of a free people.”⁸⁷

With only their labour as leverage, some freedpeople strategically withdrew from the labour market when they were unable to secure favourable terms. Black women in particular, took the opportunity to redirect their productive labour to where it would most serve their own families. During slavery, women were considered to be less productive field hands than men. Slaveholders, however, could offset the difference by exploiting the ability of women to bear children. These children were a valuable asset and represented a

⁸⁶ M. Howard to Colonel Thomas, 25 January 1866, *Letters Received, Vol. 2, G-L, January 1877 – February 1867*, RG-105, reel 14, BRFAL-MS (M826). See also Edward O’Brien to Major A. McL. Crawford, 2 October 1866, *Miscellaneous Records, 1866 – 1868*, RG-105, reel 91, BRFAL-SC (M1910).

⁸⁷ M. Howard to Colonel Thomas, 25 January 1866, *Letters Received, Vol. 2, G-L, January 1877 – February 1867*, RG-105, reel 14, BRFAL-MS (M826).

future source of labour. After emancipation, however, the reproductive labour of women was a detriment because raising children took women away from their productive labour without providing any direct benefit to the employer in the form of assets or additional labour.⁸⁸ As a result, few employers were willing to pay women the same wages as men, even if they were expected to complete the same work. In 1866, for example, Wade Hampton, Jr. and W. G. Tutt negotiated the terms of employment for a group of freedpeople working on the Swan Lake Plantation in Washington County, Mississippi.⁸⁹ According to the contract, male field hands were to receive from \$10.00 to \$15.00 per month depending on the nature of their assigned tasks. Female field hands were to receive from \$4.00 to \$10.00.⁹⁰ Recognizing the inferior wages accorded to black women for the same work, many freedwomen declined to contract.⁹¹

Instead of working on plantations, some freedwomen instead directed their labour towards the care and maintenance of their individual households.⁹² M. C. Fulton, a white

⁸⁸ Schwalm, *A Hard Fight For We*, chap. 1; Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), chaps. 4–5; Rene Hayden et al., eds., “Labor and Family Life,” in *Land & Labor, 1866-1867*, vol. 2 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 553–369.

⁸⁹ Elsewhere in the contract W. G. Tutt is referred to as W. G. Sutt. It is unclear which is the correct name. Contract between W. G. Tutt and Wade Hampton, Jr. and Adam Pulley et al, February 1866, *Labor Contracts of Freedmen, February 1866 – November 1868*, RG-105, reel 50, BRFAL-MS (M826).

⁹⁰ The contract ranked potential employees on a scale to indicate their value. Those field hands tasked with greater responsibility were titled “No.1 Men” and “No. 1 Women.” These hands received \$15.00 per month and \$10.00 per month respectively. Those assigned to do other tasks, such as caring for livestock, cooking, or carrying water received even less. *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Ralph Schlomowitz revealed that planters considered the value of freedman labour to be highest from April to July. It was at this time that labourers producing cotton were needed for plowing, planting, and cultivating. The higher value on male labour during these months, Schlomowitz argued, was because female labour was a much closer substitute for male labour in picking than in plowing, planting, and cultivation. Ralph Shlomowitz, “The Origins of Southern Sharecropping,” in *From Slavery to Sharecropping: White and Black Labor in the Rural South, 1865-1900* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994), 209–210.

⁹² Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to Present*, Revised Edition (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 44.

planter in Georgia, wrote to General Davis Tillson to complain that freedwomen whose husbands found gainful employment refused to contract. He wrote, “Their husbands are at work – while they are as nearly idle as it is possible for them to be, – pretending to spin – knit or something that really amounts to nothing.” Fulton argued that freedwomen, after years of enslavement, were used to working in the fields and therefore should be required to negotiate contracts. He claimed that this was for the wellbeing of the family.⁹³ What Fulton failed to recognize, however, that women’s labour at home – cooking, cleaning, washing ironing, sewing, nursing children – actually enabled a family to function. During slavery, those women who had young children were forced to balance childcare with field work. Ebenezer Brown described how enslaved women with infants would take the children into the fields and make pallets out of old quilts somewhere along the fence line. The infants would stay there while their mothers tended to the crop. If the infants started to cry, their mothers could only nurse them briefly when they finished the row they were working on.⁹⁴

Once free, many black women relished the opportunity to prioritize their own households. Women’s labour at home was systematically devalued because it did not constitute wage labour, but these tasks were nonetheless vital in a material sense.⁹⁵ While Fulton claimed that idle freedwomen were “a very great evil,” they were in no way idle;

⁹³ M. C. Fulton to Brigadier General Davis Tillson, 17 April 1866, *Unregistered Letters, D-F, 1866*, RG-105, BRFAL-GA (M798).

⁹⁴ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-6.1: 248.

⁹⁵ During slavery, such work constituted a “second shift” as women were expected to complete these tasks in addition to their field labour. Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 32-33. See also Jacqueline Jones, “My Mother Was Much of a Woman’: Black Women, Work, and the Family Under Slavery,” *Feminist Studies* 8, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 235-269; and Jones *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*.

they simply directed their labour inwards for the benefit of their families.⁹⁶ Moreover, by removing themselves from the free labour market, black women were also able to shield themselves from abuse by white employers and overseers. Whippings and beatings remained a threat to all freedpeople after emancipation, but teenage girls and adult women had particular reason to fear the continuation of sexual violence that had been endemic under slavery.⁹⁷

Black men and women who negotiated labour contracts benefitted from the increased demand for labour that followed emancipation. The abolition of slavery came at a time when many planters needed assistance to harvest their crops.⁹⁸ Where possible, slaveholders generally wanted to retain the labour of those that they had held in bondage. Nelson Dickerson, for example, was hired by his former master as a field hand. He was joined by many others who had been enslaved on the same plantation.⁹⁹ As the demand for labour rose, especially in areas where African Americans refused to contract, those who did decide to sell their labour were able to negotiate for the best possible wages. Of course, whether they were actually paid or not was another matter. Brigadier General Davis Tillson, responsible for overseeing the Freedmen's Bureau in Georgia, wrote that the average rate for freedpeople was \$12.00 to \$15.00 per month. Tillson recognized that the free labour system relied upon the payment of fair and just wages. Without sufficient wages, African Americans would not be able to support themselves and would become dependent on the government. Therefore, the government had a vested interest in

⁹⁶ M. C. Fulton to Brigadier General Davis Tillson, 17 April 1866, *Unregistered Letters, D-F, 1866*, RG-105, BRFAL-GA (M798).

⁹⁷ This will be the subject of Chapter 3.

⁹⁸ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-10.5: 2359.

⁹⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-7.2: 604-605.

ensuring that African Americans, who had little else to sell, be able “to dispose of their labour at the highest price.”¹⁰⁰

With the high demand for labour immediately following emancipation, some African Americans were able to field multiple offers. Where they ultimately decided to work was not merely a reflection of the proposed terms of the contract, but also of the reputation of the employer. Indeed, African Americans scrutinized potential employers when deciding where to accept employment. Communication networks established during slavery had allowed enslaved people to communicate between plantations. Often this was the only way to share sensitive information. Indeed, this was how some enslaved people, like Steve Robertson, learned that they were free. While Robertson’s master attempted to hide the truth about emancipation, Robertson eventually learned of his freedom through the grapevine.¹⁰¹ When it became necessary to negotiate contracts, those slaveholders who had been cruel or abusive found that their reputations preceded them; African Americans continued to share news through previously established communication networks, warning of employers who were likely to behave abusively.

Captain F. W. Liedtke, Acting Subassistant Commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau at Moncks Corner, South Carolina, was tasked with helping freedpeople negotiate fair contracts. Although he reported many cases where planters recognized the necessity of “fair and equitable contracts,” others “[had] not learned to look upon the Freedmen as human beings” Such planters were likely to defraud or physically abuse black labourers.

¹⁰⁰ Brigadier General Davis Tillson to Major General O. O. Howard, 15 January 1866, *Letters Sent, October 1865 – February 1866*, RG 105, reel 1, BRFAL-GA (M798).

¹⁰¹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-8.7: 3336.

The high demand for labour, however, granted African Americans some freedom when choosing employers. Those who had previously violated contracts or abused their labourers, for example, often found it difficult to secure labour during the next contract year. Liedtke wrote, “A deserted plantation is a pretty sure sign of the bad treatment [sic] received by the Freedmen from their former masters.”¹⁰² Joe McCormick, employed by his former master in Georgia, made the decision to leave when his employer refused to settle at the end of the year.¹⁰³ Gordon Bluford, hired to work for a white man in South Carolina, fled after his employer tried to whip him.¹⁰⁴ Those white Southerners who treated their labourers as though the institution of slavery remained intact, thereby upholding structural violence in the South, quickly found themselves unable to secure contracts with freedpeople in the years following the Civil War.¹⁰⁵

The most common contracts extended over a year-long period. White planters wanted a stable workforce and generally were unwilling to risk the sudden departure of employees at critical points in the agricultural year.¹⁰⁶ Between 1865 and 1868, the Bureau assisted in the negotiation of several hundred thousand labour contracts. What is interesting, however, is that beyond the year-long terms, labour contracts varied widely in terms of compensation. Both planters and freedpeople experimented with a wide variety

¹⁰² Captain F. W. Liedtke to Major H. W. Smith, 28 February 1866, *Reports of Conditions and Operations, July 1865 – December 1866*, RG-105, reel 34, BRFAL-SC (M869).

¹⁰³ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-4.2: 392-393.

¹⁰⁴ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 2.1: 63-64.

¹⁰⁵ Captain F. W. Liedtke to Major H. W. Smith, 28 February 1866, *Reports of Conditions and Operations, July 1865 – December 1866*, RG-105, reel 34, BRFAL-SC (M869).

¹⁰⁶ Hayden et al., “Land and Labor,” 34.

of payment schemes. And, as Ralph Schlomowitz stated, it was not unusual to find labourers on the same plantation with wildly different contract terms.¹⁰⁷

In order to understand labour during the postemancipation period, we need to look to the records of the Freedmen's Bureau. These records retain copies of contracts between white employers and freedpeople, allowing us to discern common patterns in employment. The most common contracts, at least initially, included provisions for a fixed sum per month. Weekly rations of meat and meal might also be included, but often the employer deducted the cost of rations from the final settlement. Contracts that provided for fixed wages were often very explicit in outlining the rules that employees were expected to follow. In Georgia, a group of freedpeople contracted with H. H. Haddock to "truly, faithfully and industriously labor ... on the farm and plantation of the said Haddock, or elsewhere as he or his agent may direct." The contract included fourteen rules that all labourers were to abide by. Labourers were not to speak impudently, disobey or talk back to either the employer or his family. Any damage to farming equipment required compensation on the part of the labourers. If children were idle or disobedient, Haddock reserved the right to punish them on behalf of the parents. All labourers were forbidden to have firearms. The violation of these rules could be punished with a monetary fine or, at the employer's discretion, dismissal with loss of pay. The contract further stipulated that all disputes would "be adjusted by the Employer."¹⁰⁸ This final clause provided Haddock with a great deal of power over his labourers; he could ensure

¹⁰⁷ Shlomowitz, "The Origins of Southern Sharecropping," 202–10.

¹⁰⁸ Contract between H. H. Haddock and Jim Sharpe et al., 1 January 1867, *Labor Contracts and Miscellaneous Court Papers, 1866 – 1868*, RG-105, reel 74, BRFAL-GA (M1903). See also, for example, Contract between Joseph G. Lockhart and Mary Ann et al., 26 February 1866, *Labour Contracts of Freedmen, February 1866 – November 1868*, RG-105, reel 50, BRFAL-MS (M826).

that all disputes were settled in his favour. Formerly enslaved people enjoyed some bargaining power, at least in theory. In practice, however, old patterns of subjugation from slavery often proved their durability in the form of restrictive contracts. In this way, structural violence continued in the South long after the abolition of slavery.

While many freedpeople preferred to receive a fixed wage each month, the stringent rules that accompanied such contracts were stifling. Betty Carrion, a freedwoman contracted to work in South Carolina, found herself at odds with her employer over how she spent her free time. One evening, after work, Carrion had some family over to talk in the kitchen. Her employer complained that the group was making a racket; he forbade her family to visit. This angered Carrion, but she offered to compromise by meeting with her family outside in the yard. She insisted that she was speaking for her rights. Her employer, however, proceeded to beat Carrion with an ironing board.¹⁰⁹ In this moment, structural violence gave way to physical violence, demonstrating the fine line between these various manifestations of violence. When Carrion pushed back against structural violence and the denial of her rights as a free citizen, her employer resorted to physical violence.

Intrusive supervision was among the most frustrating aspects of fixed wage contracts. After being closely monitored during slavery, African Americans now wanted to be able to work without an overseer looming over them. Perfectly willing to work to support themselves, they wanted more control over their own labour and wanted to make decisions how to allocate their time. Many black men and women, like Carrion, now

¹⁰⁹ Affidavit of Betty Carrion, 16 May 1866, *Miscellaneous Records, 1866 – 1868*, RG-105, reel 91, BRFAL-SC (M1910).

expected to be able to visit friends and family, a pleasure that was often denied during slavery. Now freedpeople believed, as long as the work was completed satisfactorily, that they should be allowed to do as they pleased.

Another problem was that many freedpeople were uneducated. Denied an education during slavery, many found themselves bound by contracts they could not read and being paid with money that they could not count. In Albany, Georgia, one planter procured small bills to pay the freedmen who worked for him. After laying out a large quantity of bills on the table, he wrote out a receipt in full and asked the freedmen to make their mark. The overseer also signed as a witness that the wages had been paid in full according to the contract. Once the wages were distributed, the employer and overseer left for town on business, while the freedmen went to spend their hard-earned money. Only after trying to purchase several articles did the freedmen realize that their employer had paid them a large number of bills but in small denominations; they received less than what was actually due to them. While the defrauded freedmen went to the Freedmen's Bureau for assistance, they found little could be done because their employer was protected by the signed receipt.¹¹⁰

Jack Maddox, working as a field hand in Louisiana after the Civil War, similarly found that his lack of education allowed his employer to defraud him. Each year, when it was time to settle, Maddox came out with nothing; he always owed money to the planter for whom he worked. After three years of this, Maddox learned that he was being cheated. The son of the planter, who was feuding with his father, informed Maddox of the

¹¹⁰ C. C. Hicks to Lieutenant Howard, 3 January 1868, *Letters Sent, March 1867 - December 1868*, Vol. 2, RG 105, reel 37, BRFAL-GA (M1903).

deception. He told Maddox that he was a fool if he did not learn to read and write so that he could keep his own books. Maddox took this advice to heart and, with the help of the son, learned how to read, write, and perform simple arithmetic. The next year he was able to keep his own books and informed the planter that they would compare when it came to settle. When the crop was harvested, the planter insisted that Maddox owed him money for rations, farming implements, and the like. Maddox, however, revealed that his book showed the planter owing him nearly \$100.00 for services rendered. Maddox never did receive the money he was owed, but his tenacity allowed him to assert his rights and halted the unscrupulous acts of the white planter. Moreover, by keeping his own records, Maddox turned the tools of his employer against him. Where the freedmen from Albany, Georgia were unable to secure justice because of a signed receipt, Maddox was able to use his documentation to protect himself. Maddox later moved on to find new employment where he continued to keep his own records to avoid being defrauded.¹¹¹

The idea of fixed wages increasingly lost favour as both planters and freedpeople sought more flexible arrangements. While ownership of land gave planters power over the recently freed black population, they were also struggling economically following the loss of their investments in human chattel. Few planters had the credit necessary to support contracts based on fixed wages. While many planters withheld wages, or a portion of the wages, until the end of the year, this still required more capital than most were able to muster in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War. As a result, many came

¹¹¹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-7.6: 2540.

to favour sharecropping agreements.¹¹² Under this kind of contract, the planter was responsible for providing everything necessary for agricultural production: the land, the seed, the farming implements, the work animals, the feed for the work animals, and any other plantation expenses. Freedpeople were only expected to provide their own labour and received, in exchange, roughly one-third or one-quarter of the crop.¹¹³ The exact portion of the crop provided as payment typically varied depending on what the planter had agreed to provide; some planters did not provide anything except the land which allowed freedpeople to claim a greater portion of the crop.¹¹⁴

Samuel Stone, a freedman living in South Carolina, contracted with J. C. Myers to work in exchange for one-third of the crop. Myers was also to advance rations and clothing. Stone, like many freedpeople, preferred this kind of arrangement over the payment of fixed wages because it allowed him greater freedom to manage his own labour.¹¹⁵ Hired to help produce the crop for the year and compensated in proportion to its size, those who became sharecroppers considered themselves to be entitled to a say in decisions about planting, cultivation, and harvest. Moreover, where an employee working for wages might be ordered to complete additional tasks, those working for shares had no obligation to complete general work on the plantation, including ditching, repairing buildings, machinery and fences, and clearing new land. When Myers ordered Stone to

¹¹² On labour in the South after the Civil War, see Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), chap. 8; Shlomowitz, “The Origins of Southern Sharecropping,” 203; and Roger L. Ransom, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation*, 2nd Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹¹³ On the nature of sharecropping contracts, see Louis Ferleger, “Sharecropping Contracts in the Late-Nineteenth-Century South,” *Agricultural History* 67, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 31-46.

¹¹⁴ Shlomowitz, “The Origins of Southern Sharecropping,” 203.

¹¹⁵ Complaint of Samuel Stone, 15 June 1867, *Statements Relating to Complaints, July 1867 – January 1868*, Vol. 67, RG-105, reel 87, BRFAL-SC (M1910).

straighten a plow, the freedman refused because he believed it was outside his obligations. No longer enslaved, Stone was not willing to labour except for his own benefit. This meant focusing only on the crop.¹¹⁶ If planters wanted their employees to complete work not directly related to agricultural production, they generally needed to make separate arrangements by paying wages. Seabram Blassingame and Peg Mills, for example, had contracted to work for R. C. Gilbern in exchange for one-third of the crop. When it came time to settle at the end of the year, both Blassingame and Mills made claims for outside work. When Gilbern refused to pay, the case was submitted for arbitration.¹¹⁷

Regardless of the means of compensation, planters defrauded freedpeople with alarming regularity. In South Carolina, Garrett Nagle, an agent of the Freedmen's Bureau, reported that much of his time was spent "dividing the crops and in the investigation of complaints made by freedmen that there was a disposition on the part of their employers to cheat them out of a portion of the product of their labour." After investigating the cases, Nagle concluded that the freedpeople who reported to the Freedmen's Bureau were being truthful. One small planter, he revealed, attempted to cheat his employees out of half their crop while another "was not so selfish as he was satisfied with cheating them out of one third." Some planters even had the audacity to cheat freedpeople out of their entire crop by "trying to get them to leave their plantations and thereby forfeit their interest in the crops." In a particularly egregious case, one planter ordered the arrest of a

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* See also, for example, Affidavit of Sam Brown, 16 July 1866, *Unregistered Letters Received, December 1865 – October 1868*, RG-105, reel 69, BRFAL-GA (M1903).

¹¹⁷ Complaint of Seabram Blassingame, 10 March 1868, *Register of Complaints, March – May 1868*, Vol. 211, RG-105, reel 79, BRFAL-SC (M1910).

freedwoman, the sole provider for four children, for the alleged theft of a pistol and some tumblers. Nagle, upon investigation, concluded that the woman was innocent and that the planter had charged her with the crime for the purpose of sending her to jail to avoid paying her the \$6.00 due for her work.¹¹⁸ In this way, the employer took advantage of repressive structures, in this case the legal system, to avoid paying his employee; he had expected that the courts would side with him and the woman would have been jailed. It was only because of an astute Bureau agent that this act of structural violence was uncovered.

Black women were frequently abused by their employers because they often lacked male protection, and because many perceived them to be mentally and physically inferior. The opinions expressed by agent J. D. Harris underscore the challenges that freedwomen faced in such situations. As an agent of the Freedmen's Bureau in Georgia, Harris was meant to serve as an impartial arbiter and to help safeguard the rights of freedpeople. Yet he wrote, "The women have not only been worthless as labourers this year, but they have given their employers a great deal of trouble, nine tenths of the cases brought before me for adjudication, originated with women. They are not only lazy, but exceedingly sensitive and ungovernable, work with no life or energy."¹¹⁹

It is true that black women brought a large number of complaints before the Freedmen's Bureau for adjudication, but their complaints seldom demonstrate the high degree of sensitivity or irresponsible behaviour alluded to by Harris. Rather, freedwomen

¹¹⁸ Garrett Nagle to Bt. Major A. M. L. Crawford, 31 October 1867, *Miscellaneous Records, 1866 – 1868*, RG-105, reel 103, BRFAL-SC (M1910).

¹¹⁹ J. D. Harris to Gen. Tillson, 23 July 1866, *Unregistered Letters Received*, RG 105, reel 27, BRFAL-GA (M798).

understood the rights accorded to them as free citizens and intended to see those rights upheld. Melissa Wrickley, a black woman in Georgia, complained to the Freedmen's Bureau that William Thomas had abused her. According to Wrickley, she had a verbal contract to work for Thomas. In January 1868, Thomas ordered her to the field very early in the morning before she had time to properly take care of her child. She refused to go out, which prompted Thomas to throw her on the ground. Wrickley responded that Thomas could not force her to do anything as "she was as free as he was." At this, Thomas kicked Wrickley in the head and knocked her down. Seriously injured, Wrickley immediately brought her complaint to the Freedmen's Bureau.¹²⁰

Chloe Wilson similarly complained about being abused by her employer, Mr. Browning. Wilson worked for Browning as a cook and housekeeper. One day, Browning ordered Wilson to work in the field stripping fodder. Although outside the scope of her contract, Wilson obeyed and worked in the field until the late afternoon. She then came inside to prepare dinner. She fixed herself a plate and was just sitting down to eat when Browning appeared and ordered the freedwoman to do some washing. Wilson agreed to do it after she finished her dinner, but Browning became incensed. He took Wilson's dinner and fed it to the dogs. He then took a long whip and beat Wilson. When she tried to escape outside, Browning ordered John Basle, a white man working in the yard, to knock Wilson down "with a piece of wood or anything he could lay hands on." Wilson immediately threatened to report the assault, stating, "If anyone strikes me I'll go to Captain Liedtke of the Freedmen's Bureau." Basle relented, but Browning continued to

¹²⁰ Complaint of Melissa Wrickley, 8 February 1868, *Register of Complaints, January – October 1868*, Vol. 249, RG-105, reel 60, BRFAL-GA (M1903).

threaten Wilson. He told her if she tried to report the assault, he would kill her. He then turned Wilson off the plantation without payment. Before turning Wilson off, however, Browning again ordered the freedwoman to wash his clothes or he would whip her again. Wilson washed the clothes. The next day she registered her complaint with the Freedmen's Bureau. Wilson was three months pregnant at the time of the assault.¹²¹

Many freedwomen insisted, even when threatened with physical harm, on reporting the abuse they endured. Under slavery, they had been denied the power to bring complaints against those who abused them. Emancipation, however, allowed black women to exert their freedom by exercising rights previously denied to them. In 1867, Rebecca Davis complained to the Freedmen's Bureau in Yazoo City, Mississippi that Daniel J. Harris refused to pay her for services rendered. According to Davis, she had contracted to work for the entire year as a cook and laundress. Twelve days before her contract concluded, Harris drove Davis off and refused to pay her wages, claiming that she was in violation of her contract. Davis argued, however, that she would have completed the year and that Harris owed her \$60.00. Moreover, Harris failed to specify how Davis had violated her contract. The Bureau agent determined that the claim was valid, and Harris was ordered to settle with Davis.¹²²

Even when freedwomen did violate the provisions of their contracts, they expected to be dealt with humanely. Caroline Silver complained to the Freedmen's Bureau that Ino L. Scott had tied her up by the hands for leaving the plantation after

¹²¹ Complaint of Chloe Wilson, 11 August 1866, *Testimony, Reports, and Other Records Relating to Court Cases and Complaints, 1866-1867*, RG-105, reel 89, BRFAL-SC (M1910).

¹²² Complaint of Rebecca Davis, 14 November 1868, *Register of Complaints, December 1867 – March 1868 and October – December 1868*, Vol. 238, RG-105, reel 65, BRFAL-MS (M1907).

working hours. Although she was in violation of the restrictive provisions outlined in her contract, the agent did write a letter to Scott explaining that “any disobedience of order on the part of Freedmen must be reported at this office, where the proper punishment will be inflicted upon the offending party.”¹²³ Physical assault upon an employee’s person was technically prohibited by federal authorities, but the general lack of enforcement meant that many African Americans remained the victims of such abuse. Jim Foy, for example, complained that an overseer whipped his wife “for a trifling reason” while he was contracted to work for a local white planter. The overseer rejected the outcome of the Civil War, insisting that black men and women “were not free.” He threatened “to whip them until he got tired.” Foy complained to the Freedmen’s Bureau, but the overseer insisted that “he was not afraid of the damned Yankees.”¹²⁴

Intransigent white locals and unresponsive government officials made it difficult for the Freedmen’s Bureau to secure justice for the newly freed black population.¹²⁵ The overseer who whipped Jim Foy’s wife likely knew that the Freedmen’s Bureau would be unable to secure a conviction; he could whip the freedwoman with impunity. While agents often tried their best to do right by the black men and women who came seeking help, they were keenly aware of the structural and cultural limitations of the Freedmen’s Bureau. In Savannah, agent A. W. Stone pleaded with his superiors, “Give me more power or please relieve me ... I feel like a fool to pass judgement & then be told I can’t

¹²³ Caroline Silver vs. Ino L. Scott, 16 August 1865, *Court Records, 1864 – 1865*, RG-105, reel 34, BRFAL-MS (M1907).

¹²⁴ Affidavit of Jim Foy, 17 November 1865, *Affidavits and Other Papers Relating to Freedmen’s Complaints, A-Y, 1865 – 1868*, RG-105, reel 48, BRFAL-GA (M1903).

¹²⁵ On the situation in Georgia, see Paul A. Cimbala, “On The Front Line of Freedom: Freedmen’s Bureau Officers and Agents in Reconstruction Georgia, 1865-1868,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (Fall 1992): 599-602.

enforce it.”¹²⁶ Hostility towards the Freedmen’s Bureau often meant that agents needed the assistance of federal troops to enforce their judgements; few white Southerners recognized the authority of the Freedmen’s Bureau. But insufficient manpower meant that most agents were on their own.

Thousands of black men and women brought complaints to the Freedmen’s Bureau. However, they ultimately recognized that they had to depend on themselves. Too often the agency failed to curtail the abuses inflicted upon the newly freed black population simply because it lacked the manpower. Moreover, there was a growing awareness that the Freedmen’s Bureau, and the army that upheld its order, might not always be around.¹²⁷ Structural violence continued in the South even after the abolition of slavery. As a result, those methods of resistance utilized during slavery were adopted and transformed for use against racialized violence in the postemancipation South.

In the postemancipation South, black labourers continued the tradition of theft as a way to compensate for inadequate wages. Ebenezer Brown, a freedman in Mississippi, was employed by his former master as a sharecropper. Required by contract to pay for his own rations and supplies, Brown frequently received little to no money for his labour at the end of the season; the vast majority of his wages were used to repay the debt accumulated over the course of the year. This arrangement effectively kept Brown in peonage. His response was to steal as a means of remuneration.¹²⁸ From the point of view

¹²⁶ A. W. Stone to D. Tillson, 4 June 1866, quoted in Cimbala, “On The Front Line of Freedom,” 600.

¹²⁷ On the collapse of the Freedmen’s Bureau, see James Oakes, “A Failure of Vision: The Collapse of the Freedmen’s Bureau Courts,” *Civil War History* 25, no. 1 (March 1979): 66-76; and Christopher Bean, “‘A Most Singular and Interesting Attempt’: The Freedmen’s Bureau at Marshall, Texas,” *The Southwestern Historical Association* 110, no. 4 (April 2007): 464-485; and Foner, *Reconstruction*, 142-170 and 276-278.

¹²⁸ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-6.1: 251-253.

of the labourer, theft was justified as a strategy to compensate for lost wages or mistreatment. Lizzie Atkins, for example, admitted to stealing chickens and potatoes as a way of compensating for her diminished capacity in southern society.¹²⁹

White Southerners sometimes used the expectation of theft to justify paying low wages because of the inevitable loss of livestock, crops, and even clothing. Jack Peckham, a white planter, complained to the Freedmen's Bureau regarding several freedwomen that he had hired to cultivate a sweet potato crop. According to Peckham, the women stole his fowl, wine, a mule, and other things. When the women left his employment, Peckham refused to pay them beyond what they had already received; he claimed that the stolen items should be considered payment. Sarah, one of the accused freedwomen, came to the Bureau to answer the complaint. She admitted that she had stolen, but only did so "when she couldn't get enough to eat." She further admitted that she would have stolen more given the chance. Ultimately the agent concluded that the women had violated their contract by stealing, but the poor conditions that necessitated the theft were similarly deemed a violation. Sarah was dismissed, but Peckham was ordered to give her three bushels of potatoes for her work.¹³⁰

That theft was expected from black labourers meant that few employers saw the practice as a form of resistance. This method of informal resistance afforded African Americans with a relatively safe way to challenge oppressive white Southerners. Following emancipation, Fred James made the decision to work for his former master in

¹²⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2- 2.1: 101. See also 5.4: 75; 18.1: 9; and 16.2: 67; and S1-7.2: 605.

¹³⁰ Complaint of Jack Peckham, 30 January 1866, *Register of Complaints, January – July 1866*, Vol. 138, RG-105, reel 70, BRFAL-SC (M1910).

exchange for a share of the crop of corn and cotton. Many other freedpeople also made the decision to stay. But once the crop was harvested, all the labourers were forcibly removed from the plantation without any compensation for their work. In response, those labourers who had been cheated stole the corn that they had been promised.¹³¹ Barney Alford, a freedman from Mississippi, similarly concluded that efforts to turn freedpeople off from their places of employment without any means of support inevitably led to theft.¹³² With no credit, theft was one of the few ways for newly emancipated African Americans to secure support.

Just as in slavery, many African Americans did not believe that relieving their employers of certain items was truly theft if they had been denied just compensation in the first place.¹³³ Those employed as domestic servants, for example, continued the tradition of theft by engaging in pan-toting – bringing home leftovers and other foodstuffs. One domestic worker insisted that pan-toting was not theft. She declared that black workers were entitled to take certain goods as part of an oral contract, either expressed or implied.¹³⁴ To understand this view, we might look to E. P. Thompson's discussion of the moral economy. In his study of bread riots in the English Countryside during the eighteenth century, Thompson suggested that peasants, contrary to the belief of local authorities, did not riot because they were distempered or inflamed by hunger. Rather, they were acting to punish those who engaged in illegitimate practices in

¹³¹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 3.3: 15-16.

¹³² *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-6.1: 43.

¹³³ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-8.3: 1143-1144.

¹³⁴ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada, 1994), 19; Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 132; Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to Present*, Revised (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 112.

marketing, milling, and baking. Under a moral economy, Thompson revealed, peasants believed that no man should profit from the necessities of others. Those responsible for making and selling bread, then, were expected to keep the prices of necessities at the customary level, contrary to the demands of the free market.¹³⁵ Black men and women in the South similarly believed in a moral economy where both slaveholders employers were to interact with them fairly or face direct action. Marvin L. Michael Kay and Lorin Lee Cary, in a study of the moral economy of enslaved people in colonial North Carolina, concluded that enslaved men and women “wove criminal behaviour in their culture and value systems to deal with immediate problems, sustain their sense of morality and justice, and redistribute some of the power and wealth which surrounded them.”¹³⁶ Where major criminal acts were openly recognized as resistance by both white and black Southerners, theft was more likely to be recognized as an act of necessity to maintain a moral economy.

Many thieves went unpunished, especially those who stole to reclaim property or to compensate for inadequate wages. For example, Annie Price, in her interview with the Federal Writers’ Project, revealed that her mother often laid claim to leftovers from her employer’s table because her wages were insufficient. She was never punished for her

¹³⁵ E. P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” *Past & Present* 50 (February 1971): 76–136.

¹³⁶ Marvin L. Michael Kay and Lorin Lee Cary, “‘They Are Indeed the Constant Plague of Their Tyrants’: Slave Defense of a Moral Economy in Colonial North Carolina, 1748-1772” *Slavery and Abolition* 6, no. 3 (December 1985): 37-38. See also Alex Lichtenstein, “‘That Disposition to Theft, with Which They Have Been Branded’: Moral Economy, Slave Management, and the Law,” *Journal of Social History* 21, no. 3 (Spring 1988): 413-440.

actions.¹³⁷ The threat of retaliation for theft, however, always loomed overhead. Harvey Lackey, for example, was falsely accused of theft and confined to prison for four days. He incurred a bill of \$20.00 for a lawyer to defend him in civil court. Although Lackey was ultimately proven innocent, his arrest served as a warning to those who brazenly stole.¹³⁸ Moreover, his arrest demonstrated that black men and women were not safe from false accusations by hostile white Southerners. In South Carolina, a freedman was attacked by two white men who accused him of stealing some pistols. While the freedman denied knowledge of the pistols, he eventually confessed to save his life. After telling the men where the guns were hidden, he fled and reported the attack to the Freedmen's Bureau. The stolen pistols were never found, presumably because the freedman had not stolen the pistols and did not know the location.¹³⁹

Some black men and women did not view theft as an act of deviancy because in stealing what they were rightfully owed, they were merely righting a wrong.¹⁴⁰ Lacking access to more established forms of economic action and protest, certain crimes became accepted legitimate acts. We might further classify such behaviour as unwitting resistance – acts that are not intended to be resistance by the actor yet might be recognized as threatening by the targets or other informed observers.

¹³⁷ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 13.3: 180. On the moral economy and poaching, smuggling, and theft, see Douglas Hay et al., *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Allen Lane, 1975); and E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (London: Allen Lane, 1975).

¹³⁸ Complaint of Harvey Lackey, 20 August 1866, *Register of Complaints, January – October 1867*, Vol. 131, RG-105, reel 24, BRFAL-TX (M1912).

¹³⁹ Complaint of Gazaway, 22 August 1866, *Register of Complaints, July 1866 – January 1867*, Vol. 254, RG105, reel 95, BRFAL-SC (M190).

¹⁴⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-6.1: 43 and S1-6.1: 251-253.

E. W. Seibels, a prominent planter from South Carolina who spoke before the congressional committee at the Ku Klux Klan hearings, revealed that some African Americans preferred sabotage as a means of expressing their displeasure. After the Civil War, those who were dissatisfied with their wages or their share of the crop, often resorted to arson. When Seibels refused to allow a black man to claim some cotton seed, he found his gin-house burned to the ground the next day.¹⁴¹ Indeed, South Carolina experienced a rash of burnings leading to widespread fear. Alexander P. Wylie ordered one of his labourers to move the harvested cotton in case it became a target, but the black man responded that the cotton was not in any danger because Wylie had treated African Americans “with justice.” It was only when African Americans were treated unfairly, the labourer insisted, that they resorted to arson as a method of resistance.¹⁴²

Attempts by African Americans to exert their rights were rarely met with enthusiasm. Many white Southerners expected the newly freed black population to behave submissively. As a result, actions that ran contrary to the popular image of African Americans as docile and eager to please garnered considerable scorn. In 1871, a fire erupted in the context of a race riot in Meridian, Mississippi. J. R. Smith, a white witness, testified that several African Americans refused to help extinguish the fire. Previously, he stated, African Americans had always been happy to help and to receive praise for their actions. This time, however, they made little effort. While some black men did assist, Smith remained suspicious of those who did not. He went as far as to speculate

¹⁴¹ *KKK Testimony*, 3: 94-122.

¹⁴² *KKK Testimony*, 5: 1428.

that the fire was the work of the local black population.¹⁴³ Despite the known use of arson as a method of resistance, however, there is no evidence that this fire was started by African Americans. Moreover, M. H. Whitaker, in his testimony, claimed that several black men had gone into the building to rescue the property of white business owners and to extinguish flames even as they dodged gunfire.¹⁴⁴ The suggestion that African Americans started the fire, then, reflects anger over the refusal of certain black people to help their former masters without question.¹⁴⁵

The accusations of J. R. Smith underscore how the relationship between white and black Southerners changed after emancipation – but also how this relationship remained the same. Although black men and women were now free citizens, many white Southerners still expected total submission and obedience. The refusal to help put out the fire was not understood as a reasonable decision but viewed as an intentional act of defiance. Some African Americans, like William Clopton, clearly understood their reticence as resistance. Clopton, a prominent black man and opponent of the outrages being inflicted upon the black population in Meridian, reportedly said “let it burn” as the fire raged.¹⁴⁶ This comment, reported by several witnesses, indicates that some African Americans did not feel compelled to aid their oppressors. While the fire may not have been a direct act of arson, the decision to let the fire burn uninhibited was intended to

¹⁴³ *KKK Testimony*, 11: 66-68.

¹⁴⁴ *KKK Testimony*, 11: 171-172.

¹⁴⁵ The Meridian Race Riot of 1871 has yet to receive sufficient scholarly attention. One of the only works to address the riot at length is Katharine Louise McGehee, “The Meridian Race Riot of 1871” (Honors Undergraduate Thesis, Florida State University, 1966). The records of the Ku Klux Klan hearings also include detailed testimony regarding the riot. O. C. French, a member of the Mississippi Legislature, was tasked with investigating the events that took place in March 1871. His findings were appended to his testimony before the congressional committee. Several other witnesses also testified. See *KKK Testimony*, 11: 1-223.

¹⁴⁶ *KKK Testimony*, 11: 129.

send a message that black men and women were no longer required to unquestioningly obey every order given by a white person; they could now put their own interests and safety first.

Where race relations proved particularly tenuous, some African Americans made the decision to migrate. Just as thousands of enslaved people made the risky decision to remove themselves from bondage by escaping into the night, thousands of African Americans in the postemancipation South similarly packed up and relocated. Some decided to migrate simply because they could. Having long been confined to their plantations by strict rules and even stricter punishments, many formerly enslaved people embraced the ability to move as they pleased. Priscilla Albright, who had been enslaved in Georgia, described how black men and men reacted to emancipation:

At the first blush of freedom ... the Negroes were staggered. They did not know what to do. Then their joys knew no bounds; they went wild. The very thought that they were free overwhelmed them. Some had hysterics, some shouted, some prayed and some sang, and many took to the highways and by-ways, just to exercise their independence, and walked and roamed, aimlessly for days!¹⁴⁷

Eventually many settled on new plantations where they found work as wage labourers or sharecroppers.¹⁴⁸

Occasionally African Americans relocated further afield. Tom Singleton, for example, who had lived in the South his entire life, saw emancipation as an opportunity to relocate to the North. He argued, “Dar always wuz a little trouble twixt de white folkses

¹⁴⁷ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-3.1: 2.

¹⁴⁸ On the reactions of enslaved people to emancipation, see Litwack, *Been In The Storm So Long*, chaps. 3 and 4; Schwalm, *A Hard Fight For We*, chap. 5; Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), chap. 2; Foner, *Reconstruction*, chap. 3; Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House Of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), chaps. 5-7;

an' Niggers; always a little." The best solution, he believed, was to travel to the North.¹⁴⁹ Some African Americans, however, argued that migration within the United States was not sufficient. Joe Rollins, like many African Americans, experienced the atrocities committed by the Ku Klux Klan after emancipation. He watched as thousands of African Americans were reduced to peonage and cheated out of their wages. He became disillusioned and argued that President Abraham Lincoln had failed the newly freed black population. Lincoln had died without providing a home for black Southerners. Turned out without food, clothing, or housing, African Americans were left vulnerable to racialized violence. Rollins, therefore, argued that black men and women should return to their true home in Africa.¹⁵⁰ Dempsey Jordan, in his interview with the Federal Writers' Project, similarly described Africa as "the place all these here negroes need to be."¹⁵¹

Emigration to Africa received increasing support in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Some black men and women believed that settlement in Africa was the only way to escape the economic, racial, and political problems that confronted black people in the United States.¹⁵² Reverend C. H. Pearce, a pioneer of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Florida and a respected political leader, became an outspoken advocate of black emigration to Africa. He stated, "Were I a young man I would not stand the insults of the American white people; and above all this we have a higher and grander

¹⁴⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 13.3: 270.

¹⁵⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-9.4: 1900. For additional examples of migration as a method of resistance, see 14.1: 90; 8.7: 155; 6.1: 421; and S1-3.1: 117.

¹⁵¹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-6.5: 2165-2166.

¹⁵² Keisha N. Blain, *Set the World on Fire: Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Freedom* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), chap. 2.

object in view, namely the civilization of benighted Africa.”¹⁵³ Some African Americans in Tampa, Florida even went as far as to charter a steamer to take them to Liberia.¹⁵⁴ Bishop Henry Turner McNeal, after witnessing the collapse of Reconstruction, urged black men and women to emigrate. He argued that only extinction awaited those who remained in the United States due to widespread racialized violence. In 1884, freedwoman Chaney Mack’s father disappeared. Looking back, in her interview with the Federal Writers’ Project, she concluded that he likely went with Bishop Turner to Africa.¹⁵⁵ Many African Americans felt that their lives would improve if they emigrated to Africa.

The majority of African Americans, however, felt that the United States was their home.¹⁵⁶ Frederick Douglass, for example, openly criticized emigration efforts.¹⁵⁷ Reverend Lafayette Price of Texas similarly condemned the colonization movement. When rumours began to circulate that black men and women were going to return to Africa, Price opposed the plan. He argued, “I bo’n yere ... and yere I doin’ to stay.”¹⁵⁸ Many black men and women were unwilling to be pushed from their homes by hostile white Southerners. As a result, migration remained primarily concentrated within the United States.

¹⁵³ “African Emigration,” *Christian Recorder* (Boston, Massachusetts), 25 July 1878.

¹⁵⁴ Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed*, 73.

¹⁵⁵ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-9.4: 1418. See also 13.3: 270.

¹⁵⁶ The colonization movement was highly controversial in the United States. See Claude A. Clegg, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Kwando M. Kinshasa, *Emigration vs. Assimilation: The Debate in the African American Press, 1827-1861* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1988); and Ousmane K. Power-Greene, *Against Wind and Tide: The African American Struggle Against the Colonization Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

¹⁵⁷ Blain, *Set the World on Fire*, 69.

¹⁵⁸ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 5.3: 204 and S2-8.7: 3183.

Patterns of migration changed following slavery. Where enslaved men had previously constituted the vast majority of migrants, black women now began to migrate in greater numbers. No longer restricted by the dangers of escaping with children, it was possible for black women to escape oppressive conditions on a more permanent basis. Maria White described her mother's actions when she first learned of her freedom: "Quick as my ma heard it, she left that place and took me and my sister with her." Where White's mother previously would have struggled to escape with two young children, freedom offered her the ability to migrate in search of better conditions.¹⁵⁹ Temple Cummings similarly described how her mother left the plantation where she had been enslaved. When freedom was declared, Cummings' master tried to keep the news a secret, but her mother worked in the house and overheard the conversation. When Cummings' mother learned that she was free, she "slip out 'r' d' chimney corner, crack her heels togedder fo' times shoutin', 'I's free. I's free.'" She then proceeded to tell the other enslaved people on the plantation what she had overheard and they all immediately quit. Initially the unnamed freedwomen left without Cummings, but she came back to the property at night to claim her daughter.¹⁶⁰

The decision to leave was never made lightly, but increasingly African Americans recognized that migration provided a way to demonstrate opposition to unfair labour practices. Susan Snow, for example, recalled how her mother would move between settlements working as a sharecropper. Whenever she was insulted or otherwise

¹⁵⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-10.5: 2280.

¹⁶⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-4.3: 1008-1009.

mistreated, she would simply pack up her belongings and leave.¹⁶¹ Indeed, many black men and women made the decision to ‘vote with their feet’ by removing themselves from situations of economic exploitation or physical abuse. Ann Drake complained that many black labourers lost their wages trying to cover the cost of rations and housing. Rather than continue the vicious cycle of debt, these men and women would migrate from place to place in search of better conditions. Drake recalled that her former master regularly had to hire workers and he continued to whip them if they did not behave subordinately. Most of these labourers quickly left to seek employment elsewhere.¹⁶²

White planters hoped that keeping African Americans in debt would make it impossible for them to relocate elsewhere in search of employment. Orris Harris, along with her parents, remained on the property of her former master after emancipation. They worked as sharecroppers, but each year found themselves in debt. They wanted to relocate but could not afford the travel expenses. Eventually, frustrated by the conditions on the plantation, they made the decision to leave regardless. They were forbidden from taking anything with them, but the prospect of securing a more equitable contract outweighed leaving behind the few meagre possessions they had managed to accumulate.¹⁶³

George W. Corliss, an agent of the Freedmen’s Bureau in Mississippi, encountered four freedmen on their way to Memphis, Tennessee. They did not have any definite ideas regarding their prospects other than the idea that “once in Memphis and

¹⁶¹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 7.2: 140-141.

¹⁶² *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-7.2: 648-649.

¹⁶³ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-8.3: 931-932.

they are all right.” Corliss ordered the men to return to their plantation and promised to inspect the conditions there. Upon his visit, he found that the field hands were at odds with the superintendent who knew little about governing men except by the lash. The freedpeople acknowledged that leaving would cost them their wages despite having worked for three months, but they wanted to leave regardless.¹⁶⁴ Because the South remained a bastion of structural violence, many African Americans made the decision to leave and seek employment elsewhere.

In the late nineteenth century, the pace of African American migration accelerated. In 1879, thousands of African Americans left their homes in the South to migrate to Kansas, Oklahoma, and Colorado. Nell Irving Painter, in her foundational study of black migration to Kansas after Reconstruction, argued that while physical violence was a widespread problem, it was the poor economic conditions in the South that encouraged this first exodus of African Americans from the South.¹⁶⁵ Of particular issue was the refusal of white landholders to allow African Americans to own farmland. This is not to say, as Painter articulated, that some landholders did not divide their plantations for lease or sale; however, in Mississippi, the Black Codes included a legislative ban on selling or leasing farmland to freedpeople. Moreover, when freedpeople did manage to buy land, they were often confronted by hostile white Southerners, especially those organized through the Ku Klux Klan.¹⁶⁶ T. G. Campbell, a black politician, denied that

¹⁶⁴ George W. Corliss to Stuart Eldridge, 9 April 1866, *Letters Received, Vol. 2, A-F, January 1866 – February 1867*, RG-105, reel 13, BRFAL-MS (M826).

¹⁶⁵ Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1976), 3–4.

¹⁶⁶ J. Michael Rhyne, “‘The Negroes Are No Longer Slaves’: Free Black Families, Free Labor, and Racial Violence in Post-Emancipation Kentucky,” in *After Slavery: Race, Labor, and Citizenship in the*

black men and women wanted to live in urban areas. He claimed, “The great cry of our people is for land.” Black men and women only abandoned the countryside, he argued, because they were “driven into towns by ... miserable wretches who are determined that they shall not have land unless they work as they say.”¹⁶⁷

M. Howard, a freedman living in Mississippi, wrote to the Assistant Commissioner of the Mississippi Freedmen’s Bureau. He complained that state law prohibited freedpeople from gaining access to land. Howard had attempted to rent a plot of land to support himself and his family, but he was not successful.¹⁶⁸ Each time he was denied, Howard demanded an explanation. He explained,

It was and is my wishes to show the world that we the free people and freed people was willing to except the new order of things and show to the world that we would work and that we was willing to work want to work and thare is plenty of men that is not able to hier and would be glad to lese or rent there lands but thay Say the law is a ganest them and now we to are forbid or denide the right of renting [sic].¹⁶⁹

Although Reconstruction legislation invalidated the Black Codes, few efforts were made to enact significant land reform. Many white Southerners recognized that if they could prevent African Americans from gaining access to land, they would eventually be forced to return to wage labour. What they perhaps had not considered, however, was the willingness of African Americans to relocate to areas where they might find more favourable conditions. Jacob Taylor, a black man living in South Carolina, was among those who relocated to Kansas. After hearing reports of good wages in the Kansas wheat

Reconstruction South, ed. Bruce E. Baker and Brian Kelly, New Perspectives on the History of the South (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013), 122–142.

¹⁶⁷ *KKK Testimony*, 7: 861.

¹⁶⁸ M. Howard to Colonel Thomas, 25 January 1866, *Letters Received, Vol. 2, G-L, January 1877 – February 1867*, RG-105, reel 14, BRFAL-MS (M826).

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

fields during the harvest season, Taylor decided to relocate in the hopes of securing a better wage and a brighter future for himself and his family.¹⁷⁰

When the first migrants started their journey, those who remained in the South eagerly awaited news. Newspapers provided extensive coverage of the migration. Those owned by white Southerners, who hoped to dissuade further migration, regularly reported news of terrible conditions, personal misfortunes, and the general failure of the movement. The *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, on 20 March 1879, reprinted an article from the *Vicksburg Herald* entitled “A Southern Paper on the Negro Migration.” This article described hundreds of African Americans flocking to the Mississippi River in search of transportation to St. Louis. From there the migrants hoped to find further passage to Kansas, but many found themselves stranded in St. Louis without the money to continue their journey. A white woman living in St. Louis claimed that nearly two hundred African Americans were crowded within the two or three blocks near her office to secure further transportation. Those who made the decision to migrate were described as “perfectly destitute” and reliant on the “meagre contributions of colored people resident in St. Louis.” Moreover, the newspaper adopted a paternalistic tone, lamenting, “We don’t know how to prevent the negroes from being duped into so silly and ruinous a move, for they will seldom listen to reason.”¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-11: 305.

¹⁷¹ “A Southern Paper on the Negro Migration,” *Vicksburg Herald* (Mississippi), Reprinted in *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* (St. Louis, Missouri), 20 March 1879. A later article in the *St. Louis Globe Democrat*, published on 10 June 1879, expressed ongoing opposition to black migration, arguing that “with fair treatment the negroes are more likely to better their condition in the South than in any section of the country.” The newspaper reasserted its position, stating “we have never deemed it wise to encourage such migration.” See “Negro Migration,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* (St. Louis, Missouri), 10 June 1879.

The *Daily Evening Bulletin* reported the arrival of a large number of African Americans in St. Louis, Missouri from Vicksburg and other parts of Mississippi and Louisiana. According to the report, the migrants had been falsely told that “they would be provided with means of subsistence ... and free transportation to Kansas.” Moreover, the migrants had reportedly been told that they would receive land from the government, along with money, mules, and farming implements. The article decried the foolishness of African Americans for believing such rumours and described the migration as a “gross deception.” Migrants were supposedly destitute and suffering and few had the means to reach Kansas.¹⁷² But while they might read the newspaper coverage of the exodus, African Americans remained skeptical of the reports. They recognized, as one migrant from North Carolina did, that “the whites are doing everything in their power to prevent the negroes from reaching the State.”¹⁷³

Cognizant of white opposition, many African Americans sought information on their own, or relied on independent sources.¹⁷⁴ Those who personally knew someone who had made the decision to migrate were far more likely to undertake the journey themselves. Mississippi Freedmen’s Bureau agent George W. Corliss revealed, “I find that where one or more Freedmen becomes dissatisfied others are very liable to sympathize with him, and in case one leaves, others will follow.”¹⁷⁵ It was also difficult

¹⁷² “Negro Migration from the South to Kansas – Gross Deception,” *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco, California), 17 March 1879.

¹⁷³ “An Exoduster at Indianapolis, from North Carolina, Says the Whites Are Doing Everything in Their Power to Prevent the Negroes From Reaching the State,” *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco, California), 11 December 1879.

¹⁷⁴ Painter, *Exodusters*, 204.

¹⁷⁵ George W. Corliss to Stuart Eldridge, 9 April 1866, *Letters Received, Vol. 2, A-F, January 1866 – February 1867*, RG-105, reel 13, BRFAL-MS (M826).

to persuade African Americans to return once they had made the decision to leave. The *Daily Evening Bulletin* reported that African Americans expressed “the utmost horror” at the thought of returning to the South. African Americans in the South, they claimed, suffered “all the ills of old-time slavery.”¹⁷⁶

It was not until the First World War that African Americans began to move in unprecedented numbers from rural to urban areas within the United States. As many as 500 000 black men and women left the South between 1915 and 1918 to seek expanded economic opportunities in wartime industries and to escape the political, economic, and social tyranny of Jim Crow. This marked the start of what historians call the “the Great Migration,” discussed in Chapter 4. The mass migration of African Americans in the late nineteenth century, however, was the direct result of poor labour conditions in the South. Lizzie Grant, a freedwoman in Texas, accurately summarized the state of affairs in the South after the Civil War: “When the war was over lots of money had been spent, nothing won, but a lot of new graves, widows and orphan children suffering – their homes all wrecked. Slavery had not ended, no we just went from slaves to peons, and they are worse off than slaves ever were.”¹⁷⁷ The end of slavery required the integration of millions of African Americans into the free labour system of the South. While some found jobs in the industrial sector, black men and women more commonly found employment on the same land where they had once been enslaved.¹⁷⁸ Many found themselves struggling to meet their basic needs and prevented from attaining a better

¹⁷⁶ “Negro Migration from the South to Kansas – Gross Deception,” *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco, California), 17 March 1879.

¹⁷⁷ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-5.4: 1565-1566.

¹⁷⁸ Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, chap. 3; Rene Hayden et al. *Land & Labor, 1866-1867* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); .

quality of life. Sam Rawls, a formerly enslaved man interviewed in South Carolina, noted that the government never provided formerly enslaved people with the expected forty acres and a mule. Instead, many African Americans contracted to labour as wage labourers or sharecroppers.¹⁷⁹

The transition from slavery to freedom was never easy. Those who had been enslaved were turned loose without clothing or food “like wild beasts to roam over the country.”¹⁸⁰ Moreover, with freedom came greater responsibility as black men and women now had to support themselves without relying on the paternalistic benevolence of slaveholders. If slavery can be described as a manifestation of structural violence because it enshrined the subjugation of black men and women by stripping them of their basic rights and freedoms, then the postemancipation South can be similarly described because many black men and women still struggled to meet their basic needs despite having gained their freedom. Moreover, because structural violence positioned African Americans at the bottom of the racial hierarchy without many of the rights that characterized citizenship in the United States, many were left vulnerable to overlapping manifestations of violence. Indeed, structural violence was often entwined with to epistemic violence, sexual violence, and physical violence.

With the abolition of slavery, black men and women endeavoured to support themselves but they were hindered by white efforts to approximate the conditions of slavery. According to Lizzie Grant, a freedwoman from Texas, “In slavery time the poor negro was taken good care of, now after they were supposed to free the negroes, they did

¹⁷⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 3.4: 7.

¹⁸⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-5.4: 1567.

free them in one sense of the word but put them in a whole lot worse shape as they turned them loose to make their own way with nothing to make it with.”¹⁸¹ This narrative, in part, reflects a nostalgic view of slavery likely shaped by the presence of a white interviewer. We know that many slaveholders did not provide for their enslaved labourers and inflicted untold horrors upon them. Still, Grant’s comments on the transition to freedom reveal that black men and women continued to face constraints in the postemancipation South that prevented them from attaining a better quality of life. The government never provided the newly freed black population with land, farming implements, or even the basic legislative tools to protect their interests against white Southerners who sought to reinforce a prior racial hierarchy. By maintaining strict control over black labour, hostile white Southerners ensured that the South remained a bastion of structural violence.

Segregation, disfranchisement, and peonage became the common lot of most black men and women in the postemancipation South. Hostile white Southerners endeavoured to prevent black men and women from meeting their basic needs. Many white Southerners were reluctant to negotiate or uphold fair contracts with the newly freed black population, and overt attempts by African Americans to assert their rights were met with harsh reprisals. It is important to recognize, then, that resistance to structural violence represents a tactical choice made with an awareness of the balance of power between African Americans and white Southerners. While the meaning of freedom was initially vague, the newly freed black population recognized that their status as

¹⁸¹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-5.4: 1565-1566.

citizens entitled them to certain rights. And they were not willing to allow these rights to be trodden upon by those who would approximate the conditions of slavery in the South. In other words, the newly freed black population was not willing to endure ongoing structural violence and endeavoured to uphold a moral economy. A black field hand might burn down the crops of a planter who cheated him; a black cook might steal from her employer; or the black community might migrate en masse if they were being prevented from meeting their basic needs. Such methods of resistance did not emerge in a vacuum but were adapted from resistance methods cultivated during slavery. In this way, black men and women used their past experiences with structural violence under slavery to confront the unequal distribution of both power and resources in the postemancipation South.

Chapter 3: Sexual Violence and Family Trauma: Race, Gender, and Family in the Struggle for Bodily Autonomy

Rose Williams, an elderly black woman living in Texas in the 1930s, spoke with an interviewer from the Federal Writers' Project about her experience of sexual violence. As a young girl, Williams was sold at an auction in Fort Worth, Texas. Enslaved men and women were frequently sold at auction, but enslaved women were vulnerable in a particular way.¹ Where enslaved men were purchased primarily for their ability to work as field hands or skilled labourers, enslaved women were often purchased for their reproductive capacity. Enslaved women could be put to work in the fields or in domestic spaces, and they could be exploited to produce children for the economic benefit of slaveholders. Sometimes this meant enslaved women were coerced into sexual relationships with white Southerners, and sometimes this meant enslaved women were coerced into sexual relationships with enslaved men. Regardless, slaveholders had few reservations about intervening in the intimate relationships of enslaved women.² Williams recalled receiving praise for her reproductive capacity as a key selling feature. She vividly

¹ On the interstate slave trade, see Walter Johnson, ed. *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); and Damian Alan Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

² This does not preclude the possibility of genuine relationships borne of affection between enslaved people. However, even those relationships were subject disruption at the hands of slaveholders. Marriages might be broken up by the sale of one party, or masters might dissolve chosen unions to arrange those he deemed more profitable. See Brenda E. Stevenson, *Life In Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), chaps. 7 and 8; Emily West, "The Debate on the Strength of Slave Families: South Carolina and the Importance of Cross-Plantation Marriages," *Journal of American Studies* 33, no. 2 (August 1999): 221-242; Thomas E. Will, "Weddings on Contested Grounds: Slave Marriage in the Antebellum South," *Historian* 62, no. 1 (Fall 1999): 99-118; Emily West, "Masters and Marriages, Profits and Paternalism: Slave Owners' Perspectives on Cross-Plantation Unions in Antebellum South Carolina," *Slavery & Abolition* 21, no. 1 (April 2000): 56-72; Daniel B. Thorp, "Cohabitation Registers and the Study of Slave Families in Virginia," *Slavery & Abolition* 37, no. 4 (December 2016): 744-760; and Tera W. Hunter, *Bound in Wedlock: Slave and Free Black Marriage in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017).

recalled the auctioneer shouting, “How much am I’s offer fo’ dis po’tly strong young wench? She never been ‘bused an’ will make a good breedah.”³

Mr. Hawkins, a prominent slaveholder, purchased Rose Williams to increase his stock in human chattel. After she had been living on the plantation for about a year, Hawkins ordered Williams to share a cabin with an enslaved man named Rufus. She was only seventeen at the time. One night, after preparing supper and tending to the house, Williams got into her bunk. Rufus proceeded to crawl into the bunk with her, which she vehemently opposed: “W’at yous mean? Yous fool nigger, a gittin’ in my bunk.” Rufus ordered Williams to be quiet and insisted that it was his bunk too; that they were to share the bunk as man and wife. Williams, however, protested. She shoved Rufus out of the bunk and onto the floor. When the enslaved man tried to return to the bunk, Williams armed herself with a fire poker and hit Rufus over the head. Rufus remained for approximately one hour, lurching about the tiny cabin while Williams clutched her improvised weapon. Eventually Rufus became tired and left. Williams barred the door to the cabin.⁴

The next day Williams complained that Rufus had tried to enter her bunk unbidden. However, she was told unequivocally that she was expected to join with the enslaved man and produce children for the benefit of her master. Her mistress explained, “Yous am a po’tly girl an’ Rufus am a po’tly man. De marster wants youens fo’ to bring fo’ the po’tly chilluns.” With the international slave trade abolished in 1808, slaveholders in the late antebellum South relied heavily on the existing enslaved population to produce

³ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-10.9: 4119.

⁴ *The Slavery Narrative Collection*, S2-10.9: 4121-4123.

enslaved children who could be either utilized as labourers or sold for profit.⁵ This commodification of the sexuality of enslaved people was not only profitable for slaveholders, but it also helped to further degrade and dehumanize those held in bondage.⁶ Slave breeding regimes caused immense grief among enslaved people, and shaped intimate relationships long after emancipation.

Williams left Rufus once she gained her freedom. With the abolition of slavery, Hawkins no longer had the authority to coerce Williams into a sexual relationship that she did not want. Now able to reclaim her body for herself, Williams proceeded to rebuild her life. Williams never remarried or engaged in a sexual relationship with another man. Her experience during slavery, so traumatizing, led Williams to commit herself to a life of celibacy. She explained to her interviewer, “De Lawd fo’give dis cullud woman but he have to ‘scuse me an’ look fo’ some udder persons fo’ to ‘plemish de earth.” When asked if she truly did not want another husband, Williams replied, “Mai’ied? Never! No Sar! One ‘sperience am ‘nough fo’ dis nigger. Aftah w’at I’s do fo’ de Marster, I’s never want any truck wid any man.”⁷

This narrative, as related by Williams to the Federal Writers’ Project, undoubtedly framed the enslaved woman as a victim. It is important to recognize, however, that Rufus was also victimized by Hawkins. Historian Thomas Foster, in his study of the sexual

⁵ On the abolition of the international slave trade and the rise of the domestic slave trade, see Walter Johnson, ed., *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration in the Antebellum South*.

⁶ On slave breeding regimes in the United States, see Gregory D. Smithers, *Slave Breeding: Sex, Violence, and Memory in African American History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012) and Ned Sublette and Constance Sublette, *The American Slave Coast: A History of the Slave-Breeding Industry* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2016).

⁷ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-10.9: 4119.

abuse of black men during slavery, argued that enslaved men like Rufus were often placed in positions of powerlessness.⁸ Although Rufus tried to coerce Williams into a sexual relationship, he was not acting of his own volition. Moreover, he never retaliated physically when Williams beat him over the head with the fire poker. Rufus, like Williams, may well have entered into the union against his will. While it is possible that some black men and women found pleasure in forced relationships, for many it was a last resort to avoid severe punishment.⁹

For many African Americans, freedom meant bodily autonomy. Having long endured sexual abuse at the hands of slaveholders, black men and women expected to be able to reclaim control of their bodies and reproductive potential. When Williams and Rufus gained their freedom, they immediately ended their unwanted marriage. Williams further reclaimed control of her body by remaining celibate.¹⁰ Yet the end of slavery did not mean an end to sexual violence. Black men and women remained vulnerable as hostile white Southerners attempted to subvert emancipation through the objectification and exploitation of black bodies. Moreover, hostile white Southerners continued to assert control over the reproductive labour of black women by claiming guardianship of black children through illegal apprenticeships, thereby causing widespread trauma to fledgling family units after emancipation. This chapter, then, explores two interrelated themes: sexual violence and family trauma.

⁸ Thomas A. Foster, “The Sexual Abuse of Black Men under American Slavery,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20, no. 3 (September 2011): 457. See also Thomas A. Foster, *Rethinking Rufus: Sexual Violations of Enslaved Men* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2019).

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Sexual violence refers to any act of unwanted sexual contact or behaviour, including lewd jokes or propositions, indecent exposure, voyeurism, forced marriage, and rape. Although sexual violence might be likened to physical violence, as both involved the use of physical force and injuries to the body, we should recognize sexual violence as unique. Sexual violence is a gendered form of violence experienced differently by men and women. Scholarly discussions of sexual violence in the late antebellum and postemancipation South often focus on the institutionalized rape of black women. And while this is an important topic and considered at length in this chapter, there are other facets of sexual violence that should be considered, including the sexual abuse of black men and the objectification of black bodies. Moreover, by focusing too narrowly on the institutionalized rape of black women, we risk failing to understand how sexual violence constrained the daily lives of black men and women, particularly as they endeavoured to (re)build families free from white interference.

It is necessary to acknowledge the legacy of coerced sexual relationships during slavery in order to understand the ways in which black men and women responded to sexual violence following emancipation. Slaveholders regularly interfered in the intimate relationships of enslaved people, denying their ability to forge lasting relationships and stable family units. After emancipation, hostile white Southerners attempted to recreate the conditions of slavery by sexually assaulting black men and women as part of a fantasy

of subordination in which the black community could not protect itself. Sexual violence, then, continued to function as part of a larger attack on the black community as a whole.¹¹

Widespread sexual violence served as a reminder that black people were not yet viewed as worthy of bodily autonomy. In response, black men and women tried to control their bodies and protect their families from outside interference; they formed relationships borne of affection and mutual consent in the shadow of sexual violence. As Herbert Gutman argued, the actions of formerly enslaved people after emancipation should be viewed as a demonstration of their most important beliefs held during slavery. When they became free, enslaved people were not just liberated from their masters, but also from the constraints that limited their ability to act upon their beliefs.¹² The emphasis on family in the postemancipation South, then, demonstrates the longstanding importance of family within the black community. Indeed, black men and women went to great lengths to formalize marriages they desired and reclaim their children after slavery.¹³ Of particular issue was the growing prevalence of illegal apprenticeships. Former slaveholders, used to controlling the labour of black children, often placed black children in apprenticeships

¹¹ Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence and the Meaning of Race in the Post-Emancipation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 8; Catherine Clinton, “Bloody Terrain: Freedwomen, Sexuality and Violence During Reconstruction,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 332; Noralee Frankel, *Freedom’s Women: Black Women and Families in Civil War Era Mississippi* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 111; Mary Farmer-Kaiser, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen’s Bureau: Race, Gender, and Public Policy in the Age of Emancipation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 162; J. Michael Rhyne, “‘The Negroes Are No Longer Slaves’: Free Black Families, Free Labor, and Racial Violence in Post-Emancipation Kentucky,” in *After Slavery: Race, Labor, and Citizenship in the Reconstruction South*, ed. Bruce E. Baker and Brian Kelly (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013), 123.

¹² Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 8.

¹³ Herbert Gutman argued that slavery, contrary to popular belief, did not destroy the black family. Rather, slavery forced many African Americans to adapt and created a stronger sense of solidarity within the black community. Family and enlarged kin groups became exceptionally important to black men and women both during and after slavery. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*.

without the consent of their parents, requiring parents to seek the aid the Freedmen's Bureau to invalidate the contracts and reunite their families.

Emancipation opened up new avenues through which African Americans could combat sexual violence and its impact on the black family. As Jacqueline Jones articulated, emancipation was not a gift bestowed upon enslaved people by Union soldiers or the federal government. Rather, it was a process by which black people ceased to labour for their masters and began to provide directly for each other.¹⁴ Black women, in particular, demonstrated a strong desire to put their interests – and the interests of the families – first. Indeed, black women resisted sexual violence and seized control of both their productive and reproductive labour by withdrawing from the fields, reconstituting their families, and reclaiming personal autonomy and self-determination over their own bodies.

The unique experiences of black women during slavery, as Jacqueline Jones argued in *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, derived from their capacity to produce children. Black women not only served as labourers carrying out physical work in the fields, but they also served an important function as child-bearers and objects of sexual ideation.¹⁵ Sometimes these dual roles – as producers of crops and producers of children – existed in opposition. A black woman could produce immediate returns by working in the field, but long hours toiling with heavy farming implements, walking long distances, and

¹⁴ Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to Present*, Revised (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 45.

¹⁵ Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 18–19.

enduring harsh punishments could damage her reproductive health.¹⁶ Some slaveholders and overseers, therefore, tempered their abuse of pregnant women or assigned them a lighter workload to protect their investment. Others treated pregnant women the same as any other enslaved labourer, secure in the knowledge that they could always purchase or breed another enslaved labourer. Lucindy Hall Shaw, for example, witnessed an overseer whip a black woman to death as punishment for failing to complete an assigned task. After the woman was killed, the overseer ordered an enslaved man to dig a grave. The woman was buried where she had been killed without ceremony: “He tok de shovel an’ jus’ roller her in, an’ den he shoveled in somethin’ dat I tho’t I saw move.” Shaw later learned that woman had been pregnant; the overseer had whipped her so hard that she birthed a premature child who also did not survive the beating.¹⁷ Such punishments were not uncommon for field hands, but pregnant women were especially vulnerable.

Pregnancy clearly did not guarantee safety. Indeed, slaveholders, overseers, and drivers developed specialized techniques that made it possible to physically discipline pregnant women. In Texas, one overseer stripped both men and women naked before whipping them in the field. If a woman was pregnant, he would dig a hole in the ground and lay her belly over the hole to whip her.¹⁸ This was supposedly intended to protect the child while still allowing the mother to be whipped. But the reality was that many women

¹⁶ On slavery and reproduction, especially reproductive health, see Marie Jenkins Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave: Motherhood and Medicine in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2010); Sasha Turner, *Contested Bodies: Pregnancy, Childrearing, and Slavery in Jamaica* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017); and Emily West and Erin Shearer, “Fertility Control, Shared Nurturing, and Dual Exploitation: The Lives of Enslaved Mothers in the Antebellum United States,” *Women’s History Review* 17, no. 6 (November 2018): 1006-1020.

¹⁷ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-10.5: 1927.

¹⁸ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-6.5: 1943. See also S2-3.2: 536.

lost their children, either while pregnant or shortly after birth. According to one enslaved woman, pregnant women frequently lost their children because of injury. When this happened, the mother received the blame for the death of her child. She then might be whipped further as punishment.¹⁹

It was not uncommon for black women to become surrogates for unruly black men who were more difficult to punish. According to Anthony W. Lacy, an enslaved man from Texas, his father refused to take his punishments and would often escape to the woods to hide. His mother, however, had been whipped so many times that you could not touch her back without feeling scars.²⁰ With her husband absent, Lacy's mother endured his punishments instead. Millie Manuel, also from Texas, was regularly whipped during slavery. On one occasion, she was whipped nearly to death after being placed against a post and struck repeatedly with a cowhide. The reason, she explained, was "cose they could."²¹ Not always able to escape their plantations or to resist physically, black women, especially before and after the birth of a child, were vulnerable to physical punishment.

Occasionally slaveholders tempered the abuses endured by black women. Reverend James W. Washington, for example, suggested that his former master had been a good man because he never allowed his enslaved labourers to be brutalized. He never stripped women naked to beat them, nor did he allow pregnant women to be whipped.²² But enslaved men and women were still treated brutally. That his master did not strip women naked to beat them, does not mean that he did not beat them at all. Washington's

¹⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-10.5: 2337.

²⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-6.5: 2253.

²¹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-7.6: 2569.

²² *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-10.5: 2199. See also, for example, 2.2: 145.

narrative also suggests that his master regularly beat enslaved men, suggesting that when speaking to the interviewer from the Federal Writers' Project, Washington was trying to find some way to frame his master in a positive light to meet the expectations of the interviewer.

Washington also did not recognize, or at least articulate, that any efforts by his master to temper the abuse of enslaved women could be rooted in economic exigency as much as paternalistic benevolence. In the antebellum period, slaveholders had to balance the need for control against their economic investment in human chattel.²³ This meant that it was not in the best interest of slaveholders to irreparably harm enslaved people. Washington's master still used violence as means of control; he simply tempered the whippings in order to preserve the value of his enslaved labourers. Robert Kimbrough, when interviewed in Georgia, denied that slaveholders inflicted harsh punishments without just cause because "consideration for property" made such abuse economically imprudent.²⁴

The most extreme abuse was typically inflicted by overseers. This was because overseers were simply paid employees. They were paid to ensure that enslaved labourers worked diligently and behaved obediently but they had no direct economic investment in the wellbeing of enslaved people. Slaveholders, in contrast, recognized that if an enslaved person was irrevocably injured or killed, then it represented a substantial loss.²⁵ Clara C.

²³ Andrew Fede, "Legitimized Violent Slave Abuse in the American South, 1619-1865: A Case Study of Law and Social Change in Six Southern States," *The American Journal of Legal History* 29, no. 2 (April 1985): 95-96. See also Jenny Bourne Wahl, "Legal Constraints on Slave Masters: The Problem of Social Cost," *American Journal of Legal History* 41, no. 1 (January 1997): 3-6.

²⁴ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-4.2: 365-366.

²⁵ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-9.4: 1852.

Young, an enslaved woman from Mississippi, saw firsthand the brutality of overseers and the general lack of regard that overseers displayed towards enslaved people. Her pregnant cousin was whipped so severely by the overseer that she died of her injuries. She had been targeted because the advanced state of her pregnancy made it difficult for her to work quickly. The overseer, when he realized that he had killed the woman, endeavoured to cover up her death. He was not concerned that he had killed the woman and her unborn child, but he did fear punishment from his employer who would have undoubtedly been upset by the economic loss that her death represented. The overseer threatened the other enslaved people on the plantation to keep quiet, and thereby managed to hide the death of the young woman.

Because enslaved men and women were considered to be chattel, they were deprived of legal rights to their person or protection from violence. Economic considerations might spare some enslaved people from the worst behaviour that characterized slavery, but ultimately white Southerners were more concerned with the need to control the enslaved population through violence.²⁶ Thomas Johns, an enslaved man from Texas, spoke at length about the various factors that influenced how enslaved people were treated. According to Johns, slaveholders sometimes hesitated to whip their labourers because visible scars might hinder a future sale. For many slaveholders, scars were a sign of disobedience or otherwise unruly behaviour. An enslaved person without

²⁶ On plantation management in the antebellum South, especially regarding the management of enslaved labourers, see James O. Breeden, ed., *Advice Among Masters: The Ideal in Slave Management in the Old South* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980); Fede, “Legitimized Violent Slave Abuse in the American South, 1619-1865,” 93-150; Tristan Stubbs, *Masters of Violence: The Plantation Overseers of Eighteenth Century Virginia, South Carolina, and Georgia* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2018), especially chaps. 1 and 5.

scars might be assumed to be submissive, and therefore could fetch a higher price at auction. The desire to preserve the value of their property undoubtedly prompted some slaveholders to act leniently. Johns, however, revealed that the widespread practice of slave breeding could mitigate such considerations. Even if slaveholders inflicted permanent damage, they could simply breed another labourer: “kill a nigger, breed another – kill a mule, buy another.”²⁷

The testimony of black men and women proves that enslaved people were sexually exploited.²⁸ The Slave Narrative Collection, for example, contains frequent references to slaveholders interfering in the intimate relationships of enslaved people. Johns, in his interview with the Federal Writers’ Project, described how some slaveholders terminated the marriages of enslaved people if they believed another union would produce more children: “If a owner had a big woman slave and she had a little man for her husban’ and de owner had a big man slave, dey would make de little husban’ leave, and make de woman let de big man be her husban’, so’s ders be big chillen, which dey could sell well.”²⁹

²⁷ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 4.2: 204. See also S2-6.5: 1964.

²⁸ Early scholarship generally denied the existence of slave breeding regimes. Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, for example, insisted that there was no demographic or economic evidence to indicate that slaveholders had interfered in “the normal sexual habits of slaves to maximize fertility through such devices as mating women with especially potent men.” John B. Boles similarly denied the existence of slave breeding as a widespread practice, while Noralee Frankel argued that while slaveholders had the power to interfere in the formation of relationships between enslaved people, they rarely used this power. Only recently have scholars begun to fully acknowledge the role of white Southerners in forcibly arranging unions between particularly fecund black men and women. See Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (Toronto: Little Brown and Company, 1974), 78; John B. Boles, *Black Southerners, 1619-1869* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1984), 24; Noralee Frankel, *Freedom’s Women: Black Women and Families in Civil War Era Mississippi*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 9-10; and Smithers, *Slave Breeding*.

²⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 4.2: 203.

Sometimes slaveholders did not even bother with the pretense of marriage. Instead, particularly strong black men might be used as studs. Nelson Cameron, an enslaved man from South Carolina, described the demography of his plantation: “Seem lak dere was more women and chillun than men.” This was because Cameron’s master, like many slaveholders, raised enslaved people “just lak a man raise horses or cows.” Cameron’s master owned a large number of “mares” and relied on other slaveholders to have “stallions.” Utilizing this particular method of slave breeding meant that a slaveholder could have a plantation full of children if he started out with just a few women.³⁰ Willie Blackwell, an enslaved man from Texas, similarly described how his father was used as a stud because he was big, strong, and powerful. Never formally married to any one woman, Blackwell’s father was loaned out to numerous slaveholders to “breed dey slave stock up wid.”³¹

Those men who were not used as studs, deemed inferior by their masters, were expressly forbidden from engaging in sexual relations with “de stud’s wenchens.” Any man who was caught in violation of this rule would be reported and punished by the overseer. Yet, as Blackwell ruefully explained, many managed to sneak around at night.³² Even enslaved women sometimes snuck off the plantation to visit friends or lovers.³³ For all that slaveholders tried to control how enslaved people interacted, resistance was common as men and women found ways to forge relationships that they deemed acceptable.

³⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 2.1: 172-173.

³¹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-2.1: 309-310. See also, for example, S2-6.5: 2109.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-2.1: 75-76.

Some slaveholders allowed enslaved women to arrange their own unions. In Texas, Mollie Dawson described how her master allowed each woman to pick out a man to marry. Anyone who refused to arrange their own marriage, however, faced severe repercussions. According to Dawson, if a woman refused to choose a husband, she would be taken to a “big stout high husky nigger somewhere” and left for a few days “jest lak dey do stock now’days and you bettah begins raisin’ chilluns too.”³⁴ Benjamin Russell corroborated Dawson’s testimony, describing how enslaved women were expected to “breed good strong serviceable children.” If a slaveholder saw an enslaved woman walking with a man, he would question her about the relationship. Failure to find a suitable partner in a timely manner would often prompt the slaveholder to intervene, sometimes forcibly arranging a marriage that neither party desired.³⁵

The ability to enter into marriage voluntarily was important to enslaved men and women. Ellen Rogers, an enslaved woman from Texas, refused to marry a man who had been selected by her master. She had already chosen the man she wanted to marry and refused to submit to her master’s efforts to secure a union more favourable to his economic interests. Even when she was whipped repeatedly for her resistance, Rogers refused to consider any other man.³⁶ Of course, some arranged unions did eventually result in love. Lizzie Grant admitted that her master treated her and her husband like stock. They had been placed together to raise children and nobody cared if the two actually got along. But eventually Grant and her husband learned to like each other.³⁷

³⁴*The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-4.3: 1122.

³⁵ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 3.4: 53.

³⁶ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 2-8.7: 3360.

³⁷ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-5.4: 1556.

They found comfort in their shared trauma, and while the relationship was the result of sexual exploitation, they eventually managed to create a happy and loving relationship.

The desire of slaveholders to control the intimate relationships of enslaved people fostered an ethos of self-reliance and self-sufficiency among black men and women. Enslaved women, in particular, found ways to sabotage the perpetuation of slavery through the economic and sexual exploitation of their reproductive potential. This is not to say that black men were spared the indignities of slave breeding; however, their experiences were quite different. Black men who were used as breeding stock never endured the physical burden of carrying a child to term while labouring full time, nor were they necessarily expected to have any role in raising the resulting children. According to one enslaved woman, the children that resulted from slave breeding never met their fathers.³⁸

Jeptha “Doc” Choice, one of the few enslaved men interviewed by the Federal Writers’ Project who had served as a stud, spoke openly about his participation in a slave breeding regime. Because he was handsome and in good health, Choice was in high demand to father children. He was regularly paired with young, healthy women for the sole purpose of producing children. Choice did not speak negatively about his experience, and almost seems to have preferred serving as a stud because if a “scrawny” black man was found sleeping with the women, he would be whipped or even sold.³⁹ Slave breeding gave Choice an opportunity to forge relationships that he otherwise would have been denied. Although he was undoubtedly exploited as his sexuality was commodified, he

³⁸ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-5.4: 1848.

³⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-3.2: 709.

found some benefit to the arrangement. Lewis Jones, an enslaved man from Texas, similarly explained how his father had sired approximately forty-eight children by five different women.⁴⁰ Because the alternative was to be punished or denied intimate relationships entirely, some enslaved men participated in slave breeding more willingly than their female counterparts.

The rape of enslaved women was common in unwanted marriages. Mary Gaffney, along with her mother, laboured on a plantation in Texas. When the two women were first brought to the plantation, they were both married to enslaved men because “it was what Maser said to do.” While she did not speak at length about her mother’s experience, Gaffney revealed that she hated her husband. She refused to let the man touch her; she did not treat him as her husband. It was only after the man reported Gaffney’s resistance to the slaveholder that Gaffney relented. After being brutally whipped as punishment, Gaffney reluctantly “let the negro have his way.”⁴¹

Gaffney was keenly aware that her master was exploiting her reproductive capacity for economic gain. She was forced to marry because her master wanted to “raise him a lot more slaves.” But even though Gaffney eventually relented to the forced marriage, she took great pride in cheating her master. Almost elated by her deception, Gaffney revealed to her interviewer that she “still cheated Maser” because she “never did have any slaves to grow.” Gaffney regularly engaged in sexual relations with her husband, keeping up the pretense of a successful union and thereby placating both her master and husband. But over the course of her marriage she never produced a single

⁴⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-6.5: 2109.

⁴¹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-5.4: 1453.

child. This was because she chewed on cotton root bark, an abortifacient commonly utilized by enslaved women to prevent the birth of children during slavery.⁴²

A slaveholder who was able to secure a large number of children could either expand his own labour force or sell the children for a profit. Charlie Cooper, an enslaved man from Texas, described the trauma that resulted from the sale of children. Because children were generally too frail to work in the fields and too young to be used for breeding purposes, they were more likely to be sold at auction. The resulting destruction of the black family was so devastating that many black women induced abortions in an effort to sabotage the perpetuation of slavery through the economic and sexual exploitation of their reproductive capacity.⁴³ In extreme cases, enslaved women might even resort to infanticide to spare their children from the horrors of slavery and to deprive masters of the labour of future generations. Margaret Garner, for example, fled with her family across the frozen Ohio River to Cincinnati in January 1856. Garner fled with a large group of enslaved people, including her husband and four children. When the family was eventually apprehended by U.S. Marshals acting under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, Garner made the decision to kill her children and herself rather than return to slavery. She managed to slit the throat of her two-year old daughter with a butcher knife, but she was subdued before she could claim additional lives.⁴⁴

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-3.2: 923. On fertility control by enslaved women, see Liese M. Perrin, “Resisting Reproduction: Reconsidering Slave Contraception in the Old South,” *Journal of American Studies* 35, no. 2 (August 2001): 255-275; and Emily West and Erin Shearer, “Fertility Control, Shared Nurturing, and Dual Exploitation: The Lives of Enslaved Mothers in the Antebellum United States,” *Women’s History Review* 27, no. 6 (November 2018): 1006-1020.

⁴⁴ “Stampede of Slaves: A Tale of Horror,” *The Cincinnati Enquirer* (Cincinnati, Ohio), 29 January 1856 and Levi Coffin, *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin* (New York: Arno Press, 1968), chap. 16. On the legacy of

The forced breeding of enslaved people represented the commodification of both the human body and human sexuality. These coerced relationships, however, did not always involve an enslaved man and an enslaved woman. Indeed, slaveholders, overseers, and drivers were free to sexually exploit enslaved labourers and did so with impunity. Betty Powers, an enslaved woman from Texas, stated that slaveholders, overseers, and drivers, all “took ‘vantage of de women like dey wants.’”⁴⁵

William Ward, an enslaved man from Georgia, exposed the depravity of slaveholders and the general lack of respect accorded to the desires of enslaved people. Ward, unlike many other enslaved people, entered into a marriage voluntarily with a woman he loved. His master, Mick Williams, however, did not feel compelled to respect this marriage and made it clear to Ward that the marriage was only allowed to stand because he allowed it. Williams informed Ward that if his wife had been pretty, he would have killed Ward, taken her, and raised children with her.⁴⁶ Ward did not doubt that Williams would have killed him if he resisted the sexual exploitation of his wife. Slaveholders stood at the pinnacle of a system of gender, sex, and racial authority. This position of power allowed slaveholders to force enslaved women in sexual relationships.⁴⁷ Ward’s wife was only spared because Williams did not consider her to be physically attractive.

Margaret Garner, see Delores M. Walters and Mary E. Frederickson, eds., *Gendered Resistance: Women, Slavery, and the Legacy of Margaret Garner* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

⁴⁵ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 5.3: 191-192. As historian Thomas Foster argued, slaveholders, overseers, and drivers undoubtedly assaulted enslaved men, too. However, there are few documented instances of this and I have found none in the records for Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, or Texas. See Foster, “The Sexual Abuse of Black Men,” 452-454.

⁴⁶ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 13.4: 133.

⁴⁷ Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 24.

Lydia Jefferson, a mere child during slavery, was keenly aware that slaveholders, overseers, and drivers raped enslaved women. When interviewed by the Federal Writers' Project, she stressed that her testimony was the truth. She insisted, "Now dis' is de truth what I tells you and what my eyes has seen." According to Jefferson, there "wasn't any purity for de young girls in de slave quarters, 'cause de overseer was always sending for de young negro girls to be with 'em and some girl was always finding a baby for him." Jefferson was not supposed to know about such violence; older enslaved women tried to keep the child from learning about the terrible fate that likely awaited her once she reached puberty. But Jefferson could not miss the influx of light skinned children on the plantation. Moreover, as a precocious child, Jefferson tended to listen to private conversations. This narrative underscores that despite efforts to silence testimony about sexual violence, the painful truth always emerged. Jefferson learned from the older enslaved women, despite their efforts to protect her, about the realities of sexual violence. She carried this knowledge with her for the rest of her life.⁴⁸

The prevalence of light skinned children made it difficult to ignore the sexual exploitation of enslaved women. Even those who never directly witnessed such violence could easily see the results simply by looking at the enslaved population on any given plantation. Adline Marshall, an enslaved woman from Texas, disclosed that her master never married during slavery. Instead, he kept an enslaved woman in his house as his companion.⁴⁹ Carrie Mason revealed that slaveholders, and often their sons, regularly

⁴⁸ *The Slave Narrative Collection* S2-6.5: 1943.

⁴⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-7.6: 2578.

produced children by enslaved women.⁵⁰ Because children adopted the legal status of their mother, this meant that many slaveholders held their own children in bondage.⁵¹

The children of slaveholders and enslaved women were sometimes excluded from both the black and white community. Ryer Emmanuel, in her interview with the Federal Writers' Project in South Carolina, described the children on the plantation where she grew up. Most of the children, she stated, "was black skin wid ... kinky hair." But one young girl "was yellow skin wid right straight hair." These typically Caucasian features singled the child out as the product of a union between a white man and a black woman. Indeed, the girl was the child of her master and she spoke openly of this fact. The girl had never been taught to lie about her parentage. To the other enslaved children, it seemed as though she believed she was entitled to special consideration because her father owned the plantation. To her white mistress, the girl was a reminder of her husband's infidelity. Emmanuel's mistress was supposedly very fond of the black children on the plantation; she would allow them to come to the house and gave them small treats on occasion. But the girl with light coloured skin and straight hair was ordered to leave the house and was never allowed inside.⁵²

Occasionally slaveholders treated their children by enslaved women more kindly. Sylvia Cannon argued that slaveholders treated biracial children with greater

⁵⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-4.2: 423.

⁵¹ See, for example, Wilma King's discussion of James Henry Hammond, a prominent planter in South Carolina who sexually abused at least two enslaved women on an ongoing basis and produced several children by them. Wilma King, "'Prematurely Knowing of Evil Things': The Sexual Abuse of African American Girls and Young Women in Slavery and Freedom," *The Journal of African American History* 99, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 176-177.

⁵² *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 2.2: 14.

consideration than they did black children.⁵³ The preference for light skin made such children desirable as domestic servants because they would be in close contact with white Southerners.⁵⁴ Close quarters, however, sometimes meant additional danger. Jack and Rosa Maddox, for example, described how their master purchased a “pretty mulatto gal” ostensibly to do needlework. In reality, having the woman work in the house was a thinly veiled excuse to keep her nearby; the woman was intended to serve as a sexual companion for the master.⁵⁵

The relationships between slaveholders and enslaved women were rarely kept secret. Those who lived and worked on plantations knew that enslaved women working in the house were objects of sexual ideation. When the “pretty mulatto gal” was left alone, her mistress promptly shaved the woman’s head. Humiliated and resentful, the white woman endeavoured to make the enslaved woman appear less attractive. In this way, she may have spared the woman the trauma of being raped. However, she also dehumanized the enslaved woman by shearing off her hair and treating her like livestock. Jack and Rosa Maddox refused to comment more on the situation, claiming that there was nothing

⁵³ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 2.1: 192.

⁵⁴ Winthrop D. Jordan, “American Chiaroscuro: The Status and Definition of Mulattoes in the British Colonies,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (April 1962): 183–200.

⁵⁵ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-7.6: 2531 and S2-7.6: 2545-2546. See also, for example, 13.3: 230; S2-2.1: 23-24; and S1-4.2: 436. On affairs between enslaved women and slaveholders, see Randall Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies: Sex, Marriage, Identity, and Adoption* (New York: Pantheon, 2003), chap. 1. Perhaps the most famous long-term affair between a slaveholder and enslaved woman is that of Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings. Both documentary and genetic evidence strongly support the conclusion that Jefferson had several children by Hemings. See Mia Bay, “In Search of Sally Hemings in the Post-DNA Era,” *Reviews in American History* 34, no. 4 (December 2006): 407-426; Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2008); and Robert M. S. McDonald, “Race, Sex, and Reputation: Thomas Jefferson and the Sally Hemings Story,” *Southern Cultures* 4, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 46-63

else to say about the abuse of enslaved women. But they concluded their interview by acknowledging that white men produced many children by enslaved women.⁵⁶

White men could rape enslaved women with impunity because enslaved women were not recognized as being human beings worthy of protection. Moreover, rape, as it was legally defined, did not apply to enslaved women.⁵⁷ In Georgia, from 1770 onwards, the law provided for the capital punishment of those “slave, free negro, Indian, mulatto or mustizoe” defendants found guilty of rape or the attempted rape of a white person.⁵⁸ Individuals who were not white were defined by the law as the perpetrators of sexual violence while being excluded as victims. Moreover, enslaved women were considered to be property without legal rights and could not legally charge rape despite being regularly forced into sexual relationships against their will. A slaveholder could press charges if an enslaved woman he owned was raped by another man, but the law saw this as a crime committed against the slaveholder rather than the woman herself.⁵⁹

In the absence of legal recourse, it was not uncommon for black women to take up arms in defense of their own lives. An enslaved woman in Texas, when her master tried to sexually assault her, responded by hitting the white man with a hoe.⁶⁰ In South Carolina, Thomas Goodwater related how Mr. Inning, a white planter attempted to rape Goodwater’s mother while she was working in the field. The woman refused to submit and resisted. When Inning tried to pin the woman down, she pulled at his ears until he

⁵⁶ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-7.6: 2531 and S2-7.6: 2545-2546

⁵⁷ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-5.4: 1580.

⁵⁸ *Digest of the Laws of the State of Georgia* (Savannah, 1802), quoted in Clinton, “Bloody Terrain,” 315.

⁵⁹ Peter W. Bardaglio, “Rape and the Law in the Old South: ‘Calculated to excite Indignation in every heart,’” *The Journal of Southern History* 60, no. 4 (November 1994): 756.

⁶⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 4.2: 36-37.

relented. Notably, Inning did not immediately punish the woman for her resistance. Instead, he went to speak with the woman's husband. Believing that he had a right to engage in sexual relations with the woman because she was his property, Inning complained and ordered the husband to chastise his wife. The husband, however, refused and laughed at the planter.⁶¹

Enslaved people might band together to retaliate against particularly cruel slaveholders, overseers, or drivers. In Texas, Stephen Williams described how six enslaved men killed the overseer on their plantation. The overseer had been a vile man with a tendency to mistreat young girls. Outraged by their inability to protect their daughters and wives from such treatment, the six men slipped out of their cabins at night to kill the overseer. When the overseer was dead, the enslaved men tied a plowshare to his body to weigh it down; they threw the body into the river.⁶²

Such open resistance was always dangerous. The woman who struck her master with a hoe was brutally whipped. The six men who murdered the overseer were hanged for their crimes. Even women who secretly induced abortions to thwart their masters' attempts to secure additional children risked being sold if they were deemed infertile.⁶³ Given the danger of retaliation that resistance invoked, those who bided their time should not be criticized. Similarly, those who resisted and were punished should not be deemed failures. Mollie Dawson was greatly hurt by the way that she was treated, but she knew

⁶¹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 2.2: 167.

⁶² *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 4.2: 4140.

⁶³ Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, Revised Edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 101.

that her options were limited. She argued that all enslaved people “had ter do best we could which nearly all of us done.”⁶⁴

Emancipation provided new opportunities for African Americans to combat sexual violence and its impact on the black family. Mary Gaffney did not know what to expect from freedom. But she had heard that in Africa, her race was free and not enslaved. Gaffney came to believe that if she could become free, then she would be like her grandparents in Africa. She dreamed of roaming the woods, living with a man she wanted, and not being bothered by the law. Gaffney briefly entertained the idea that she might receive a portion of her master’s land because “we [enslaved people] had made what he had.” In the end, all Gaffney received was her freedom. She did not receive any land, nor was she allowed to go into town without the company of a white man. Yet Gaffney praised the perseverance of African Americans living in the postemancipation South: “But somehow by suffering hunger, cold and everything a race of people could, we got by some way, I don’t know how and we are still here bringing more and more negroes into the world every way.”⁶⁵

Slavery, for many African Americans, was characterized by incidents of sexual exploitation, forced marriage and marriage breakup, and family separation. It is not surprising, then, that family became the primary focus of so many freedpeople after emancipation. Those who had been forced into unwanted unions as part of slave breeding regimes, for example, took advantage of their freedom to end exploitative relationships. In Texas, the parents of Mollie Dawson had been forced into an unhappy union in order

⁶⁴ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-4.3: 1132.

⁶⁵ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-5.4: 1454.

to breed enslaved children for their master. When freedom came, the couple made the mutual decision to separate immediately.⁶⁶

Formerly enslaved people found that ending an unwanted marriage was relatively easy following emancipation. The majority of slaveholders encouraged (or forced) enslaved people to marry. The resulting marriages, however, had no legal standing. Therefore, ending an intimate relationship could be as simple as two people choosing to go their separate ways. Many eventually married partners of their choosing, but some, like Rose Williams, responded to years of sexual exploitation by refusing to marry again.

While many formerly enslaved people ended unwanted relationships, others recognized freedom as an opportunity to legalize their intimate relationships. The Freedmen's Bureau documented and solemnized the marriages of freedpeople across the postemancipation South. Continuing a practice that had been started by military officials and civilians during the Civil War, Commissioner Oliver Otis Howard issued orders to keep a record of marriages between freedpeople. These marriages could be solemnized by any ordained minister of the gospel.⁶⁷

Each state interpreted the orders of Commissioner Howard slightly differently. As a result, the assistant commissioners in each state collected various kinds of data about marriages between formerly enslaved people. In Mississippi, for example, Assistant Commissioner Samuel Thomas issued Circular Number 1 authorizing his agents to keep a record of marriages between persons of colour. The resulting records detailed myriad

⁶⁶ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-4.3: 1122.

⁶⁷ Circular No. 5, issued by O. O. Howard, 30 May 1865, *Circulars Issued, Subject Index, May 1865 – June 1869*, reel 7, BRFAL (M742).

information about the people being wed, including the race of the people married, the race of their parents, the number of years they had been living together as man and wife, and the number of children held between both people. From June to September 1865, Georgia was under the jurisdiction of the Freedmen's Bureau in South Carolina. In both states, an elaborate set of marriage rules outlined who was eligible to marry, and who could grant permits and solemnize marriages. In Texas, the assistant commissioner issued a circular in March 1866 outlining marriage rules and advising the Texas Legislature to recognize the marriages of formerly enslaved people who lived in accordance with the state's common law marriage practices. Because of the variations across state lines, the exact number of marriage records can vary depending on location. In some states, like Texas, there is no evidence that the Bureau registered or issued marriage licenses or certificates.⁶⁸

The majority of freedpeople favoured the legalization of marriage. Signing a marriage certificate offered a degree of security against marriage breakup and seemed the surest way to guarantee familial stability.⁶⁹ On 25 June 1865, Philip Hartley and Sarah Henry officially registered their marriage with the Freedmen's Bureau in Mississippi. Having lived together intermittently for approximately fourteen years, Hartley and Henry already recognized themselves as a married couple; they were forty-five and forty-three respectively when they registered their marriage and already had four children between

⁶⁸ On the marriage registers of the Freedmen's Bureau, see Elaine C. Everly, "Marriage Registers of Freedom," *Prologue: Journal of the National Archives* 5, no. 3 (Fall 1973): 150-154; Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, 18-24; and Reginald Washington, "Sealing the Sacred Bonds of Holy Matrimony: The Freedmen's Bureau Marriage Records," *Prologue: Journal of the National Archives* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 58-65

⁶⁹ Frankel, *Freedom's Women*, 79-81.

them.⁷⁰ The marriage certificate issued by the Freedmen's Bureau, however, marked the first time that their union would be legally recognized in the United States.

For Hartley and Henry, like thousands of other freedpeople, their marriage certificate represented the hope that they could live as a family in the same household free from white interference. This was particularly important for those who wanted to reclaim their children after slavery. Although emancipation technically secured the freedom of all enslaved people, regardless of age, many black children were still held in bondage following the abolition of slavery. Annie Huff, a freedwoman from Georgia, revealed that her former master refused to release the children from his plantation after emancipation. He insisted that the children were required to remain until they reached the age of twenty-one.⁷¹ Such arrangements were legal under the apprenticeship system in various states, though it is unclear if Huff's former master had made any formal arrangements to apprentice the children. In the United States, parents and guardians had long bound out children to provide for their support and training. After emancipation, however, the apprenticeship system enabled former slaveholders to maintain control over the reproductive labour of black women by claiming their children.

In 1866, Texas enacted a statute that allowed white planters to claim ownership of children deemed orphans under the guise of offering work in exchange for room and board. This apprenticeship statute was written without regard to race but it was clear to both black and white observers that the law was to be used almost solely in regard to

⁷⁰ Marriage Contract of Philip Hartley and Sarah Henry, 25 June 1865, *Register of Marriages of Freedmen, 1863-1865*, Vol. 1, RG 105, reel 42, BRFAL-MS (M826).

⁷¹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 12.2: 236. See also 14.2: 192-193.

black children. Because enslaved people were treated, traded, and sold like livestock, it was common for children to be separated from their parents at the time of emancipation. Without the protection of a parent or comparable guardian, these children were often classified as orphans.⁷²

The apprenticeship system, although supported by law across the postemancipation South, was essentially the continuation of slavery for children under the age of twenty-one. When a child was to be apprenticed, the standard procedure was for the county court to give ten days public notice. This was supposed to give any surviving family members time to challenge the apprenticeship and claim responsibility for the child. Black men and women, however, were at an enormous disadvantage because they were largely illiterate. Unless a sympathetic individual informed them of the public notice and explained their parental rights under the apprenticeship system, it was more than likely that the pending apprenticeship would go unchallenged.⁷³

The Freedmen's Bureau, in an effort to protect the interests of the newly freed black population, wanted to require the consent of either a parent or guardian for apprenticeships executed by local officials. The legacy of slavery, however, particularly slave breeding and the sexual exploitation of black women, complicated the efforts of freedpeople to reconstitute their families. In many situations, parents had been separated from their children by sale. Sometimes parents and children were not even in the same

⁷² Barry A. Crouch, "'To Enslave the Rising Generation': The Freedmen's Bureau and the Texas Black Code," in *The Freedmen's Bureau and Reconstruction: Reconsiderations*, ed. Paul A. Cimbala and Randall M. Miller, Reconstructing America (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), 261–87.

⁷³ Barry A. Crouch, "Reconstructing Black Families: Perspectives from the Texas Freedmen's Bureau Records," in *The Dance of Freedom: Texas African Americans during Reconstruction*, ed. Larry Madaras (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 44–45.

state at the time of emancipation. This made it very difficult for parents to reclaim their children after slavery, especially if they did not know where their children ended up.

Black men and women frequently faced deceptive and malicious white Southerners who used involuntary apprenticeships to control the labour of black children and hold them in bondage. While the Freedmen's Bureau tried to remain sympathetic to the efforts of parents to reclaim their children, this sympathy had its limits and agents sometimes wavered in their commitment. Agents were sometimes more concerned with preventing the newly freed black population from becoming dependent on the government for support than they were with reconstituting black families. As a result, some freedpeople struggled to combat unjust claims to the custody of their children.

Black women trying to gain custody of their children occupied a precarious position in the postemancipation South. No longer enslaved, white people expected black women to support themselves. However, they were also widely regarded by white people as dependents who were not capable of supporting children or sustaining legitimate households.⁷⁴ Harriet Hill, a freedwoman living in Coweta County, Georgia, contracted to work for Charles Axt in Taliaferro County, Georgia. A single mother of seven children, Hill moved to live on Axt's plantation where she laboured in exchange for one-half of the crop. Her four youngest children were too young to work in the fields and travelled immediately with Hill. Her three eldest children, however, were held on the plantation of G.B. Hill, who formerly claimed ownership of the family during slavery. He forced these children to labour in exchange for ten dollars a month along with rations and clothing, the

⁷⁴ Farmer-Kaiser, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen's Bureau*, 104.

cost of which was deducted from their earnings. As a result of this unfair arrangement, the children never earned anything and could not afford the cost of transportation to join their mother. Axt was willing to contract with the children, but first they needed to leave Hill's plantation.⁷⁵

Hill tried repeatedly to secure the freedom of her children. When she tried to retrieve the children herself, Hill was threatened and turned away by a group of local white people. They told her that if she “fooled around there, she would get a rope around her neck.” The threat was enough to stop Hill from trying a second time to retrieve her children personally. Instead she reached out to the Freedmen's Bureau. Hill wrote to the Acting Assistant Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau for Georgia. She asked the agency to afford her proper relief “by restoring to her and her children their rights.” She argued that she was their mother and therefore the children should be under her care. Furthermore, she emphasized that the labour of her eldest children was vital for the maintenance of her fledgling household. She suspected that the Freedmen's Bureau would go to great lengths to prevent her from becoming dependent on the government for support, especially as she was already supporting four young children. Hill emphasized the importance of having her children contribute to her household, arguing that her three eldest children were needed to assist her in tending the crop. When Davis Tillson responded to the letter, he stated that Harriet Hill had no right to contract on behalf of her eldest son, who was of age. Tillson promised, however, to ensure that if the freedman's

⁷⁵ Harriet Hill to Brigadier General Tillson, 5 February 1866, *Unregistered Letters Received, G-L, 1866*, RG 105, reel 27 BRFAL-GA (M798).

rights to liberty were being restrained then the situation would be remedied. The final outcome of the complaint is never stated.⁷⁶

Fears about the ability of black women to support themselves sometimes complicated efforts to secure parental rights. Jenny, a freedwoman from Georgia, complained to the Freedmen's Bureau that John Hockenhull had apprenticed her children, Josh and Frank, without consent. She asked that the children be returned to her custody. Initially the Bureau ordered that Hockenhull return the children to their mother. When the case was later referred to the assistant commissioner for further instruction, it was decided that the children would remain with Hockenhull until Jenny could prove that she was capable of providing suitable living conditions for the children.⁷⁷ Sylvia White, a freedwoman from Mississippi, similarly sought the assistance of the Freedmen's Bureau to reclaim her children from William P. Haley. According to White, she and her sons, Tom and Ned, had belonged to Haley during slavery. After emancipation, Haley had the two boys apprenticed to him despite White's opposition. When White learned that apprenticeship required the consent of a parent, she immediately sought to reclaim custody of her children. White was only able to reclaim her children once she promised to provide support and education.⁷⁸

Harriet Hill and Sylvia White, like thousands of other freedwomen, recognized that the apprenticeship system often functioned as a continuation of slavery. Black

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* Captain W. W. Deane to Mr. Charles Axt, 9 February 1866, *Letters Sent, October 1865 – February 1866*, RG 105, reel 1, BRFAL-GA (M798).

⁷⁷ Complaint of Jenny, March 1868, *Register of Complaints, November 1867 – August 1868*, Vol. 212, RG 105, reel 60, BRFAL-GA (M1903).

⁷⁸ Affidavit of Sylvia White, 1 May 1867, *Miscellaneous Records, 1866 – 1868*, RG 105, reel 28, BRFAL-MS (M1907).

children who were apprenticed to unscrupulous white planters were likely to be subjected to especially cruel treatment. They might be physically abused, provided with inadequate rations, denied medical care, and confined to sites of labour. The daughter of Harriet Butler, a freedwoman from Georgia, was involuntarily apprenticed to James Morris. The white planter regularly whipped the young girl, threatening to kill her if she attempted to leave. When the girl eventually tried to escape, she was captured, bound, and repeatedly whipped. Butler, unwilling to allow such treatment, tried to retrieve her daughter personally but ultimately requested assistance from the Freedmen's Bureau.⁷⁹

Ellen Blackstock similarly tried to retrieve her child from an involuntary apprenticeship. When George Jones seized custody of Blackstock's son, the freedwoman travelled to the plantation to retrieve the boy personally. She was driven away, however, when Jones threatened her with physical violence.⁸⁰ Phillis Peebles, a freedwoman from Texas, tried to retrieve her children after they had been forcefully taken by Dr. Milner. Peebles recognized that freedom meant she had a right to reconstitute her family and to enjoy the labour of her children. When she went to retrieve her children, however, the white planter, along with his wife and children, struck Peebles in the head with a whip

⁷⁹ Complaint of Harriet Butler, 22 July 1868, *Orders Sent to Local Citizens and a Register of Complaints, October 1865 – December 1866 and May 1867 – November 1868*, Vol. 103, RG 105, reel 45, BRFAL-GA (M1903). See also, for example, Complaint of Amanda Redmond, 10 July 1868, *Register of Complaints, November 1867 – August 1868*, Vol. 212, RG 105, reel 55, BRFAL-GA (M1903) and Complaint of Mornie Redmond, 10 July 1868, *Register of Complaints, November 1867 – August 1868*, Vol. 212, RG 105, reel 55, BRFAL-GA (M1903).

⁸⁰ Order Sent to George Jones, 17 November 1866, *Orders Sent to Local Citizens and a Register of Complaints, October 1865 – December 1866 and May 1867 – November 1868*, Vol. 103, RG 105, reel 45, BRFAL-GA (M1903).

and cut off her finger. They insisted that she apprentice the children to the family, which Peebles eventually agreed to do under duress.⁸¹

It was not uncommon for freedwomen to try and settle apprenticeship disputes on their own. Both Blackstock and Peebles were willing to put themselves at risk to liberate their children from involuntary apprenticeships. When these efforts failed, however, some black women found ways to resist with the assistance of the Freedmen's Bureau.⁸² When Blackstock failed to retrieve her child, for example, she filed a formal complaint with the Freedmen's Bureau. Upon investigation, the Bureau concluded that Jones could not forcibly separate a parent and child without consent. Jones was unable to produce a contract in support of the apprenticeship and he was ordered to return the child to his mother without delay. More important, however, was the Bureau's acknowledgement that Blackstock's efforts to secure her child were "not only natural but lawful."⁸³ Peebles found similar success. When she travelled to the Freedmen's Bureau, her complaint quickly secured the return of her two children.⁸⁴ With the abolition of slavery, white Southerners no longer had a legal claim to the children of formerly enslaved women. Blackstock and Peebles, therefore, were able to appeal to the authorities to protect their families.

⁸¹ Complaint of Phillis Peebles, 2 August 1867, *Register of Complaints, May 1867 – February 1868*, Vol. 54, RG 105, reel 13, BRFAL-TX (M1912).

⁸² See also, for example, Complaint of Martha Estes, 20 November 1868, *Register of Complaints, December 1867 – March 1868 and October – December 1868*, Vol. 328, RG 105, reel 65, BRFAL-MS (M1907).

⁸³ Order Sent to George Jones, 17 November 1866, *Orders Sent to Local Citizens and a Register of Complaints, October 1865 – December 1866 and May 1867 – November 1868*, Vol. 103, RG 105, reel 45, BRFAL-GA (M1903).

⁸⁴ Complaint of Phillis Peebles, 2 August 1867, *Register of Complaints, May 1867 – February 1868*, Vol. 54, RG 105, reel 13, BRFAL-TX (M1912).

The records of the Freedmen's Bureau are replete with complaints from freedwomen, and occasionally freedmen, regarding the destruction of family units as a result of involuntary apprenticeships. In Georgia, for example, a white planter seized custody of a young black girl following emancipation. Her mother, Angelina Ellis, tried repeatedly to reclaim her daughter, but the planter refused to surrender the girl because she was a valuable labourer. To reclaim her daughter, Ellis approached the Freedmen's Bureau for assistance and offered to pay for transportation. She also stated her intention to ensure that the girl received an education.⁸⁵

Freedwomen who were able to demonstrate their ability to provide for their children typically found success when asking the Freedmen's Bureau for help reclaiming their children. When Carrie Jones illegally detained the daughter of Sharlet Washington, the white woman was forced to return the child under orders from the Bureau. The agent responsible for the case concluded that Washington was capable of supporting the child and stated that Jones could not detain the child in violation of Washington's rights as a parent.⁸⁶ In the majority of cases, the Freedmen's Bureau was unwilling to deprive freedwomen of their children

Freedwomen invoked gender differences to contest the involuntary apprenticeship of children. They stressed the importance of motherhood, claiming that children should not be separated from their mothers whenever possible. Many found success and the

⁸⁵ Complaint of Angelina Ellis, 7 January 1868, *Orders Sent to Local Citizens and a Register of Complaints, October 1865 – December 1866 and May 1867 – November 1868*, Vol. 103, RG 105, reel 45, BRFAL-GA (M1903).

⁸⁶ Order Sent to Carrie Jones, 1 December 1866, *Orders Sent to Local Citizens and a Register of Complaints, October 1865 – December 1866 and May 1867 – November 1868*, Vol. 103, RG 105, reel 45, BRFAL-GA (M1903).

complaint registers of the Freedmen's Bureau contain numerous references to children being returned to their mothers.⁸⁷ Freedmen, however, were not always as successful. As Mary Farmer-Kaiser revealed, the legacy of slavery greatly influenced how agents dealt with custody disputes involving freedmen.⁸⁸ The laws and customs that maintained enslaved men had no right to children born out of wedlock made it more difficult for freedmen to claim custody of their children, especially when the children resulted from informal unions or slave breeding regimes.

Louis Lowry, a freedman from Texas, complained to the Freedmen's Bureau that H. S. D. Clarke had apprenticed his daughter, Eliza, without permission. According to Lowry, Eliza had entered Clarke's household during slavery after passing between several slaveholders following the death of her mother. After emancipation Clarke refused to allow Eliza to leave. Lowry sought the assistance of the Freedmen's Bureau to secure the return of his daughter, but the agent responsible questioned whether Lowry was Eliza's rightful guardian; some witnesses suggested that Lowry was not her father and therefore had no right to claim the girl. It is likely that Lowry fathered the child as part of a slave breeding regime. He was reportedly involved with several different women and produced numerous children during slavery. Eliza had been the result of one of these many unions. The complex family relationships that resulted from slave breeding regimes were difficult for the Freedmen's Bureau to understand. As a result, the agency further victimized those involved by refusing to acknowledge parental rights. Without a

⁸⁷ For a detailed discussion of the efforts of black women to reclaim their children, see Karin L. Zipf, "Reconstructing 'Free Woman': African-American Women, Apprenticeship, and Custody Rights during Reconstruction," *Journal of Women's History* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 8-32.

⁸⁸ Farmer-Kaiser, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen's Bureau*, 134.

solemnized marriage, there was confusion as to whether Lowry had a right to claim his daughter. The case was settled when Desdemona, a freedwoman, confirmed that Lowry was the father of Eliza and that Eliza's mother had asked Lowry to care for the child. Only then did the Freedmen's Bureau order that Clarke return Eliza to her father.⁸⁹

It was not unusual for custody of a child to pass to a family member other than the father in the event that the mother died. This, too, could complicate the efforts of freedmen to reclaim their children. Henry Calhoun, a freedman from South Carolina, complained to the Freedmen's Bureau that his sons, Henry and Sam, had been kidnapped by J. L. Bouchillou. Calhoun complained that the boys had been taken under threat of force.⁹⁰ The agent responsible for the case, however, concluded that the children had not been kidnapped, but voluntarily apprenticed to Bouchillou. The contract had been approved by the Freedmen's Bureau. After their mother died, custody of the children passed to their aunt. She made the decision to apprentice the boys to help provide for their care. Calhoun argued that he had a right to the labour of his children, and he needed them for support. Without Henry and Sam, he stated, he would become dependent on the government. Henry and Sam, however, were only twelve and eight years of age respectively. Too young to provide sufficient labour to support their father, Calhoun was more likely to become dependent on the government with his children than without.

⁸⁹ Compliant of Louis Lowry, 24 November 1866, *Register of Complaints, October 1866 - February 1867 and October - December 1868*, Vol. 115, RG 105, reel 21 (M1912).

⁹⁰ O. H. Howard to the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands Office, Agent Division of Albany, Georgia, 1 June 1867, *Letters Received, March 1866 – November 1867*, RG 105, reel 32, BRFAL-SC (M1910).

Calhoun was denied custody and his children remained in their apprenticeship with their aunt serving as their legal guardian.⁹¹

Unmarried black men were less successful in securing custody because they were expected to provide for their children without assistance; the argument that a father needed the labour of his children for financial support was consequently less successful. Joseph Moore was only able to claim custody of his children after proving that he could provide support. Moore complained to the Freedmen's Bureau that Asa Watson had illegally claimed custody of his two sons, Ed and Daniel. Moore requested the return of his sons, who Moore argued were too young to negotiate a contract themselves. The agent responsible for the case concluded that while the children no longer had a mother, Moore was a suitable guardian. The agent ordered Watson to return the children immediately.⁹²

The efforts of freedpeople to claim custody of their children were further complicated when the children in question were not born to two black parents. The sexual exploitation of black women by white men during slavery meant that former slaveholders were sometimes able to claim custody of their own children after emancipation. These children, however, were rarely taken into the household as the equals of any legitimate, white children. Rather, they were continually abused and held in perpetual bondage. Jonathan Miller, for example, employed a large number of freedpeople on his plantation in South Carolina. Included among the labourers was a child that he had fathered by an unnamed black woman. Miller had few interactions with his child except to administer

⁹¹ Endorsement of T. A. Connors on O. H. Howard to the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands Office, Agent Division of Albany, Georgia, 1 June 1867, *Registers of Letters Received, November 1867, June – December 1868*, Vol. 95, RG 105, reel 32, BRFAL-SC (M1910).

⁹² James Kelly to Asa Watson, 21 February 1868, *Reports, Statements, and Settlements, January 1867 – December 1868*, Vol. 114, RG 105, reel 15, BRFAL-MS (M1907).

punishments. Indeed, Miller was a notoriously cruel man who regularly whipped his labourers.⁹³ Much of his abuse was directed at Fanny Little, a black woman who took responsibility for the daily care of Miller's illegitimate child. Although not the mother of the child, Little became a de facto guardian. As Miller continued to abuse the child, several freedpeople approached the Freedmen's Bureau to inquire about transferring custody to Little. Alice Ardis testified that Miller was utterly unqualified to raise the child. She argued that Little was "a more proper person to bring up a child of my own race than a white man who had been a cruel master."⁹⁴

Freedpeople held a multifaceted understanding of family. The exigencies of slavery meant that enslaved people forged relations of extended kinship that defined families both within and across plantation boundaries. Where a mother or father could not be present, other family members or members of the community might step in to help raise a child.⁹⁵ When Julia Malone's mother died during slavery, she was raised by a

⁹³ See, for example, Affidavit of Jane Harrison, 26 March 1866, *Miscellaneous Records, 1865 – 1868*, RG 105, reel 43, BRFAL-SC (M1910); Affidavit of Mary L. Dixon, 26 March 1866, *Miscellaneous Records, 1865 – 1868*, RG 105, reel 43, BRFAL-SC (M1910); Affidavit of Hetty Miner, 26 March 1866, *Miscellaneous Records, 1865 – 1868*, RG 105, reel 43, BRFAL-SC (M1910).

⁹⁴ Affidavit of Alice Ardis, 2 March 1866, *Miscellaneous Records, 1865 – 1868*, RG 105, reel 43, BRFAL-SC (M1910). For additional testimony regarding the cruelty of Jonathan Miller, especially towards Fanny Little, see Affidavit of Alice Ardis, 24 March 1866, *Miscellaneous Records, 1865 – 1868*, RG 105, reel 43, BRFAL-SC (M1910); Affidavit of Alice McKinsey, 24 March 1866, *Miscellaneous Records, 1865 – 1868*, RG 105, reel 43, BRFAL-SC (M1910); Affidavit of Morgan Bennerson, 26 March 1866, *Miscellaneous Records, 1865 – 1868*, RG 105, reel 43, BRFAL-SC (M1910); Affidavit of Harriet Levon, 26 March 1866, *Miscellaneous Records, 1865 – 1868*, RG 105, reel 43, BRFAL-SC (M1910); and Affidavit of Egypt Scott, 27 March 1866, *Miscellaneous Records, 1865 – 1868*, RG 105, reel 43, BRFAL-SC (M1910).

⁹⁵ On the structure of enslaved families, see Ann Patton Malone, *Sweet Chariot: Slave Family and Household Structure in Nineteenth-Century Louisiana* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Larry E. Hudson, Jr., *To Have and To Hold: Slave Work and Family Life in Antebellum South Carolina* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997); and James H. Sweet, "Defying Social Death: The Multiple Configurations of African Slave Family in the Atlantic World," *William & Mary Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (April 2013): 251-272.

“foster mammy.”⁹⁶ It is not surprising, then, that Fanny Little would take responsibility for a child to which she was not immediately related. In freedom, freedpeople drew upon kin both by blood and by bond in order to maintain family structure and ensure that children were supported and cared for.⁹⁷ When Jonathan Miller actively abused the freedpeople on his plantation, he demonstrated his unfitness as a parent.⁹⁸ The black community stepped in to remedy the situation, testifying en masse to the Freedmen’s Bureau about the abuse they had suffered at the hands of their employer in an effort to transfer custody of Miller’s child to a more suitable guardian.

The efforts of formerly enslaved people to reconstitute their families caused white Southerners to feel that their economic, social, and political expectations were being challenged. Used to exerting their dominance over black men and women, and having unrestrained access to their productive and reproductive labour, hostile white Southerners responded with greater violence. For some black men and women, this meant an increase in physical violence – whippings, beatings, lynchings riots. For others, especially women, sexual violence persevered as an integral component of their experience in the postemancipation South. Indeed, hostile white southerners continued to sexually exploit black women just as they had under slavery

⁹⁶*The Slave Narrative Collection*, 5.3: 43.

⁹⁷ See also Complaint of Ellen Jones and Mary Lewis, 13 August 1867, *Register of Complaints, June 1867 – December 1868*, RG 105, reel 12, BRFAL-TX (M1912). Sometimes grandparents assumed custody if a child’s parents were deceased or otherwise not present. See, for example, Complaint of Mary Warren, 12 November 1866, *Register of Complaints, October 1866 – February 1867 and October – December 1868*, Vol. 115, RG 105, reel 21, BRFAL-TX (M912)

⁹⁸ Affidavit of Alice Ardis, 2 March 1866, *Miscellaneous Records, 1865 – 1868*, RG 105, reel 43, BRFAL-SC (M1910).

The institutionalized rape of black women by white men constituted an attack on the newly freed black population. Samuel Berg, a freedman from South Carolina, complained to the Freedmen's Bureau that George Byrd, a white man, had raped his sixteen-year-old daughter, Julia. Berg had contracted to work for Byrd, along with his daughter and wife, in exchange for one-third of the crop. On 20 June 1866, Julia came home and told her mother that Byrd had "flog [sic] her down in the field and enjoyed his satisfaction with her." Berg confronted his employer in an effort to protect his daughter, but the white man denied the incident. When Berg persisted, Byrd physically assaulted the freedman and threatened to shoot him if he did not leave the plantation immediately. Berg never received compensation for his work on the plantation. Julia became pregnant with twins as a result of the rape.⁹⁹

Many black people anticipated that freedom would be accompanied by a strengthening of gender roles and conventional sexual morality.¹⁰⁰ No longer considered chattel but free citizens, black men and women recognized that they could now refuse to engage in unwanted sexual relationships. In Georgia, as of 1861, the legal code was amended to define rape as "the carnal knowledge of a female, whether free or slave, forcibly against her will."¹⁰¹ For the first time, women who were not white could be legally recognized as the victims of rape. After emancipation, the law continued to embrace an egalitarian definition of the crime. However, freedpeople quickly realized that enforcement of the law did not necessarily adhere to the same spirit of fairness. As

⁹⁹ Samuel Berg to General Scott, 16 April 1867, *Registered Letters Received, A-E, 1866 – 1867*, RG 105, reel 12, BRFAL-SC (M869).

¹⁰⁰ Clinton, "Bloody Terrain," 32.

¹⁰¹ *The Code of the State of Georgia* (Atlanta, 1861), 4248 Sec. XXXIII, p. 824, quoted in Clinton, "Bloody Terrain," 315.

Catherine Clinton elucidated in her study of sexual violence during Reconstruction, conviction for the rape of a white woman could result in two to twenty years imprisonment, while conviction for the rape of a black woman, if the case was prosecuted at all, might only result in a fine or imprisonment at the discretion of the court.¹⁰²

Although black women were technically protected from sexual violence under the law, hostile white Southerners continued to use rape and other forms of sexual assault – verbal harassment, forced exposure, mutilation – to enforce racial control and negate the promises of freedom. Freedpeople, like Samuel Berg and his daughter, quickly learned that freedom was no guarantee of safety from sexual violence. Moreover, local authorities were not always overly concerned with protecting the virtue of black women. As Hazel V. Carby explained:

The institutionalized rape of black women has never been as powerful a symbol of black oppression as the spectacle of lynching. Rape has always involved patriarchal notions of women being, at best, not entirely unwilling accomplices, if not outwardly inviting sexual attack. The links between black women and illicit sexuality consolidated during the antebellum years had powerful ideological consequences for the next hundred and fifty years.¹⁰³

Black women, as Carby explained, were not always viewed as the victims of rape. Rather, they were framed as willing participants in illicit sexual relationships. When Berg filed his complaint with the Freedmen's Bureau in support of his daughter and in defense of his family unit, the assistant commissioner advised that his daughter should "commence a suit" for bastardy against George Byrd and "obligde [sic] him to support his children." There was no suggestion that Julia should pursue a charge of rape. Instead, she was

¹⁰² Clinton, "Blood Terrain," 315.

¹⁰³ Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 39.

advised that her best course of action was to pursue financial support for the two children that resulted from her violation.

Because black women were viewed as being especially libidinous and innately licentious, it was unlikely that William Byrd would ever have been convicted by a jury for the rape of Julia Berg.¹⁰⁴ The best option to secure remuneration, then, was to pursue a charge for bastardy instead of rape. At the outset of the trial, Julia testified that Byrd was the father of her two children, a boy and a girl born on 16 March 1867. In response, Byrd swore that “he has had no illicit sexual connexion” with the black woman. He was a married man and denied having ever strayed outside the bonds of his marriage. When Julia produced the children as evidence of Byrd’s illicit actions, several witnesses for the defense claimed that the children could not possibly be the product of a black woman and white man. The witnesses discussed the complexion of the children at length, claiming that the children were simply too dark to have a white father. A magistrate declared that he had seen many “mongrel children” in his lifetime and that children with a white father typically looked more like the white father in colour.¹⁰⁵ The jury returned a verdict of not guilty; however, the assistant commissioner for the Freedmen’s Bureau at Orangeburg suggested that the verdict “was influenced more by the colour of the mother than by that of the children.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ On popular myths regarding black womanhood in the antebellum South, see White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman?*, chap. 1.

¹⁰⁵ The State vs. George Byrd, August 1867, *Miscellaneous Records*, RG 105, reel 97, BRFAL-SC (M1910).

¹⁰⁶ Brevet Major William H. H. Holton to Brevet Major Edward L. Deane, 14 August 1867, *Registered Letters Received*, RG 105, reel 12, BRFAL-SC (M869).

By bringing their complaints to the Freedmen's Bureau, black women endeavoured to claim their rights as free citizens worthy of dignity, self-respect, and self-determination. Many, however, found it difficult to secure justice as law enforcement and local officials tended to disregard sexual violence against black women. Moreover, hostile white Southerners often banded together to protect the perpetrators of sexual violence against black women. Patsy, a freedwoman from South Carolina, attempted to force William Harper, a white man, to recognize her child as his own. According to Patsy, her daughter was the result of an illicit sexual relationship with Harper. When she asked Harper to claim the child and provide support, Harper threatened to kill Patsy if she told anyone that he was the father. Harper's nephew later learned about the existence of the child and Patsy's plan to name Harper as the father. The young man visited the freedwoman and, in an effort to protect the reputation and fortune of his uncle, told Patsy that if she continued in her efforts to claim support for her child then "she would certainly be killed."¹⁰⁷ In this context, the decision to seek justice via the legal system was exceptionally brave. Not only did Patsy confront issues of sexual violence and family trauma in her bid to seek child support, but she faced epistemic violence and the threat of physical violence as the nephew tried to silence her testimony.¹⁰⁸

George Richard complained to the Freedmen's Bureau regarding the attempted rape of his daughter, Rose, by John Richardson. On 3 October 1868, Richardson, along

¹⁰⁷ Affidavit of Patsy (No Last Name Given), 11 August 1868, Miscellaneous Records Relating to Affidavits, Charges and Specifications, and Proceedings of Provost Courts, September 1866 – August 1867, RG 105, reel 51, BRFAL-SC (M1910).

¹⁰⁸ On testimony as resistance, please refer to Chapter 1. See also Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*, chap. 6.

with several other white men, came to Richard's home. Richardson attempted to rape Rose and "did bruise and otherwise maltreat her." In addition to the attempted rape, the other men present also stole an Enfield rifle, three boxes of gun caps, and two chains. Richard's complaint was sufficient to secure a warrant of arrest for Richardson. However, the man managed to provide an alibi and was acquitted.¹⁰⁹ Of course, it is possible that this alibi was legitimate, but the details included in Richard's complaint leave little doubt regarding the identity of the man who tried to rape his daughter. It is more likely that someone swore a false alibi, perhaps motivated by sympathy for the defendant and a belief in the superiority of the white race. It was not uncommon for white Southerners to engage in a conspiracy to obstruct justice in an effort to restore the prior racial order in which African Americans were unable to claim the rights and protections of free citizens.¹¹⁰

In addition to being devastating for black women, rape served as a surrogate attack on black men. Catherine Clinton, Noralee Frankel, and Hannah Rosen, among others, have all described the institutionalized rape of black women as part of a fantasy of subordination on the part of white men whereby black fathers and husbands could not prevent violence against their female family members.¹¹¹ Edward Carter, a freedman from Mississippi, testified before the congressional committee that his daughter had been raped

¹⁰⁹ Complaint of George Richard, 2 November 1868, Register of Complaints, November – December 1868, Vol. 136, RG 105, reel 24, BRFAL-TX (M1912).

¹¹⁰ On white Southerners swearing false alibis, see Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 204.

¹¹¹ Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence and the Meaning of Race in the Post-Emancipation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 8; Clinton, "Bloody Terrain," 332; Frankel, *Freedom's Women*, 111; and Farmer-Kaiser, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen's Bureau*, 162.

by a group of white men who wanted to punish Carter for his refusal to submit. After Carter had refused to relinquish his property, the men found his daughter in the field where she was milking the cows. They “put a leather girth on her neck to prevent her hollering, and they carried her about a quarter or a half a mile from the house, and they ravished her.” Carter stated that the attack had been intended “to get what [he] had.”¹¹²

It is not my intention to suggest that sexual violence, especially rape, was solely intended to target men through their women. Rather, sexual violence against black women should be understood as part of a larger attack on the black community as a whole. Black women undoubtedly suffered the most direct consequences of such violence, but the institutionalized rape of black women served as a frequent reminder that black people were not yet viewed as being worthy of bodily autonomy.¹¹³ As Hannah Rosen acknowledged, feminist historians have long struggled with how to interpret indications that the rape of black women was a surrogate attack on black men. Indeed, it is vital that we continue to place black women at the centre of our understanding of sexual violence. Rosen suggested that scholars neither accept nor reject that punishing black men was in fact the aim of rape, but instead recognize that the men enacting the rapes seem to have been telling themselves that this was the aim of rape.¹¹⁴

¹¹² *KKK Testimony*, 12: 1083-1085.

¹¹³ See Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*, 217.

¹¹⁴ In the postemancipation South, masculinity was closely tied to the ability to protect women and children. Pervasive fears about the rape of white women at the hands of black men, for example, spurred many men to take up arms in defense of female honour and virtue. While these fears were greatly exaggerated, they have often been linked to the lynching epidemic that plagued the postemancipation South. This will be the topic of Chapter 4. On violence and white masculinity, see Carole Emberton, *Beyond Redemption: Race Violence, and the American South after the Civil War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), chap. 6.

With the abolition of slavery, the vast majority of African Americans wanted not only to secure political and economic justice, but to protect black women against unwanted and unwelcome sexual relationships with white Southerners. Rhoda Ann Childs filed a complaint with the Freedmen's Bureau in Georgia regarding a horrific sexual assault. Childs, along with her husband, was working under contract for Mrs. Amanda Childs of Henry County. One night a group of eight white men seized the freedwoman while her husband was away from home. Although the men had been looking for her husband, they seized Childs in his stead and proceeded to rape her violently. She described the assault in graphic detail.

They then Seized me and took me Some distance from the house, where they 'bucked' me down across a log, Stripped my clothes over my head, one of the men Standing astride my neck, and beat me across my posterior, two men holding my legs. In this manner I was beaten until they were tired. Then they turned me parallel with the log, laying my neck on a limb which projected from the log, and one man placing his foot upon my neck, beat me again on my hip and thigh. Then I was thrown upon the ground on my back, one of the men Stood upon my breast, while two others took hold of my feet and stretched My limbs as far apart as they could, while the man Standing upon my breast applied the Strap to my private parts until fatigued into stopping, and I was more dead than alive. Then a man, Supposed to be an ex-confederate Soldier, as he was on crutches, fell upon me and ravished me. During the whipping one of the men ran his pistol into me, and Said he had a hell of a mind to pull the trigger, and Swore they ought to Shoot me, as my husband had been in the 'God damned Yankee Army,' and Swore they meant to kill every black Son-of-a-bitch they could find that had ever fought against them. They then went back to the house, Seized my two daughters and beat them, demanding their father's pistol, and upon failure to get that, they entered the house and took Such articles of clothing as Suited their fancy, and decamped.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Affidavit of Rhoda Ann Childs, 24 September 1866, Register of Complaints, February 1866 – November 1868, Vol. 270, RG 105, reel 64, BRFAL-GA (M1903). This horrific testimony has been reproduced in numerous scholarly works on sexual violence and challenges of Reconstruction. See, for example, Clinton, "Bloody Terrain," 328-329; Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 33-34; Farmer-Kaiser, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen's Bureau*, 161-162; and Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*, 216-217.

The brutality described by Childs underscores the determination of hostile white Southerners to uphold white supremacy and oppress the newly freed black population. As the wife of a black Union soldier, Childs represented the new racial order that positioned black people alongside white people as free citizens in the postemancipation South. She was a reminder of everything that the South had lost in the aftermath of the Civil War. The assault on Childs, then, should be understood as part of a broader attack on the black community.

The large number of complaints regarding sexual violence filed by black men attests to a strong desire to protect black women. While black men were not afraid to directly intervene in attempts to rape black women, they quickly realized that such efforts were rarely successful and often incredibly dangerous. Sally Berry filed a complaint with the Freedmen's Bureau after John Jones sexually assaulted her daughter, Amanda. On 25 November 1865, a group of freedpeople were attending a quilting bee. Jones interrupted the event, throwing Amanda on the floor and, in the presence of a number of freedpeople "attempted to ravish" her. The reason for the attempted rape is unclear, but Amanda's brother, Jim, "did interfere and protested against such violence." In response, Jones drew his pistol and shot Jim in the heart. The wound was fatal.¹¹⁶ When Elijah Cox sexually assaulted the wife of Arthur Young, the freedwoman immediately reported the abuse to her husband. Young responded by quitting and finding another place to work. When he

¹¹⁶ Affidavit of Sally Berry, 28 November 1865, *Affidavits and Other Papers Relating to Freedmen's Complaints, A-Y, 1865 – 1868*, RG 105, reel 48, BRFAL-GA (M1903).

returned to Cox's plantation to retrieve his belongings, Cox drew a pistol and threatened the freedman.¹¹⁷

Recognizing that efforts to protect black women from sexual violence were often met with further violence, many freedpeople found recourse by appealing to the Freedmen's Bureau. W. H. Hiestand, the subassistant commissioner for Hallettsville, Texas, secured the arrest of Henry Kelly, a white man responsible for committing numerous outrages against freedpeople. On 9 January 1867, Kelly, along with several other white men, engaged in a night of terror and debauchery. After attempting to murder a freedman, Kelly and his companions interrupted a party being hosted by several freedpeople. They discharged their revolvers among the women and chased a number of men away on horseback. Shortly after, Kelly continued to act "in a very bad manner" and forced his way into the house of a freedwoman. He used "the most obscene and disgusting language" before attempting to rape the black woman's daughter, drawing a knife and threatening to kill her. When the girl resisted, Kelly further threatened to kill "the damned negro and fifteen Yankees apiece." Kelly was widely recognized as being part of "a desperate set of scoundrels and the terror of the freedmen." The civil authorities, however, could not be trusted to bring the man to justice. Despite the existence of numerous witnesses to his crimes, Hiestand acknowledged that it was "impossible to convict a white man in the county." The Freedmen's Bureau, then, represented a valuable ally in the struggle against sexual violence. Hiestand ordered the

¹¹⁷ Complaint of Arthur Young, 28 August 1867, *Register of Complaints, August 1867 – January 1868*, Vol. 112, RG 105, reel 15, BRFAL-MS (M1907).

immediate arrest of Kelly, even without official orders from headquarters, to prevent the white man from escaping justice.¹¹⁸

James Johnson complained to the Freedmen's Bureau that two white men broke into his house and raped his wife.¹¹⁹ Lucius Halliday complained that Bill Burlinson had forced his wife, Amanda, "to go to his room."¹²⁰ Gregory Hiter complained that a group of four or five white men belonging to the 5th U.S. Cavalry raped Polly Jinning. While Jinning was being raped, her father was forced to flee in order to protect his own life.¹²¹ These complaints demonstrate the unwillingness of black men to stand by idly while black women suffered. When they could not intervene directly on behalf of their family members or neighbours, black men raised their voices and called upon the power of the federal government to provide protection and redress. In this way, black men endeavoured to protect black women.

The complaints filed by black men are notable for a general lack of detail. While black men acted as allies by bringing attention to a resurgence of sexual violence in the postemancipation South, they were not the people who could speak directly to the trauma experienced by black women. When Johnson, Halliday, and Hiter complained to the Freedmen's Bureau, they reasserted themselves as the protectors of their female family

¹¹⁸ W. H. Hiestand to J. T. Kirkman, 25 March 1867, Letters Sent, May – June 1866 and October 1866 – March 1868, Vol. 114, RG 105, reel 21, BRFAL-TX (M1912)

¹¹⁹ Complaint of James Johnson, 25 December 1865, *Register of Complaints, December 1865 – June 1867*, Vol. 109, RG 105, reel 22, BRFAL-TX (M1912).

¹²⁰ Complaint of Lucius Halliday, 4 October 1866, Register of Contracts, July – August 1866, Vol. 51, RG 105, reel 12, BRFAL-TX (M1912).

¹²¹ Complaint of Gregory Hiter, 27 October 1868, *Registers of Complaints, July – November 1868*, Vol. 176, RG 105, reel 43, BRFAL-GA (M1903). For additional examples of complaints filed by black men, see Complaint of Charlie Jolly, 3 June 1867, Register of Complaints, August 1867 – December 1868, Vol. 216, RG 105, reel 55, BRFAL-GA (M1903); and Complaint of Tony Herbert, 28 October 1867, *Register of Complaints, July – October 1867*, Vol. 89, RG 105, reel 14, BRFAL-TX (M1912).

members. White Southerners wielded sexual violence as a weapon that not only emphasized the lack of bodily autonomy accorded to black women even in freedom, but also reminded black men of their powerlessness and inability to serve as protectors. Even when the Freedmen's Bureau did not successfully bring action against those white men who committed acts of sexual violence, the decision to file a complaint allowed black men to reclaim a modicum of power. By filing complaints, regardless of the outcome, freedmen brought increased attention to the epidemic of sexual violence in the postemancipation South.

Black women also acted in their own defense; they refused to be silenced despite the challenges of epistemic violence. Following emancipation, black women came forward in unprecedented numbers to share their stories of sexual coercion and abuse. In doing so, they asserted their rights as free citizens and demanded protection; they challenged existing ideas about black female sexuality and undermined longstanding notions that excluded black women from the norms of respectable society. Laura Danair, a freedwoman from Mississippi, described being raped by three men. Danair was at home nursing her infant when Scott Whiteside, along with three other white men, broke into her home. They seized the infant and threw it upon the bed. Three men then raped Danair. Danair was careful to avoid any indication that she somehow encouraged the assault. Indeed, she portrayed herself as a loving and devoted mother; she wanted to be recognized as someone worthy of protection.¹²²

¹²² Complaint of Laura Danair, 1867, *Register of Complaints, ca. 1867*, Vol. 121, RG 105, reel 15, BRFAL-MS (M1907).

Darlene Clark Hine, in her foundational study on black women's sexual vulnerability as the victims of rape and domestic violence, suggested that black women seldom made their private emotions the subject of public discourse. This 'culture of dissemblance' involved creating an illusion of disclosure and openness, while actually erecting a veil of secrecy to shield the inner aspects of their lives from prying white eyes. The inclination of white Southerners to ignore those considered marginal made it possible for black women to withdraw. Black women's secrecy or invisibility, however, also made possible the dissemination of stereotypes, negative images, and debilitating assumptions.¹²³

There is no doubt that many black women were circumspect when it came to speaking openly about sexual violence. The majority of public statements made by African Americans in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century were made by black men.¹²⁴ Yet when black women did report incidents of sexual violence, they spoke in great detail. We must pay special attention to those women who made the decision to testify about their experiences of verbal harassment, forced exposure, rape, and mutilation. The testimony of black women reveals a strong desire to hold hostile white Southerners accountable for their actions, and to force a wider audience to bear witness to the violence being inflicted on black women on a daily basis.

Maria Davis, a freedwoman from South Carolina, described her rape by an unknown man in detail. In July 1866, while Davis was laying in bed breastfeeding her

¹²³ Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West," *Signs* 14, no. 4 (Summer 1989): 912–20.

¹²⁴ Smithers, *Slave Breeding*, 60.

baby, a man entered her private quarters. Davis explained that she was busy tending to her child. But the man asked Davis to “give him something or another” and threatened that “he would give [Davis] another baby.” The man proceeded to get on top of Davis. The freedwoman tried to beat the man with her right hand but found that she was too weak and frightened to launch an effective assault. The man proceeded to rape Davis. When he finished, he promised to give Davis a dollar but left without giving her any money.¹²⁵

Because Davis did not know the identity of her attacker, her testimony was unlikely to result in an arrest. Indeed, there is no indication that the Freedmen’s Bureau launched an investigation to track down the perpetrator. Even when the perpetrators were known, it was not unusual for the Freedmen’s Bureau to fail to secure justice. The decision to testify, then, was calculated to challenge demands for silence, fear, and modesty. By speaking openly about her rape, Davis forced a wider, predominantly white, audience to acknowledge her suffering and the lack of consideration accorded to black women.¹²⁶ This is particularly evident in the description of Davis tending to her child prior to the assault. White perpetrators often tried to frame narratives of sexual assault as acts of illicit

¹²⁵ Affidavit of Maria Davis, 2 August 1866, *Miscellaneous Records, 1865 – 1868*, RG 105, reel 97, BRFAL-SC (M1910).

¹²⁶ On the difficulty black women faced in securing justice for incidents of rape, see Laura F. Edwards, “Sexual Violence, Gender, Reconstruction, and the Extension of Patriarchy in Granville, North Carolina,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 68, no. 3 (July 1991), 237-260; Laura F. Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), chap. 5; Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*, chap. 6; Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance - A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010) especially chaps. 1-3.

or casual sex.¹²⁷ By offering to pay Davis, the unnamed man attempted to justify his actions and frame Davis as a willing prostitute. Davis countered this familiar narrative by stressing her role as a mother. She was not a prostitute but a virtuous mother trying to raise her child to the best of her ability. Davis crafted her testimony to highlight her status as a victim.¹²⁸

The dangers posed by sexual violence ultimately made it impossible for black women to remain silent. Indeed, many black women came to recognize that if they wanted to challenge the falsehood that black women were inviting sexual attack, they needed to speak out and emphasize when they were not willing participants in sexual relationships with white men. Fanny Whetstone, a freedwoman from Texas, complained to the Freedmen's Bureau that she was sexually assaulted by Anthony Coon. Coon broke into Whetstone's house, threw her on the bed, and demanded "criminal intercourse." Whetstone vehemently refused, but another man then entered the house and threw himself on top of the freedwoman. Although Whetstone struggled and attempted to escape, she was not able to get out of the bed.¹²⁹ Ellen Parton, a freedwoman from Mississippi, was raped during a race riot. On the first night of the riot, a group of white men came to her home and claimed that they would do no harm. On the second night, they came and demanded any weapons she had in the house. On the third night, they raped Parton. At the time of the incident, Parton was working as a washerwoman for Marshal Ware, a white

¹²⁷ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs* 17, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 262–266; and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "'The Metalanguage of Race,' Then and Now," *Signs* 42, no. 3 (Spring 2017): 628–642.

¹²⁸ Affidavit of Maria Davis, 2 August 1866, *Miscellaneous Records, 1865 – 1868*, RG 105, reel 97, BRFAL-SC (M1910).

¹²⁹ Complaint of Fanny Whetstone, 21 November 1868, *Register of Complaints, November – December 1868*, Vol. 136, RG 105, reel 136, BRFAL-TX (M1912).

policeman. Ware hid in a pantry to avoid detection but left Parton to defend herself against the rioters. Marshal recognized one of the men present and begged him for protection. He refused, however, and retreated. The remaining rioters proceeded to rape the woman at gunpoint.¹³⁰

Whetstone and Parton refused to be held accountable for their victimization; as free citizens they had a right to refuse. When white men continued to act as though black women were still enslaved, these women brought their grievances to federal officials and demanded acknowledgement. Parton, after the riot settled and efforts to rebuild began, shared her story with anyone who would listen. She did not wait for an official forum, but “told a great many citizens” about the outrages she endured at the hands of white men. She not only spoke to prominent white men, but also respectable white women.¹³¹ The decision to speak to white women about her treatment is particularly significant, as race and gender stereotypes regarding pleasure and desire portrayed white women as pure, virginal, and uninterested in sex. In contrast, black women were seen as amoral and lascivious. Within this conventional framework, white women received protection against sexual violence; black women were, at best, left to defend themselves or, at worst, actively victimized.¹³²

Vigilante groups, like the Ku Klux Klan, positioned themselves as the defenders of white womanhood. They claimed to protect those most vulnerable members of society (women and children) by confronting the unruly black population that plagued the

¹³⁰ *KKK Testimony*, 11: 38-39. See also 11: 36-37.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Lou Falkner Williams, “The Great South Carolina Ku Klux Klan Trials, 1871-1872” (PhD Dissertation, University of Florida, 1991), 69-70.

postemancipation South. Black women, however, became the frequent targets of the Ku Klux Klan. While the Klan primarily acted against black Republicans – breaking into their homes, stealing or destroying their guns, whipping them, and ordering them not to vote the Republican ticket – many of the most brutal atrocities were those committed against disenfranchised women. Harriet Simril, a freedwoman from South Carolina, encountered the Klan on several occasions. Her husband was a Radical Republican and, therefore, a frequent target. On one occasion a group of disguised men arrived when Simril was alone. Several of the men spit at Simril and threw dirt in her eyes; three men raped her.¹³³

While there are references to rape in the first-person testimony culled from the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, these examples are relatively few. Even the testimony of Simril was heavily censored because the description of her assault was deemed to be “of too obscene a nature to permit of publication.”¹³⁴ Topics relating to sexuality remained largely taboo in the late nineteenth century. Such testimony, then, was not considered appropriate for publication, as the testimony from the Ku Klux Klan hearings was likely to appear in newspapers in addition to formal government reports. As a result, testimony about particularly egregious incidents of sexual assault were often excluded, even though the victims, like Simril, often went to great lengths to describe the violence they endured.

Far more common are descriptions of black women, often alongside black men, being forced to strip naked before receiving beatings. Caroline Benson, along with several

¹³³ *KKK Testimony*, 5: 1861-1862.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

other freedpeople, was dragged from her home in the middle of the night by a group of disguised men. All the women present – Carolina Benson, Mary Brown, Mary Neal, and Rachel Arnold – were stripped naked and forced to stand in the road. Recalling the incident, Benson stated that the disguised men “laughed and made great sport.”¹³⁵

Members of the Ku Klux Klan took great pleasure in humiliating freedpeople and forcing them to show their nakedness in a public setting. In Georgia, two unnamed freedwomen were forced to strip before a group of disguised men. One woman was ordered to strip her clothes down from the waist, while the other was stripped totally naked. That the disguised men did not order the women to show their nakedness to the same degree suggests that this action was not simply to facilitate a more effective whipping. Rather, the decision to force the women to strip was intended to humiliate and degrade.¹³⁶

The bodies of black men and women were widely considered by white people to be grotesque and monstrous while also being inherently sexual.¹³⁷ These ideas served to justify the actions of the Ku Klux Klan, and other hostile white Southerners, who refused to consider black people worthy of bodily autonomy. In South Carolina, a group of disguised men went as far as to use the body of a black woman to punish a white politician who supported black rights. William Champion, a Radical Republican, was taken from his home, whipped, and forced to kiss the “private parts” and posterior of a

¹³⁵ *KKK Testimony*, 6: 386-388. See also 6: 375-377; 6: 386; 6: 388-390; and 6: 501-503.

¹³⁶ *KKK Testimony*, 7: 597-598.

¹³⁷ Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), chap. 1.

black woman.¹³⁸ Not only was the black woman sexually assaulted, but the supposed inferiority of her body was manipulated to serve as a punishment for a white man, as performing oral sex on a black woman was considered to be degrading. Notably, the black woman is not even named in the testimony, nor is there any evidence that she testified about the assault.

Black men were also subjected to sexual violence at hands of the vigilante groups. Clem Bowden, a freedman from South Carolina, was taken from his home and stripped naked by the Ku Klux Klan. While Bowden was still being held captive, another group of disguised men approached with a white man. This man, a Republican, was forced to kiss Bowden's forehead and posterior. This was intended to make the white man "be on nigger equality." The white man was then forced to whip Bowden before being whipped himself. Both were eventually released.¹³⁹ This encounter was humiliating for both men, but especially Bowden whose body and sexuality were weaponized as a means of humiliating the white man.

Black bodies were often eroticized by white observers, who processed their mixed feelings of abhorrence and desire by inflicting violence.¹⁴⁰ Black men, like black women, were frequently forced to remove their clothes as part of an ongoing campaign of sexual violence. Willis Winn, for example, encountered the Klan several times while living in Texas. On more than one occasion, Winn was ordered to remove his clothes and run

¹³⁸ *KKK Testimony*, 3: 365-367.

¹³⁹ *KKK Testimony*, 3: 380-381.

¹⁴⁰ For a detailed discussion on the cultural fixation on black male bodies, see Foster, "The Sexual Abuse of Black Men," 448-452.

about naked. He was even forced to stand on his head in the middle of the road.¹⁴¹ On 29 October 1869, a group of disguised men arrived at the house of Abram Colby in Georgia. After breaking down the door, the men removed Colby from bed, took him into the woods, and proceeded to whip the freedman for three hours. As part of the attack, Colby was ordered to remove his clothes. The freedmen indignantly responded that he would not remove his clothes for any man.¹⁴² In doing so, Colby rejected the objectification of his naked body.

Clothing became an important status marker for freedpeople.¹⁴³ During slavery, many enslaved people were insufficiently clothed. George Fleming, an enslaved man from South Carolina, recalled seeing “lil’ naked niggers setting on de rail fences like pa’cel of buzzards.”¹⁴⁴ Some enslaved people might receive multiple sets of clothing throughout the year. Those who belonged to particularly benevolent masters might have nicer clothing to wear to church on Sunday. But overall, the clothing of enslaved people tended to favour practicality over frivolity.¹⁴⁵ Young boys and girls typically wore a simple shift until they reached puberty, at which point they might start to wear pants and shirts.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-10.9: 4256.

¹⁴² *KKK Testimony*, 7: 696-697.

¹⁴³ Amy Murrell Taylor, *Embattled Freedom: Journeys Through the Civil War’s Slave Refugee Camps*, Civil War America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), chap. 6.

¹⁴⁴ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-11.2: 134.

¹⁴⁵ On the clothing of enslaved people, see, for example, *The Slave Narrative Collection* 13.3: 81-82; 13.3: 253; 13.3: 298; S1-9.4: 1499; S1-9.4: 1711; and S2-4.3: 1030.

¹⁴⁶ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 13.3: 40-41. See also, for example, 13.3: 150; 13.3: 239; 13.3: 298; 13.3: 323; S1-9-4: 1792; S1-10.5: 1936; and S2-4.3: 1007. For a more detailed discussion of the clothing worn by enslaved people, see Patricia K. Hunt, “Textile Fragments Recovered from a Slave Cemetery in South Carolina,” *Ars Textrina* 22 (1994): 87-105; Shane White and Graham White, “Slave Clothing and African-American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries” *Past & Present* 148 (August 1995): 149-187; and Patricia K. Hunt-Hurst, “‘Round Homespun Coat and Pantaloons of the Same’: Slave

After emancipation, formerly enslaved people embraced the ability to buy new clothing, especially those types of clothing that had been largely unavailable during slavery. Black women began to wear elaborate dresses like those worn by elite white women. They challenged longstanding beliefs that such clothing was linked exclusively to white womanhood.¹⁴⁷ The forced removal of clothing, then, should be understood as more than a way to deliver a more brutal whipping. Rather, the Klan symbolically stripped freedpeople of their status as free citizens, returning them to a state more closely associated with slavery.

While some freedpeople, like Abram Colby, refused to remove their clothing, many found themselves with little choice but to comply. Even Colby, after he initially refused, eventually removed his clothing when the disguised men in his home turned their pistols on his daughter. This is not to say, however, that black men and women did not find ways to strike back at their attackers. Indeed, many of those who testified before the congressional committee stripped their attackers of their carefully constructed attire, openly naming those who had abused them. Those who rode with the Klan typically wore disguises – robes, masks, hoods, or other paraphernalia intended to obscure an individual's identity. These disguises were less about protecting members from the legal ramifications of their actions. As I have already demonstrated, it was extremely difficult to convict a white man throughout much of the postemancipation South even in the face of overwhelming evidence. Rather, the purpose of the disguises was to create the illusion

Clothing as Reflected in Fugitive Slave Advertisements in Antebellum Georgia," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 83, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 727-740.

¹⁴⁷ Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 214.

that members of the Klan were otherworldly and omnipotent.¹⁴⁸ Many pretended to be the ghosts of Confederate soldiers.¹⁴⁹ The Klan crafted a careful persona intended to heighten the terror inspired by their visits. By naming their attackers, however, black men and women chipped away at the power of the vigilante group and revealed its members to be average people from the community – business owners, local officials, neighbours, employers, and even friends.

Aury Jeter, a freedwoman from Georgia, was stripped naked when a group of disguised men arrived at her house looking for husband, Columbus Jeter. While some of the men carried her husband from the house, others remained to strip Jeter naked before they issued a whipping. When she testified before the congressional committee, Jeter named four of her attackers: Mr. Winn, Mr. McWhorter, Mr. Herbert Morris, and Doctor McClarty.¹⁵⁰ Augustus Mills, a freedman from Georgia, went as far as to track the horses of his attackers in order to identify them in court. On 20 March 1871, a group of disguised men forced Mills, his wife, and a hired hand to remove their clothes. Once the men retreated, Mills slipped out of his house to track the horses. Although the men had donned disguises, some were still wearing the same clothes that they had been wearing earlier that day. Moreover, the men had distinctive voices that could be identified.

¹⁴⁸ On the significance of the disguises worn by members of the Ku Klux Klan, see Elaine Frantz Parson, “Midnight Rangers: Costume and Performance in the Reconstruction-Era Ku Klux Klan,” *The Journal of American History* 92, no. 3 (December 2005): 811-836.

¹⁴⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 3.3: 128; 7.2: 104; S1-7.2: 334; S1-7.2: 347; S1-9.4: 1355; S1-9.4: 1900; S1-10.5: 1913-1914; S1-10.5: 2404; S2-3.2: 597; S2-4.3:1000; S2-4.3: 1106; S2-4.3: 1113-1114; S2-5.4: 1612-1613; S2-7.6: 2504; S2-8.7: 3094-3095; S2-8.7: 3127; S2-9.8: 3546; S2-9.8: 3571; S2-10.9 3974; and S2-10.9: 4063. See also, for example, *KKK Testimony*, 4: 797; 6: and 244 and 246.

¹⁵⁰ *KKK Testimony*, 6: 566-567.

Therefore, it was possible for the victims to identify and report their attackers. Mills reported William Felker to Governor Bullock.¹⁵¹

Although the records of the Freedmen's Bureau, the Ku Klux Klan hearings, and the Slave Narrative Collection were heavily mediated and subjected to interference from white observers, they allowed African Americans to create a unique record of their experiences in which they named, blamed, and shamed those hostile white Southerners who attempted to uphold white supremacy and the legacy of slavery through sexual violence and the destruction of black families via illegal apprenticeships. In the antebellum South, slaveholders stood at the pinnacle of gender, sex, and racial authority.¹⁵² This position of power allowed slaveholders to force enslaved men and women into unwanted sexual relationships, both with slaveholders and other enslaved people. This long history of sexual license on the part of slaveholders underpins much of the violence and trauma discussed in this chapter. After emancipation, many African Americans equated freedom with bodily autonomy. Black men and women expected to reclaim control of their bodies and reproductive potential; they expected to form stable family units and, often for the first time, to claim parental rights over their children. When hostile white Southerners continued to objectify and exploit the newly freed black population, black men and women realized that they could not assert their rights as free

¹⁵¹ *KKK Testimony*, 6: 468-469. See also 6: 465-466. Many African Americans who testified before the congressional committee identified their attackers. See, for example, *KKK Testimony*, 3: 427-435; 3: 538-551; 3: 585-591; 3: 591-595; 5: 604-611; 4: 666-675; 4: 681-687; 4: 690-694; 4: 1173-1177; 4: 1155-1158; 5: 1497-1556; 5: 1563-1574; 5: 1574-1577; 5: 1947-1948; 5: 1948-1949; 5: 1950; 6: 410; 7: 641-644; 7: 644-645; 7: 646-647; 7: 668-671; 7: 687-689; 7: 733-735; 7: 735-743; 7: 866-867; 12: 769-777; and 12: 1184-1185.

¹⁵² Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 24.

citizens. As a result, thousands of black men and women engaged in resistance by testifying about their experiences with sexual violence and family trauma.

Black men and women spoke openly about sexual violence – lewd jokes, indecent exposure, forced marriage, and rape – after the abolition of slavery. Black women, in particular, recognized that freedom meant the ability to put their interests – and the interests of their families – first. No longer considered property in the eyes of the law, it was now possible for black men and women to seek redress for sexual violence and the destruction of the black family. By speaking openly not only about rape but also the struggle to maintain stable family units, black men and women exposed a long history of sexual violence and its consequences in the South. In the process, they reclaimed personal autonomy and self-determination over their own bodies by seeking justice.

Testimony regarding sexual violence against black women declined somewhat in the late nineteenth century. It was not that sexual violence declined, but rather attention shifted to the lynching epidemic plaguing the postemancipation South. Between 1882 and 1930, there were 2,805 lynchings in ten southern states.¹⁵³ Although almost three hundred white people were lynched by mobs, the vast majority of lynching victims were African Americans. Lynching was accepted as a justified punishment for criminal behaviour. In particular, there was a pervasive fear that black men wanted to rape white women.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press) 269. Tolnay and Beck offer a detailed statistical study of lynching in ten southern states – Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Their work traces the composition of lynch mobs, incidents of lynching, and lynching victims.

¹⁵⁴ Patricia A. Schechter, “Unsettled Business: Ida B. Wells against Lynching, or, How Antilynching Got Its Gender,” in *Under the Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South*, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 292. The archetypal lynching scenario reported in mainstream

Within this conventional framework, white men became the gallant protectors of white women against lascivious black men. There is little evidence to support the myth that black men raped white women. The myth was sufficiently potent, however, to draw attention away from the institutionalized rape of black women as focus shifted to protecting white women.¹⁵⁵

newspapers justified lynching as a punishment for alleged assaults perpetrated by African American men against white women.

¹⁵⁵ The subject of lynching is discussed at length in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Physical Violence: Black Resilience Against Terror and Lawlessness

On 21 October 1871, Tilda Walthall appeared before the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary South.¹ Her husband, John Walthall, had been murdered by the Ku Klux Klan.² In the postemancipation South, terrorist organizations, like the Ku Klux Klan, killed thousands of black men and women.³ As W. E. B. Du Bois explained, “When Congress intervened by its reconstruction measures to defeat the reactionary program of the South, there swept over that section a crime-storm of devastating fury. Lawlessness and violence filled the land, and terror stalked abroad by day, and it burned and murdered by night.”⁴ Du Bois described how disguised white men patrolled the roads at night, often armed with rifles and pistols, to threaten and intimidate those African Americans who dared to challenge the economic and social expectations of white Southerners. Black men hired to construct a railroad, for example, were whipped by disguised men because they occupied jobs that might otherwise have gone to white men. In South Carolina, disguised men destroyed a

¹ An earlier version of part of this chapter was previously published in *Past Tense Graduate Review of History*. See Sarah Whitwell, “Rejecting Notions of Passivity: African American Resistance to Lynching in the Southern United States,” *Past Tense Graduate Review of History* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 71-95.

² *KKK Testimony*, 6: 407-408.

³ There were a number of terrorist organizations operating in the postemancipation South, including the Pale Faces in Tennessee; the White Brotherhood, the Constitutional Union Guard, and the Invisible Empire in North Carolina; Heggie’s Scouts, the Washington Brothers, and the Red Shirts in Mississippi; the Knights of the White Carnation in Alabama; the Knights of the Rising Sun and the Ku Klux Rangers in Texas; and the Knights of the White Camelia and the White Shirts in Louisiana. Kwando M. Kinshasa, *Black Resistance to the Ku Klux Klan in the Wake of the Civil War* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2006), 64. See also Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971); Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Stony the Road: Reconstruction, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Jim Crow* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019), chap. 1.

⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2013), 602.

successful business worth approximately \$40 000 simply because it belonged to a black man.⁵

John Walthall attracted the attention of the Ku Klux Klan in Georgia for allegedly “running after some white woman.”⁶ On 22 April 1871, a group of approximately forty to fifty disguised men approached the house of John and Tilda Walthall. The men knocked on the door and demanded entrance. Tilda, however, refused to allow the men inside her home. John, meanwhile, lifted a plank in the floor and hid under the house. When the disguised men finally broke down the door, Tilda insisted that she did not know the whereabouts of her husband. The disguised men proceeded to beat the freedwoman, kicking her until she fell to the floor and then striking her over the head with their rifles and pistols. Tilda screamed for help but her neighbours were unable, or unwilling, to intervene.⁷

The Ku Klux Klan eventually found John; he was spotted hiding beneath the house and shot. Tilda, who had already been severely beaten, was ordered to hug her grievously wounded husband. The disguised men “beat their heads together” and then issued John an additional three hundred lashes.⁸ Maria Carter, a neighbour, testified that “the house looked next morning as if somebody had been killing hogs there.”⁹ John died of his injuries the next night.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *KKK Testimony*, 6: 472. See also 6: 412.

⁷ *KKK Testimony*, 6: 407 and 6: 471.

⁸ *KKK Testimony*, 6: 473.

⁹ *KKK Testimony*, 6: 412.

The murder of John Walthall received significant attention from the black community; numerous witnesses testified before the congressional committee.¹⁰ While some claimed that they did not know what had motivated the attack, several emphasized a pervasive fear among white Southerners that black men wanted to rape white women. The Ku Klux Klan, they testified, portrayed John Walthall as a lascivious black man who “felt like sleeping with some more white women.”¹¹ The killing, then, was intended to protect the honour and virtue of white women. There is little evidence, however, to support the myth that black men raped white women. Ida B. Wells, the foremost antilynching activist of the nineteenth century, attacked the rape justification for lynching.¹² As a prominent figure in the black press, Wells challenged “the old threadbare lie that negro men assault white women.”¹³ Before the Civil War, she argued, no one was concerned about black men raping white women. It was therefore absurd to suggest that black men might suddenly turn into sexual deviants just as they were being freed from bondage.¹⁴ Wells insisted that the rape charge was without foundation. Her assertions were echoed by Robert R. Grinstead, a freedman interviewed by the Federal Writers’ Project, who described how an enslaved man was sent to the bedroom of his mistress to light a fire

¹⁰ See, for example, *KKK Testimony*, 6: 407-408; 6: 408-409; 6: 410; 6: 410-411; 6: 411-414; 6: 471-472; and 6: 472-477.

¹¹ *KKK Testimony*, 6: 412-413. 6: 476

¹² On Ida B. Wells see Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970); Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), chap. 2; Jacqueline Jones Royster, *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997), 1-41; Linda McMurry Edwards, *To Keep the Waters Troubled: The Life of Ida B. Wells* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Richard M. Perloff, “The Press and Lynchings of African Americans,” *Journal of Black Studies* 30, no. 3 (January 2000): 315-330; and Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010).

¹³ Ida B. Wells, *A Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynchings in the United States* (Chicago: Donohue and Henneberry, 1895), 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

each morning during slavery. Even under such close conditions, Grinstead could not recall a single rape occurring.¹⁵

Z. Hargrove, a white attorney from Georgia, spoke at length to the congressional committee about the creation of the Ku Klux Klan as a means of correcting various evils that resulted from emancipation. He explained:

One of the resulting evils, in my opinion, was to stimulate the black man, in his ignorance, to deeds that were improper, such as thefts, burnings, and sometimes violence. Rape is a very common crime with the black man; it seems to be vastly more so with him than with the white man, and it is vastly more frequent now than it was when he was in a state of slavery. He does not seem to have any adequate idea of the penalty for the offense. I think we have had more rapes by negroes upon white women than almost in the whole history of the country before.”¹⁶

Hargrove stressed the dangers that black men allegedly posed to white women. Yet when asked how to provide evidence to support his claim, Hargrove could not do so. He admitted, “I think the only case we have had there was the case of a colored man committing a rape on a negro woman.”¹⁷ He could not name a single instance of a black man raping a white woman.¹⁸

Joseph Carter, a neighbour who witnessed the attack on Tilda and John Walthall by the Ku Klux Klan, denied the rumours that John had engaged in sexual intercourse

¹⁵ *KKK Testimony*, 7.1: 126.

¹⁶ *KKK Testimony*, 6: 124-125.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ The reality is that the majority of lynchings occurred in response to alleged murder. But much of the rhetoric surrounding lynching focused only on the sexual assault of white women by black men. Richard M. Perloff suggested that this unbalanced and inaccurate view was perpetuated, in part, by newspapers. Indeed, many editors recognized that sensational coverage of lynchings could sell newspapers. Public opinion favoured lynching and often there was great pressure to “arouse prurient interest, engage racist citizens, and uphold a social order that was dependent on the systematic oppression of Blacks by Whites.” In particular, Perloff claimed that editors risked bodily harm if they were too critical of incidents of sexual assault of white women by black women. Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 158; and Perloff, “The Press and Lynchings of African Americans,” 321-322.

with white women. Instead, he linked the murder of the freedman to a labour dispute. John had been employed by the unnamed son-in-law of Duncan Monroe, a white planter of immense influence. One day, while working in the field, the son-in-law accused John of failing to fulfill his contract; he claimed the freedman had not put in full time. Prior to this dispute, Carter had never heard any rumours about the black man engaging in sexual relations with white women. Indeed, Carter suggested that such rumours were fabricated to justify attacks on those freedpeople who refused to maintain the appearance of bondage following emancipation.¹⁹

This chapter explores the widespread use of physical violence to subjugate African Americans in the late antebellum and postemancipation South. Physical violence refers to any act that causes injury, abuse, trauma, or destruction by way of physical force. Often physical violence is equated with violence generally. Indeed, many scholars who study racialized violence consider violence narrowly in the context of physical assault, race riots, and lynching. This is not surprising because the injuries that result from such violence are immediately visible and therefore more easily observable.²⁰ The (in)famous photo of Private Gordon, for example, depicts a partially nude black man seated on a wooden chair; his back is covered with thick keloid scars. The photo drew attention to the inhumanity of slavery by capturing the results of frequent, bloody whippings. As the *New York Independent* commented, the photo told “the story in a way that even Mrs. Stowe can not approach, because it tells the story of the eye.”²¹

¹⁹ *KKK Testimony*, 6: 476-477.

²⁰ Mary R. Jackman, “Violence in Social Life,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 28 (2002), 393.

²¹ *The New York Independent*, quoted in Deborah Willis and Barbara Krauthamer, *Envisioning Emancipation: Black Americans and the End of Slavery* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 54.

The tendency of scholars to study racialized violence in the context of physical assault, race riots, and lynchings does not mean that my study of racialized violence should not consider physical violence. The reality is that physical violence was a major aspect of life for African Americans living in both the antebellum and postemancipation South. While my dissertation seeks to broaden our understanding of racialized violence by considering epistemic violence, structural violence, and sexual violence, it must still examine physical violence because it was part of daily life for many black men and women. Moreover, physical violence cannot be separated from our understanding of the other manifestations of violence under consideration. There is overlap, as we have seen in the previous chapters, where epistemic violence is bolstered by physical violence. For example, members of the Ku Klux Klan threatened to murder those who testified before the Joint Select Committee. Similarly, structural violence often enshrined the use of physical violence. For example, white employers beat black labourers who failed to behave subordinately. My goal in this chapter is to bring into focus the widespread and ongoing use of physical violence to subjugate African Americans in the late antebellum and postemancipation South without obfuscating the fact that physical violence was one of many manifestations of racialized violence.

The concreteness and immediacy of physical violence makes it perhaps the most obvious place to study unorganized resistance – clandestine actions with mitigated risk of reprisal. A black man may not lash out immediately in response to having his testimony denied in court, or a black woman may think carefully about her options before confronting her employer about stolen wages. And while sexual violence might occur as

part of singular attack, as in the case of rape, black men and women often experienced sexual violence on an ongoing basis, especially in situations where they were sexually objectified. Physical violence, however, frequently necessitated immediate action. When the Ku Klux Klan arrived at the door of a terrified family, a quick response could mean the difference between life and death. This chapter, therefore, perhaps best captures the terror inspired by racialized violence. Moreover, by examining the various tactics employed by black men and women against physical violence – discursive insubordination, physical retaliation, armed defense, migration – it is possible to capture the importance of resistance as a means of survival both during slavery and after emancipation.

It is important, however, to recognize that some black men and women made a calculated decision to avoid confrontation. While many supported the power of armed resistance and direct confrontation, others counselled caution. This is not to suggest, as Lester C. Lamon concluded, that African Americans were silent in response to oppression.²² Rather, many made decisions that reflected a desire to live and thrive. Some black men and women endured acts of physical violence because they feared retribution if they resisted. Others found feigning submission made daily life more bearable. Others still likely viewed their subordinate position as being inevitable. One freedman admitted that slavery “permanently established the idea of the Negro’s inferiority.”²³ We must consider the various factors that might have influenced whether an individual decided to engage in resistance.

²² Lester C. Lamon, *Black Tennesseans, 1900-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 18.

²³ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-3.1: 75.

Kidada Williams, in her study of racialized violence and black testimony from emancipation to the First World War, described a continuum of violence that ranged from ordinary to extraordinary.²⁴ Ordinary physical violence occurred on a daily basis; it was individual and spontaneous. Ordinary physical violence might include threats and intimidation, such nonfatal assaults as whippings and beatings, and assault that ended in death but where death was not the intent. When ordinary physical violence failed to yield results, hostile white Southerners often turned to extraordinary physical violence – nightriding, race riots, lynching. Extraordinary physical violence, according to Kidada Williams, was often premeditated. White posses, gangs, and mobs administered extraordinary physical violence collectively and were more likely to torture, rape or kill their victims.²⁵ While the types of physical violence described by Williams are focused on the postemancipation period, this chapter applies the idea of ordinary and extraordinary violence to the antebellum period, too. Emancipation did not mark the end of physical violence, and many of the practices utilized during slavery to subjugate enslaved people were adapted and transformed after the Civil War for use on the newly freed black population.

In the slave states of the antebellum South, physical violence was intimately linked to the defense of slavery. The legal system in the antebellum South placed few restrictions on the interactions between slaveholders and enslaved people. Lawmakers and jurists rarely imposed strict regulations regarding the treatment of enslaved people,

²⁴ It is important to note that Williams' continuum of violence primarily includes acts of physical violence.

²⁵ Kidada E Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me: African American Testimonies of Racial Violence from Emancipation to World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 226.

instead permitting slaveholders to regulate order on their own plantations. Slaveholders were permitted to physically assault, torture, and even murder enslaved people. Henry Lewis, for example, described how his master punished enslaved people who failed to work satisfactorily. Using a board with holes, the master would beat his victims so that each blow raised a blister. He would then burst the blisters and rub the open wounds with salt and red pepper.²⁶ Often the victims would go into convulsions from the pain, while others developed fevers and even fell into a state of coma lasting for several days.²⁷

Wes Brady, an enslaved man from Texas, spoke at length about the use of physical violence to control enslaved people. On one occasion, Brady witnessed an overseer drive four stakes into the ground in order to tie down an enslaved labourer. He then “beat them till they was raw.” The overseer then pulverized a brick into powder, mixed it with lard, rubbed the mixture all over the enslaved person, and finally rolled the enslaved person in a sheet. Brady further described how an enslaved man who stole a meat bone from the smokehouse received 1500 lashes.²⁸

Slaveholders, overseers, and drivers were creative in their cruelty. Even when economic considerations might temper the abuses inflicted upon enslaved people, there were always those who were motivated by cruelty and the inability to recognize enslaved people as human beings. Matilda Mumford, an enslaved woman interviewed by the Federal Writers’ Project in Georgia, described how an overseer on her plantation punished enslaved people for perceived wrongdoings. Sometimes the overseer stripped

²⁶ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-6.5: 2338.

²⁷ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-3.1: 5-6. For additional examples, see 2.1: 162; 5.3: 209-210; 13.3: 202; S1-4.2: 350; S2-4.3: 1121-1122; and S2-3.2: 799.

²⁸ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-2.1: 399-400.

his victims down to the waist, tied them to a tree, and beat them. In a particularly egregious incident, the overseer reportedly tied a naked man to a buggy and forced him to pull the vehicle like a mule until he collapsed. The trauma of this event stayed with Mumford for years. In a rare instance of an interviewer interjecting themselves directly into the narrative, one interviewer noted that “Matilda’s voice was filled with past horror as she went on breathlessly.”²⁹ The inclusion of this description suggests that Mumford’s testimony alone was not enough to convey the trauma caused by such punishments. Indeed, punishments that went beyond simply correcting undesirable behaviour caused trauma for both the victims and witnesses. Those who witnessed physical violence, like Mumford, often remembered such experiences well into old age. Lydia Jefferson, an enslaved woman from Texas, similarly recalled with horror how an overseer punished disobedient enslaved people by forcing them to sit naked on ant beds.³⁰

Jenny Bourne Wahl, in her study of the legal history of plantation management, concluded that slaveholders were granted substantial autonomy in disciplining and directing enslaved labourers. This was partly the result of economic considerations, as plantation law was significantly cheaper to implement than public law. If slaveholders were allowed to police their own enslaved labourers, then the public would not be responsible for undertaking this burden.³¹ Slaveholders could also be more reactive due to their physical proximity to enslaved people. Indeed, slaveholders could more effectively establish control if they did not need to wait for the courts or local law enforcement to

²⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-4.2: 464.

³⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-6.5: 1943.

³¹ Jenny Bourne Wahl, “Legal Constraints on Slave Masters: The Problem of Social Cost,” *American Journal of Legal History* 41, no. 1 (January 1997): 3.

administer discipline.³² North Carolina Chief Justice Thomas Ruffin, espousing the views of many white Southerners, explained, “The power of the master must be absolute, to render the submission of the slave perfect.”³³

Slaveholders strived to maintain order and control but they often found that enslaved people were unwilling to bow to subjugation. Although treated as chattel, enslaved men and women remained human beings. When mistreated, they were likely to lash out in response.³⁴ An enslaved labourer who was severely abused might plot revenge. For example, Sol and Liza Walton, an enslaved couple from Texas, described how the overseer on their plantation whipped anyone who was slacking. The overseer whipped his victims until they bled and their shirts stuck to their backs.³⁵ When an old man fell down while a group of enslaved people were burning logs and trash, the overseer took offense and ordered the other men present to hold the old man while he delivered a whipping. The old man, however, refused to be whipped. He reportedly picked up a stick and knocked the overseer on the head. The other enslaved people did not intervene. Then, using an axe, the old man cut off the overseer’s hands and feet.³⁶

J. H. Day, an enslaved man from Texas, claimed that his mother defended an enslaved man from being brutally whipped. A neighbouring farm had only two enslaved labourers, a man and woman. The slaveholder, according to Day, would whip the man and woman every day, even if they had not done anything to warrant punishment. On one occasion, Day’s mother invited the enslaved man, Taylor, into the house to warm up.

³² *Ibid.*, 2-3.

³³ *State v. Mann*, 2 Dev. 263, 266 (N.C. 1829), quoted in Wahl, “Legal Constraints on Slave Masters,” 4.

³⁴ Wahl, “Legal Constraints on Slave Masters,” 2.

³⁵ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-10.9: 3953.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 3954.

Shortly after, the slaveholder came and ordered the man outside. He proceeded to whip Taylor and curse at him. He continued his attack until Day's mother grabbed a butcher knife and threatened the white man: "If you hit him another lick I'll use this one [sic] you." According to Day, the threat worked and the slaveholder retreated.³⁷

Enslaved people who demonstrated a lack of fear in the face of physical violence were often most successful in their resistance efforts. Edd Roby, an enslaved man from Mississippi, related a story about an enslaved woman who refused to be cowed by physical violence. According to Roby, a certain enslaved woman was owned by a slaveholder who did not allow his enslaved labourers to pray. The enslaved woman, however, was a devout Christian. While washing, she "got so full o' ligion she started prayin'." When the slaveholder heard her praying, he threatened to whip the enslaved woman for disobeying. But she responded, "You can whip me— you can kill dis body but you can't kill my soul." After this incident, the woman was allowed to pray whenever she wanted and nothing was done to stop her.³⁸ She was not afraid to be punished and her master, as a result, lost his power to control her. He might have tried to stop her praying, but her obstinacy only would have served as an example to other enslaved people. Though Roby had only heard this story and never met the enslaved woman personally, the narrative served as a reminder that enslaved people could stand up to slaveholders. Indeed, the story was so compelling that Roby recalled it decades after the end of slavery.

Mary Armstrong reported that she belonged to "the meanest two white folks what ever lived" during slavery in Texas. William and Polly Cleveland regularly beat their

³⁷ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-4.3: 1164-1165.

³⁸ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-9.4: 1868.

enslaved labourers and Polly whipped Armstrong's nine month old sister to death: "She came an' took the diaper off my little sister an' whipped 'till the blood jes' ran jes' cause she cry like all babies do an' it killed my sister."³⁹ Only a child herself at the time, Armstrong was not able to retaliate immediately. She bided her time and waited for an opportunity to enact her revenge for the brutal murder of her sister.

When Olivia, the daughter of William and Polly, married a local planter, Armstrong went with the white woman to live on the new plantation. Polly, however, was reluctant to relinquish ownership of Armstrong.⁴⁰ She continued to beat the girl regularly. Armstrong, in response, finally "picked up a rock 'bout as big as half your fist an' hit her right in the eyeball an' told her that was for whippin' my baby sister to death." Polly raged about the attack, but Olivia simply acknowledged that her mother learned her lesson. When Armstrong spoke about the incident as an elderly woman, she seemed to have gained a measure of peace knowing that she avenged her sister's death. She stated, "I hopes they is burn' in torment now."⁴¹ Many formerly enslaved people, like Armstrong, found comfort in the belief that those who owned human chattel would likely never be granted entry into heaven.⁴² By expressing their belief that slaveholders were unworthy of heaven, they engaged in discursive insubordination. But for some this belief

³⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-2.1: 66-67.

⁴⁰ It was not uncommon for enslaved people serving as domestics to stay with the children they helped to raise. In particular, when young white women from slaveholding families married, they might take a trusted enslaved woman with them to their new household. See Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, Revised Edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 47–60; and Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), chapter 3. On forced migration, see Damian Alan Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration in the Antebellum South*, Cambridge Studies on the American South (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), especially chap. 4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² See, for example, *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 2.1: 162; S1-3.1: 48-49; and S2-7.6: 2568.

might be understood as an acknowledgement of the limited options available to enslaved people; only in death could they hope for true retribution.

In extreme cases, enslaved men and women might commit suicide rather than endure a lifetime of physical violence.⁴³ In South Carolina, a young enslaved girl made the decision to kill herself rather than take another beating. Charlotte Foster explained, “One day a girl about 16 years of age came to her [Foster’s] house and said she’d just as leave [sic] be dead as to take the beatings her master gave her, so one day she did go into the woods and eat some poison oak.”⁴⁴ By choosing to commit suicide, the enslaved girl not only prevented her master from abusing her in perpetuity, but she denied her master the benefits of her labour. Given that many slaveholders tempered their abuse to avoid killing their enslaved labourers, this was a particularly powerful blow and served as a reminder to slaveholders that enslaved people were willing to make extreme sacrifices to escape physical abuse.⁴⁵

Enslaved people were rarely sentenced to jail or executed, although those who committed particularly heinous crimes, such as the murder of a white person, might be subjected to the justice system. For example, in South Carolina, an enslaved man and woman were tried and hanged for plotting to kill their masters.⁴⁶ But more often those enslaved people who behaved insubordinately, like Mary Armstrong, were never brought

⁴³ On suicide as resistance, see Lester David, “Suicide as a Political Act,” *Psychological Reports* 66, no. 2 (June 1990): 1185-1186; Sing Lee and Arthur Kleinman, “Suicide as Resistance in Chinese Society,” in *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict, and Resistance*, eds. Elizabeth J. Perry and Mark Selden (New York: Routledge: 2003), 300-302; Terri L. Snyder, “Suicide, Slavery, and Memory in North America,” *Journal of American History* 97, no. 1 (June 2010): 39-62; and Richard Bell, “Slave Suicide, Abolition and the Problem of Resistance,” *Slavery & Abolition* 33, no. 4 (December 2012): 525-549.

⁴⁴ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 2.2: 81.

⁴⁵ See also the discussion of infanticide in Chapter 3.

⁴⁶ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 2.2: 198. See also, for example, 3.3: 158.

before local authorities. Slaveholders sometimes tried to minimize acts of resistance by ignoring them. To draw attention was to encourage further resistance. Moreover, black people were affected by racist stereotypes, which portrayed them as mentally and physically inferior to white people. Robin Kelley refers to the “Cult of True Sambohood.” This southern, racist ideology ascribed acts of resistance – theft, outbursts of anger, sabotage, and other such acts – to the belief that African Americans were inept and lazy.⁴⁷ The “Cult of True Sambohood” was not unknown to African Americans. By carefully manipulating how they were perceived by white Southerners, black men and women could use their allegedly inferior status to their advantage.⁴⁸

On the rare occasions that enslaved people were formally executed, slaveholders sometimes used the public hangings as an opportunity to instill enslaved labourers with fear. Susan Snow, an enslaved woman from Mississippi, was known for her combative nature. She was often at odds with the white people on her plantation. Her master, therefore, forced her to watch the hanging of several black men so that she would understand what happens to black people who harmed white people.⁴⁹ Jackson Spears, an enslaved man from South Carolina, similarly described how the hangings of black men

⁴⁷ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada, 1994), 21.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 21-23. See also W. Fitzhugh Brundage, “The Roar on the Other Side of Silence: Black Resistance and White Violence in the American South, 1880-1940,” in *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 277–78; and Veta Smith Tucker, “Secret Agents: Black Women Insurgents on Abolitionist Battlefields,” in *Gendered Resistance: Women, Slavery, and the Legacy of Margaret Garner*, ed. Mary E. Frederickson and Delores M. Walters (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 77.

⁴⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-10.5: 2012. Such practices continued after emancipation in the form of public lynchings. See W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 28–35; 52–53; and 103–106; and Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 2.

and women functioned as public spectacles. Slaveholders and their enslaved labourers would often gather hours before the scheduled hanging.⁵⁰ For the slaveholders, the hangings served as a form of entertainment that also demonstrated the majesty of the law. For the enslaved people, the hangings served as a cruel warning.

In the antebellum period, slaveholders had to balance the need for control against their economic investment in human chattel.⁵¹ This meant that it was not in the best interest of slaveholders to irreparably harm their victims. Reeves Tucker, an enslaved man from Texas, explained that while his master used physical violence to punish those who disobeyed, he never allowed his enslaved labourers to sustain serious injuries because “they cost too much.”⁵² A single enslaved person could be worth as much as \$1500.⁵³ Robert Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, in their economic history of slavery, rightfully acknowledged that it was more cost effective to physically punish enslaved people than to kill them or commit them to jail.⁵⁴ An enslaved person who was dead, or incarcerated, could not labour effectively for their master.

Some slaveholders preferred a hands-on approach when it came to disciplining enslaved people using physical violence.⁵⁵ On small farms or within private households,

⁵⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-11: 299.

⁵¹ Andrew Fede, “Legitimized Violent Slave Abuse in the American South, 1619-1865: A Case Study of Law and Social Change in Six Southern States,” *The American Journal of Legal History* 29, no. 2 (April 1985): 96.

⁵² *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-10.9: 3892.

⁵³ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-9.8: 3680-3681.

⁵⁴ Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1974), 147. Many formerly enslaved people interviewed by the Federal Writers’ Project commented on the lack of jails during slavery. See, for example, 3.3: 158; 12.1: 96; 13.3: 97; S1-6.1: 56; S1-9.4: 1897; S2-10.9: 3954

⁵⁵ Wahl, “Legal Constraints on Slave Masters,” 2-3.

slaveholders typically handled discipline personally.⁵⁶ On large plantations, slaveholders often employed overseers to manage the day-to-day operations of the plantation. There was always a risk, however, that overseers would commit excessive acts of violence because they did not have any investment in the well-being of the labour force.⁵⁷ Tucker Smith, an enslaved man from Texas, feared the overseer on his plantation because “he would just soon kill a negro as not, cause they did not cost him one cent and he did not care that done to us negroes or how he treated us cause he did not think that we would ever be free and that we might cause him plenty of trouble some day.”⁵⁸ Some slaveholders, to protect their investment, held overseers to certain standards or imposed regulations on the treatment of enslaved people. For example, a slaveholder in Texas reportedly required that his overseers reimburse him for the value of any enslaved person who was killed as a result of being punished with physical violence.⁵⁹

While economic considerations meant that slaveholders preferred to use physical violence to maintain control, they recognized the power of confinement when necessary. Some slaveholders crafted makeshift jails on their plantations. Aaron Jones, for example, described how an overseer sometimes locked disobedient enslaved people in the ginhouse or some other farm building.⁶⁰ William Byrd’s master frequently whipped his enslaved labourers until they could not move, sometimes stretching them over a log to administer

⁵⁶ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 12.1: 96. See also, for example, 2.2: 224-225; 13.3: 97; and 2-7.6: 2463-2464. Contrary to popular belief, mistresses were often heavily involved in disciplining enslaved labourers, especially those who worked in a domestic context. See Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 24–31.

⁵⁷ On overseers, see William K. Scarborough, “The Southern Plantation Overseer: A Reevaluation,” *Agricultural History* 38, no. 1 (Winter 1964): 13-20; and Tristan Stubbs, *Masters of Violence: The Plantation Overseers of Eighteenth-Century Virginia, South Carolina, and Georgia* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2018).

⁵⁸ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-9.8: 3674-3675.

⁵⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-6.5: 2338.

⁶⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-8.3: 1186.

the whipping. When these whippings did not produce the desired results, however, he constructed a jail.⁶¹

Imprisonment, for many enslaved people, was the worst possible punishment. The majority of enslaved people worked six days of week from sunrise to sunset. In their limited free time, enslaved men and women completed household chores, tended to private gardens, travelled to other plantations, and attended illicit gatherings. Being able to leave the plantation, in particular, was an important reprieve from the daily horrors of slavery. It allowed people to come together and socialize in an environment separate from their site of labour.⁶² Sol Walton, an enslaved man from Texas, described slipping off the plantation regularly to attend various parties and dances.⁶³ Imprisonment, however, made such pleasures impossible. John McAdams, in his interview with the Federal Writers' Project, argued that imprisonment "hurt the negro worse than whipping him" because enslaved people could handle a whipping, but not the loss of "all their running around."⁶⁴ Mary Gaffney similarly complained that imprisonment meant enslaved people could not attend dances or visit family members on other plantations.⁶⁵

The desire to move freely was often at the forefront of resistance efforts by enslaved people. The pass system required that enslaved people have written permission from their masters in order to leave the plantation. Those found roaming the countryside without a pass would be apprehended by the patrollers, organized groups of white men

⁶¹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-3.2: 575-576. For additional examples of slaveholders constructing private jails, see 2.2: 196; S2-6.5: 2146; and S2-7.6: 2463-2464.

⁶² Stephanie Camp M. H., *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), chap. 3.

⁶³ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 5.4: 129.

⁶⁴ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-7.6: 2463-2464.

⁶⁵ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-5.4: 1444-1445.

who monitored the roads to prevent enslaved people from leaving their plantations without permission.⁶⁶ The patrollers, however, failed to stop enslaved people from sneaking off at night to visit family or to attend illicit gatherings. Nora Armstrong, an enslaved woman from Texas, described how her mother would regularly sneak off the plantation at night to attend parties and visit neighbours. Often, she did not return until morning.⁶⁷ Bob, an enslaved man from South Carolina, similarly travelled at night to visit a woman that he was courting on another plantation. On one occasion Bob was spotted by the patrollers who proceeded to chase the enslaved man through the woods. If caught, Bob would have been whipped and then returned to his plantation where he might face further punishment. Bob was fortunate, however, that his pursuers were blocked by a ditch in the road. Bob narrowly escaped by jumping over the ditch.⁶⁸

Enslaved people who were apprehended by the patrollers would be stripped, whipped, and otherwise abused. Manda Walker, an enslaved woman from South Carolina, witnessed her father being whipped by the patrollers. Because Walker's mother lived on another plantation, her father had to travel to visit her. When he was late getting back one night, he was apprehended by the patrollers. The patrollers pulled down the

⁶⁶ The slave patrol system was first developed in 1704 in South Carolina. As the institution of slavery spread, and the black population increased, more areas began to use slave patrols to monitor enslaved people. Often patrollers were not slaveholders, but landless white men who returned fugitives in exchange for a reward. Occasionally local militias fulfilled this duty. On the slave patrol system see Stanley W. Campbell, *The Slave Catchers: Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850-1860* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1970); J. Michael Crane, "Controlling the Night: Perceptions of the Slave Patrol System in Mississippi," *Journal of Mississippi History* 61, no. 2 (June 1999): 119-136; Sally E. Hadden, "Colonial and Revolutionary Era Slave Patrols of Virginia," in *Lethal Imagination: Violence and Brutality in American History*, ed. Michael A. Bellesiles (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 69-86; and Sally E. Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003). See also, for example, *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 3.3: 16; 12.1: 141-153; S1-3.1: 185; S1-6.1: 34; S1-8.3: 820; and S2-10.9: 4060.

⁶⁷ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-2.1: 75-76.

⁶⁸ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 2.1: 320.

enslaved man's pants and whipped him in front of his wife and children, a practice intended to humiliate and objectify the black man. Walker, like many enslaved people, held a negative opinion of patrollers. She spoke openly against their actions and ridiculed the patrollers as men without class. She asserted that you never see "classy white buckra men" patrolling for enslaved people. It was only ever "low-down white men, dat never owned a nigger in deir life."⁶⁹ To some extent Walker's comments indicate that she has internalized the values of plantation society, as she apparently viewed those who owned enslaved labourers as superior. Her comments also reflect the practical consideration that, while both patrollers and slaveholders could be unnecessarily cruel, but at least a slaveholder might provide his enslaved labourers with clothing, food, and other shelter. Patrollers, then, came to embody the cruelest and most violent aspects of slavery.

Both black men and women were the victims of racialized violence. Black women were more likely to be subjected to sexual violence, but they also had greater latitude to commit acts of insubordination. Anda Woods, for example, described how black women would run interference to save enslaved people from the patrollers. Enslaved people often organized illicit gatherings – dances, prayer meetings, quilting bees – in the forest. If the patrollers discovered a gathering, they would capture and whip the attendees. Many black women, however, remained behind to delay the patrollers while the black men fled. Woods described how women would throw hot torches and red coals at the patrollers. Some would even light brooms on fire and run towards the patrollers to scare them away.

⁶⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 3.4: 171. See also S1-11: 133. The term 'buckra' is a derogatory slang term commonly used in the Southeast to describe a white man, particularly one who occupies a position of power.

Woods credited such women with saving a significant number of enslaved people from being whipped.⁷⁰

While black men were sometimes killed, black women were less likely to face death.⁷¹ Jesse, an enslaved man from Georgia, belonged to Colonel Calloway. After being repeatedly abused, Jesse made the decision to run away; he dug a cave in the ground and lived there for seven years. At night, however, he would sneak back to the plantation to visit his wife, Lettie. Calloway never managed to catch the enslaved man, even after Lettie gave birth to two children who strongly resembled Jesse. When Calloway openly accused Lettie of knowing the whereabouts of her husband, she denied any knowledge and pretended that she had not seen him since the day he left.⁷² Lettie was protected by the value of her productive and reproductive labour, which decreased the likelihood that she would be irreparably harmed.⁷³ While many slaveholders abused enslaved people regardless of gender or status, there were some who tempered the abuses of enslaved women because they were valuable for slave breeding regimes. Lettie, therefore, was able to protect her husband with less risk of reprisal, defying her master in a way that an enslaved man could not have done. Indeed, when enslaved men tried to protect enslaved women from physical violence, they were often severely beaten as punishment.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-10.5: 2390.

⁷¹ On the unique opportunities afforded to women regarding resistance, see Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 22–27; Brundage, “The Roar on the Other Side of Silence,” 279.

⁷² *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 12.2: 52.

⁷³ Leslie A. Schwalm, *A Hard Fight For We: Women’s Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina*, *Women in American History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), chap. 2; White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman?*, chap. 2.

⁷⁴ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-2.1: 23-24.

The trauma of physical violence left lingering wounds that long outlasted the institution of slavery. Millie Manuel, a formerly enslaved woman, was interviewed by the Federal Writers' Project in Texas. The interviewer described Manuel as "an old ex-slave who 'would rather trust a rattler than a white man' and who believes that 'the Good Shepherd will give the best white man a heaven that is hotter than the worstest nigger's hell.'" ⁷⁵ During slavery, Manuel had been whipped on numerous occasions. Once she was tied to a post and struck repeatedly with a cowhide; she nearly died from her injuries. As she concluded her interview, Manuel firmly stated that she was happy that everyone who had mistreated her during slavery was now dead. Berry Smith, an enslaved man from Mississippi, was similarly plagued by the trauma he had endured during his slavery. In his interview with the Federal Writers' Project, Smith spoke critically of his former master. And while he recalled some good memories with his immediate family, he continued to harbour resentment for the whippings received during slavery. The interviewer, however, tried to downplay his descriptions of physical violence, suggesting that the whipping seemed to have "scarred his pride too deeply." ⁷⁶

Physical violence remained a crucial part of racial subordination long after the abolition of slavery. Emancipation and Reconstruction partially undermined white control as formerly enslaved people began to assert themselves as citizens. ⁷⁷ With the prior racial hierarchy collapsing, many white Southerners began to feel that their economic and social

⁷⁵ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-7.6: 2569.

⁷⁶ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-10.5: 1978.

⁷⁷ On Reconstruction, see Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); K. Stephen Prince, *Stories of the South: Race and the Reconstruction of Southern Identity, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014); and Carole Emberton, *Beyond Redemption: Race, Violence and the American South After the Civil War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

expectations were being challenged. To regain control, both individuals and groups again turned towards physical violence to perpetuate their dominance over the newly freed black population.⁷⁸ The difference, however, was the severity of the violence. While some Southerners recognized the ongoing importance of black labour in the postemancipation South, many others felt that emancipation ended the need to preserve black lives out of economic interest. Hostile white Southerners, especially those who did not hire black labourers after the end of slavery, felt free to unleash a new wave of violence.⁷⁹ Annie Row, in her interview with the Federal Writers' Project described how a slaveholder from Texas, upon learning about the abolition of slavery, flew into a rage. He yelled, "Free de nigger, will dey? Ise free dem." He then proceeded to beat a formerly enslaved woman before retrieving his gun and marching to the field where many other formerly enslaved people were working. Somewhat ironically, just as he attempted to snuff out the lives of dozens of black men and women, the slaveholder dropped to the ground and died of an apparent heart attack.⁸⁰ At his funeral, Row revealed, none of the black attendees were particularly sad.

⁷⁸ For example, some white Southerners joined the Ku Klux Klan, a white supremacist organization that frequently inflicted violence upon African Americans. While the majority of Southerners did not participate in such criminal behaviour, many ignored the violence that plagued the South. Shawn Leigh Alexander, *Reconstruction Violence and the Ku Klux Klan Hearings* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2015), 5.

⁷⁹ Fede, "Legitimized Violent Slave Abuse," 95–96; Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 2–4; Michael J. Pfeifer, "The Origins of Postbellum Lynching: Collective Violence in Reconstruction Louisiana," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 50, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 189–201; Michael W. Fitzgerald, "Ex-Slaveholders and the Ku Klux Klan: Exploring the Motivations of Terrorist Violence," in *After Slavery: Race, Labor, and Citizenship in the Reconstruction South*, ed. Bruce E. Baker and Brian Kelly (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013), 154–155; Shawn Leigh Alexander, *Reconstruction Violence and the Ku Klux Klan Hearings* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2015), 1–2; George C. Rable, *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1984), especially chaps. 1 and 2.

⁸⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-8.7: 3373-3374. For additional examples of slaveholders lashing out violently at the newly freed black population, see 4.2: 250-251; S2-5.4: 1766; and S1-10.5: 2243. See also

Much of the physical violence directed against African Americans in the immediate aftermath of emancipation occurred on an ad hoc basis. Such violence – described by Kidada Williams as ordinary violence – occurred on a daily basis; it was individual and spontaneous.⁸¹ Joe Mullens, for example, complained to the Freedmen’s Bureau that John Murphy refused to pay for services rendered. According to Mullens, he had worked for Murphy for two months and three weeks at a rate of \$10.00/month. When Mullens requested his wages, Murphy “set in to beat him.”⁸² It was not unusual for labour disputes to end in physical violence.⁸³ Long accustomed to reaping the rewards of enslaved labours, few slaveholders were eager to pay freedpeople for services rendered. When freedpeople complained, violence was often the immediate response. Used to punishing enslaved people with physical violence, few white Southerners ever questioned

Complaint of Eliza Brown and Narcissa Ford, 17 August 1865, *Register of Complaints, August – September 186*, Vol. 317, RG 105, reel 64, BRFAL-MS (M1907).

⁸¹ Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me*, 226.

⁸² Complaint of Joe Mullens, 26 September 1868, *Register of Complaints, August 1867 – December 1868*, Vol. 216, RG 105, reel 55, BRFAL-GA (M1903).

⁸³ See, for example, Complaint of Jo Harrison, 27 June 1867, *Register of Complaints, June 1867 – December 1868*, Vol. 52, RG 105, reel 12, BRFAL-TX (M1912); Complaint of Jim Brown, 11 February 1868, *Register of Complaints, April 1867 – November 1868*, Vol. 80, RG 105, reel 15, BRFAL-TX (M1912); Complaint of Edmund Pratt, *Registers of letters Received, March – June 1867*, Vol. 95, RG 105, reel 32, BRFAL-SC (M1910); Affidavit of Fannie Price, 18 October 1865, *Miscellaneous Records, 1865 – 1868*, RG 105, reel 43, BRFAL-SC (M190); Affidavit of Micajah Oliphant, 11 October 1866, *Miscellaneous Records 1865 – 1868*, RG 105, reel 43, BRFAL-SC (M1910); Complaint of Charles Daniels, 16 December 1867, *Register of Complaints 1867–January 1868*, Vol. 248, RG 105, reel 60, BRFAL-GA (M1903); Complaint of Brown Kenyon, 26 January 1868, *Register of Complaints, January – October 1868*, Vol. 249, RG 105, reel 60, BRFAL-GA (M1903); Complaint of Eliza Jolley, 26 January 1868, *Register of Complaints, January – October 1868*, Vol. 249, RG 105, reel 60, BRFAL-GA (M1903); Affidavit of Henry Stokes, 1868, *Miscellaneous Records, 1865 – 1868*, RG 105, reel 12, BRFAL-MS (M1907); Complaint of Mrs. Nellie Cheatam, 7 June 1866, *Registers of Complaints, 1866 – 1868*, Vol. 58, RG 105, reel 14, BRFAL-TX (M1912); Complaint of Cherry Golan, 1 April 1867, *Register of Complaints, March 1867 – January 1868*, Vol. 164, RG 105, reel 27, BRFAL-TX (M1912); Complaint of Emma, 5 July 1865, *Miscellaneous Records, 1865 – 1868*, RG 105, reel 97, BRFAL-SC (M1910); Complaint of Lavinia Ball, 13 July 1867, *Statements Relating to Complaints, July 1867 – January 1868*, Vol. 67, RG 105, reel 87, BRFAL-SC (M1910); and Complaint of Wiley Wilson, 9 January 1867, *Register of Complaints, October 1866 – February 1867 and October – December 1868*, Vol. 115, RG 105, reel 21, BRFAL-TX (M1912).

whether it was appropriate to inflict physical violence upon the newly freed black population.

Ordinary physical violence, according to Williams, rarely made newspaper headlines or attracted the attention of the broader population.⁸⁴ While freedpeople regularly reported incidents of physical violence to the Freedmen's Bureau, the agency was poorly equipped to mete out justice. Charles Harper, for example, complained to the Freedmen's Bureau that he had been physically assaulted by James Rush. The resulting investigation concluded that Rush was guilty. The Bureau, however, simply imposed a fine of \$10.00.⁸⁵ The majority of cases handled by the Freedmen's Bureau were settled with small fines or bonds to maintain the peace.⁸⁶ Sometimes the Bureau would not even adjudicate complaints, but instead referred them to the civil authorities.⁸⁷ On 8 January

⁸⁴ Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me*, 226.

⁸⁵ Complaint of Charles Harper, 23 December 1865, *Register of Complaints, December 1865 – June 1867*, Vol. 109, RG 105, reel 22, BRFAL-TX (M1912).

⁸⁶ See, for example, Complaint of Mary, 3 June 1867, *Register of Complaints, June 1867 – December 1868*, Vol. 52, RG 105, reel 12, BRFAL-TX (M1912); Complaint of Meredith Haynes, 2 May 1867, *Register of Contracts, July – August 1866*, Vol. 51, RG 105, reel 12, BRFAL-TX (M1912); Complaint of Unnamed Freedman, 11 July 1865, *Endorsements Sent and Received, May – December 1868*, Vol. 221, RG 105, reel 36, BRFAL-MS (M1907); Complaint of Jacob Lambert, 5 July 1865, , *Endorsements Sent and Received, May – December 1868*, Vol. 221, RG 105, reel 36, BRFAL-MS (M1907); Complaint of Alfred Lacey, 16 May 1868, *Register of Complaints, April 1867 – November 1868*, Vol. 80, RG 105, reel 15, BRFAL-TX (M1912); Complaint of Tom Foley, 25 October 1866, *Register of Complaints, October 1866 – February 1867 and October – December 1868*, Vol. 115, RG 105, reel 21, BRFAL-TX (M1912); Complaint of Wash Whitfield, 29 June 1866, *Register of Complaints, December 1865 – June 1867*, Vol. 109, RG 105, reel 22, BRFAL-TX (M1912); Complaint of Jonas, 30 December 1865, *Register of Complaints, December 1865 – November 1866*, Vol. 392, RG 105, reel 90, BRFAL-GA (M1903); Complaint of Emily Gibson, 1867, *Letters Sent Relating to Complaints, March and May 1866 and July – October 1866*, Vol. 282, RG 105, reel 46, BRFAL-MS (M1907); A. P. Garaher to Brevet Major Reide, 9 January 1868, *Miscellaneous Records, 1866 – 1868*, RG 105, reel 94, BRFAL-SC (M1910); and Complaint of Charles Grey, 1866, *Register of Complaints, January – April 1866 and February – May 1866*, Vol. 299, RG 105, reel 69, BRFAL-GA (M1903).

⁸⁷ See, for example, Complaint of John Beroggins, 4 January 1868, *Register of Complaints, June 1867 – December 1868*, Vol. 52, RG 105, reel 12, BRFAL-TX (M1912); Complaint of Caesar Speed, 2 June 1868, *Reports of Outrages Committed, 1866 and 1868*, RG 105, reel 33, BRFAL-SC (M1910); and Complaint of Isom Howard, 4 June 1868, *Reports of Outrages Committed, 1866 and 1868*, RG 105, reel 33, BRFAL-SC (M1910).

1868, Moses Jasper arrived at the Freedmen’s Bureau in Yazoo City, Mississippi covered in blood. He complained that he had been physically assaulted by Dr. Sprott, but the agent refused to hear his complaint. Two days later, on 10 January, Jasper returned; his wounds were still bleeding. The agent still did not address the complaint but referred Jasper to the civil authorities. The final outcome of the complaint is unknown.⁸⁸

Ordinary physical violence against African Americans rarely prompted public outrage. Following emancipation, Tom Williams, a white planter from Mississippi, endeavoured to hire formerly enslaved people as labourers. While many agreed to negotiate labour contracts, one freedman refused. This angered Williams because the freedman was physically capable and intelligent; he was an ideal labourer. Williams, therefore, lashed the freedman to an oak tree. He then proceeded to whip the freedman over the course of three days. When the freedman still refused to negotiate a labour contract, Williams began to spread rumours that the freedman was of questionable character. Despite the severity of the physical violence inflicted on the freedmen, few white Southerners ever acknowledged the incident. Those who did were easily convinced that the freedman somehow deserved such abuse.⁸⁹

The prevalence of physical violence in the postemancipation South was made possible by what Hannah Arendt referred to as the “superior organization of power.”⁹⁰ As much as white Southerners endeavoured to create the illusion of security, their domination over the black population was only made possible by the organized solidarity

⁸⁸ Complaint of Moses Jasper, 10 January 1868, *Register of Complaints, December 1867 – March 1868 and October – December 1868*, Vol. 328, RG 105, reel 65, BRFAL-MS (M1907).

⁸⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-10.5: 2316-2317.

⁹⁰ Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1969), 50.

of those who remained hostile towards black men and women. Indeed, many white people knew that even if they committed acts of extreme physical violence, they would likely never be prosecuted because of this solidarity. For example, Van Eaves, a white man from Georgia, struck Due Heard, a freedman, with a rock. Eaves also tried to shoot Heard with a pistol, taking deliberate aim. An agent of the Freedmen's Bureau was present at the time of the attack, yet Eaves did not hesitate to attack the freedman. Following the attack, the agent placed Eaves in the charge of John Doray, a local law enforcement official, while he secured a warrant of arrest. Doray reportedly allowed Eaves to escape.⁹¹ Similarly, Wise Williams, Ernest Stallings, and Taylor Maitland physically assaulted two freedwomen and managed to escape punishment. The white men entered the freedwomen's house, assaulted them, and refused to leave when ordered. The men were arrested and charged with assault and battery with intent to kill, trespass, and disorderly conduct. Several witnesses identified the perpetrators and confirmed the attack on the freedwomen, and yet all three men were acquitted.⁹²

The reality is that many white Southerners felt threatened by the newly freed black population. Especially in areas where the black population constituted a majority, as in South Carolina and the Black Belt, the abolition of slavery left many white Southerners feeling insecure and unsure of their ability to maintain a position of dominance. Much of their political and economic power had rested on the institution of slavery, which no longer existed. Moreover, with the end of the slavery, black men and women increasingly

⁹¹ Complaint of Due Heard, 19 September 1868, *Register of Complaints, August 1867 – December 1868*, Vol. 216, RG 105, reel 55, BRFAL-GA (M1903).

⁹² Complaint of Rebecca Kelly and Hickey Kelly, 12 July 1866, *Register of Complaints, April – September 1866*, Vol. 94, RG 105, reel 52, BRFAL-SC (M1910).

recognized that they had a right to resist oppression, and to object to the widespread use of racialized violence. This further weakened the position of white Southerners, who responded with further violence. But, as Hannah Arendt argued, “Violence appears where power is in jeopardy.”⁹³ Wherever white Southerners felt threatened, they responded with greater violence in a desperate attempt to secure their dominance.

Peter Clifton, a freedman from South Carolina, described how his former master, Chester Biggers, continued to use physical violence as a means of controlling his black labourers. On one occasion, Biggers yelled at a freedwoman for the way she was chopping cotton. The woman resented being treated as though she were still enslaved, and so she “turnt on him wid de hoe and gashed him ‘bout de head wid it.” Biggers then shot the woman.⁹⁴ Overt attempts at resistance were often met with harsh reprisals. The freedwoman survived being shot but learned quickly that physical violence was to remain a key feature of life in the postemancipation South.

When Charley Hurt, a freedman from Texas, witnessed a white planter beating his mother, he was traumatized by the attack. While working in the field, Hurt’s mother became angry with her employer and began to cuss at the white man. She received a beating for her perceived impertinence. After the attack, Hurt swore revenge and planned to kill the white man. The only reason Hurt did not go through with the plan was because his mother convinced him not to risk his own life.⁹⁵ Ordinary violence was often spontaneous and carried out in response to a particular incident or perceived slight. In

⁹³ Arendt, *On Violence*, 56.

⁹⁴ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 2.1: 208-209.

⁹⁵ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-5.4: 1839-1840.

contrast, extraordinary violence, according to Kidada Williams, was often premeditated. White posses, gangs, and mobs administered extraordinary physical violence collectively and were more likely to torture, rape, or kill their victims.⁹⁶ Hurt's mother recognized that if her son killed a white man, even as an act of retaliation for the abuse she suffered, he would likely become a victim of extraordinary physical violence.

Nightriding – sometime referred to as whitecapping – refers to extralegal acts of violence carried out by vigilantes under the cover of darkness. Much like the patrollers who controlled the movement of enslaved people and punished fugitives, the Ku Klux Klan, in the postemancipation South, terrorized the black community by whipping and beating black men and women, seizing weapons, and breaking up social and religious gatherings.⁹⁷ The Klan also targeted white people who endeavoured to protect African Americans or who supported the Republican Party and the reorganization of the South following the Civil War.⁹⁸

Lynching, like nightriding, refers to the practice of exercising punishment on a victim without regard for the law.⁹⁹ Walter T. Howard, in his study of lynching in Florida, defined lynching as “the practice of a group of two or more individuals inflicting

⁹⁶ Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me*, 226.

⁹⁷ Michael W. Fitzgerald, in his study of ex-slaveholders and the formation of the Ku Klux Klan, identified seven factors that contributed to the rise of racialized violence. First and foremost was the legacy of slavery, including the encouragement of brutality and the intolerance of dissent, along with the use of the slave patrol system to subjugate black men and women. Fitzgerald, “Ex-Slaveholders and the Ku Klux Klan,” 154.

⁹⁸ Trelease, *White Terror*, especially chaps. 2 and 12; Rable, *But There Was No Peace*, chap. 5; Lou Falkner Williams, “The Great South Carolina Ku Klux Klan Trials, 1871-1872” (Dissertation, 1991), chap. 1; Michael W. Fitzgerald, “Ex-Slaveholders and the Ku Klux Klan: Exploring the Motivations of Terrorist Violence,” in *After Slavery: Race, Labor, and Citizenship in the Reconstruction South*, ed. Bruce E. Baker and Brian Kelly, New Perspectives on the History of the South (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013), 143–58.

⁹⁹ Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

punishment upon victims without regard to law in the service of justice, tradition, or race.”¹⁰⁰ Unlike nightriding, however, lynching was intended to deprive the victim of life. Lynching also did not always rely on the cover of darkness to inspire terror, but often occurred in broad daylight as a spectacle for eager audiences.¹⁰¹

In the postemancipation South, lynching served as an instrument of social control aimed largely at black men and women who threatened the social and racial hierarchy of the South. Between 1882 and 1968, according to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), 4743 individuals were lynched across the United States. The vast majority of these victims, approximately seventy-three percent, were black.¹⁰² While lynchings occurred in the North, most took place in the South. Mississippi experienced the greatest number of lynchings between 1882 and 1968 with

¹⁰⁰ Walter T. Howard, *Lynchings: Extralegal Violence in Florida during the 1930s* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1995), 17. There are, however, numerous definitions regarding what constitutes lynching. The Dyer Bill, for example, defined lynching as “three or more persons acting in concert for the purpose of depriving any person his life without authority of law as a punishment for or to prevent the commission of some actual or supposed public offense.” See National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, “NAACP History: Anti-Lynching Bill,” *NAACP*, <https://www.naacp.org/naacp-history-dyer-anti-lynching-bill/> (accessed 24 August 2020). For the purposes of this chapter, I will adhere to Howard’s broad definition of lynching. This definition better complements the limitations of my primary sources which often fail to detail how many persons were involved in attacks against African Americans.

¹⁰¹ Because of these distinctions, we should recognize lynching as separate from nightriding.

¹⁰² National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, “History of Lynching,” *NAACP*, <https://www.naacp.org/history-of-lynchings/> (accessed 21 July 2020). Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck report 2,805 lynchings between 1882 and 1930 in ten southern states. See Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 269. Tolnay and Beck offer a detailed statistical study of lynching in ten southern states – Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Determining the exact number of lynchings is difficult, largely because the definition of lynching was open to contestation. While the NAACP kept records, some lynchings were inevitably not recorded. See, for example, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States* (New York: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, National Office, 1919).

581. Georgia was second with 531, while Texas had 493. Of the total, approximately seventy-nine percent of lynchings occurred in the South.¹⁰³

Lynching was a powerful tool of intimidation. Not merely extralegal murders, lynchings were incidents of ritualized violence that held a singular psychological force. Lynching not only caused physical trauma to the victim, but also psychological trauma to the entire black community, witnesses to extraordinary physical violence at the hands of angry mobs. Lynching might involve hundreds of people; photographs might be taken and circulated as souvenirs; and sometimes the bodies of the victims were left on display as a warning to other African Americans or, in extreme cases, dismembered and distributed to eager spectators.¹⁰⁴

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, black men and women lived in constant fear of extraordinary physical violence. The publicly stated reason for extraordinary physical violence – especially lynching – was the punishment of black criminals. Lynch mobs, for example, organized to punish alleged criminal offenses, including murder and rape. In the eyes of many white Southerners, those vigilantes who inflicted violence on the newly freed black population were carrying out justice. Many believed that black-on-white crime was increasing, and the formal system of criminal justice was too weak to ensure an appropriate punishment. However, while white Southerners claimed that extraordinary physical violence was necessary to punish black criminals, Ida B. Wells, an antilynching activist, concluded that many of those lynched in

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Amy Louise Wood, “Lynching Photography and the Visual Reproduction of White Supremacy,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 6, no. 3 (September 2005): 373–99; Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

the postemancipation South were lynched for minor offenses or were innocent of any wrongdoing.¹⁰⁵

Thousands of African Americans actively engaged in resistance against extraordinary physical violence. Amidst widespread violence, an organized antilynching movement emerged. The NAACP, for example, championed federal antilynching legislation to outlaw lynching.¹⁰⁶ The National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, founded in 1896, endeavoured to raise the public perception of black women and emerged at the forefront of the antilynching movement.¹⁰⁷ These organizations, along with countless others, demonstrate the unwillingness of black men and women to submit to racialized violence.

The work of reform groups – national organizations, women's clubs, fraternal organizations – are integral to understanding how African Americans responded to racialized violence in the postemancipation South. However, only a small number of black men and women belonged to these groups or participated in other forms of organized protest. Deborah Gray White, for example, acknowledges that those black

¹⁰⁵ African Americans were the first to examine the myths about the causes of extralegal violence by making careful, empirical studies of lynching. Wells published *A Red Record* to “tell the world the facts” by outlining the true causes of lynching. See W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 5; Ida B. Wells, *A Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynchings in the United States* (Chicago: Donohue & Henneberry, 1895). See also *KKK Testimony*, 11: 224-225.

¹⁰⁶ Charles Flint Kellogg, *NAACP: A History of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1909-1920* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1967); and Robert Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909-1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980); and Angelica Mungarro and Karen Anderson, *How Did Black Women in the NAACP Promote the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill, 1918-1923?* ed. Marian Horan (Binghamton, New York: State University of New York, 2003).

¹⁰⁷ Mary Jane Brown, *Eradicating This Evil: Women in the American Anti-Lynching Movement, 1892-1940* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 9.

women who joined women's clubs were primarily members of the middle class.¹⁰⁸ Those who belonged to the working class were more likely to engage in informal, unorganized resistance by making jokes or taunting attackers, engaging in armed self-defense, lying to protect those who might be victimized by vigilantes, or migrating to areas of relative safety.

Nightriding and lynching were used to impose severe restraints on ambition, and to punish perceived signs of impudence, impertinence or independence. This resulted in an atmosphere of terror and inflicted severe psychological trauma on African Americans. For many, the sight of law enforcement officials or the sound of bloodhounds evoked terror and a renewed sense of vulnerability.¹⁰⁹ But many African Americans applied traditions of discursive insubordination to combat the terror of physical violence. This resistance manifested primarily as a rich catalogue of humour with which black men and women mocked both acts of violence and the perpetrators of physical violence.

Laughter functioned as a compensating mechanism. African Americans relied on humour to provide a transcendent release from the tensions of living in the oppressive South.¹¹⁰ Lawrence W. Levine argued that laughter stems from a desire to place negative situations into perspective; to exert some degree of control. As a result, the need to laugh often exists most urgently among those who are able to exert the least power over their

¹⁰⁸ Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999).

¹⁰⁹ Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 12–15. On the use of bloodhounds to hunt those enslaved people who ran away, see *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 4.2: 110.

¹¹⁰ Trudier Harris, "Adventures in a 'Foreign Country': African American Humor and the South," *Southern Cultures* 1 (1995), 458.

immediate environment.¹¹¹ No subject was excluded from the province of humour, as jokes allowed black people to express their feelings on a variety of issues. Warren Davis, a black man from Georgia, became a target of the Ku Klux Klan after he refused to sell his crop and relinquish his land. One morning, when his family went outside to feed the chickens, there was a coffin on the property. Inside the coffin was a note reading “LOOK OUT FOR THE KKK.” The note further promised that if Davis did not leave within fifteen days, he would be killed. When he described the incident before the congressional committee, Davis laughed at the theatricality of the terrorist organization. He explained, “Just as well to laugh as to cry.”¹¹² Humour, therefore, offered a means of undermining the fear imposed by acts of physical violence.

It was important for African Americans to be able to draw on racial stereotypes and racist epithets to laugh at their own predicament. John Dollard, a psychologist and sociologist studying race relations in the United States during the twentieth century, witnessed the use of humour to confront the trauma of lynching. He observed, “To take cheerfully a matter of such terrible moment is really to turn the joke back on the white man; some fun is squeezed even out of his warning.”¹¹³ Dollard further related a joke about a lynching in Texas. After a black man was lynched, a sign was attached to the hanging corpse. It read, “In statu co.” The local black population was frightened and wanted to know what the sign meant. After asking numerous prominent officials, a

¹¹¹ Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 300.

¹¹² *KKK Testimony*, 7: 727-729.

¹¹³ John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (New York: Doubleday, 1957), 310. John Dollard was among the first scholars to study racialized violence as part of an effort to bring attention to controversial topics, like lynching, that southern historians typically avoided.

professor was called to explain the sign. The professor confessed to the crowd that he did not recognize the words but asserted that in general they meant that the lynched man was “in a hell of a fix.” The joke was met with a hearty laugh and the tension dissipated.¹¹⁴

When the Ku Klux Klan visited the home of Elias Thomson, the freedman refused to cower in fear. Instead, he began to tell jokes and make light of the situation. When told to pray and beg for his life, Thomson cheekily responded that he “was not a praying man much, and hardly ever prayed; only a very few times; never did pray much.” Thomson barraged the intruders with jokes and even laughed at one of the men because the situation “sort of tickled” him. In a final effort to intimidate the freedman, one disguised man claimed to be the ghost of a Confederate soldier.¹¹⁵ Thomson pretended to be in awe and stated, “You have been through a right smart of experience.” Thomson was whipped, but ultimately survived his encounter with the Ku Klux Klan.¹¹⁶ Frank Williams, a freedman from Mississippi, similarly encountered the Ku Klux Klan when he stumbled upon a meeting in the woods. Once spotted, one of the disguised men laughed and said, “Why if dat ain’t a coon right here with us!” Williams responded, “Naw, mister, dat ain’t no coon dat was a coon!” Williams then fled to safety.¹¹⁷ Such jokes demonstrate the power of humour when confronting violent actions. Humour was not resigned, but

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ The Ku Klux Klan regularly pretended to be otherworldly spirits. See *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 3.3: 128; 7.2: 104; S1-7.2: 334; S1-7.2: 347; S1-9.4: 1355; S1-9.4: 1900; S1-10.5: 1913-1914; S1-10.5: 2404; S2-3.2: 597; S2-4.3:1000; S2-4.3: 1106; S2-4.3: 1113-1114; S2-5.4: 1612-1613; S2-7.6: 2504; S2-8.7: 3094-3095; S2-8.7: 3127; S2-9.8: 3546; S2-9.8: 3571; S2-10.9 3974; and S2-10.9: 4063. See also, for example, *KKK Testimony*, 4: 797; 6: 244; and 6: 246.

¹¹⁶ *KKK Testimony*, 3: 411-412.

¹¹⁷ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-10.5: 2320-2321.

rebellious. It allowed black men and women to assert their own moral superiority and to dismiss fears of white authority.¹¹⁸

Discursive insubordination could also take the more brazen form of open taunts or insults. Jacob Montgomery, for example, was victimized by the Ku Klux Klan in South Carolina in April 1870. After breaking into Montgomery's house, the disguised men asked if he was scared. Montgomery replied that he was not.¹¹⁹ He refused to be intimidated. Similarly, in 1894, Abe Smalls was to be hanged for killing a white policeman in Georgia. He boasted to the *Savannah Morning News* that "he don't care when he dies, just so he is not taken alive and that he is game enough to die with his boots on."¹²⁰ Both Montgomery and Smalls demonstrated considerable bravery and refused to show fear when confronted with physical violence. Montgomery was still whipped and Smalls was still hanged. But they did not give their attackers the satisfaction of seeing them cower.

At an election in December 1870 to fill a vacancy caused by the murder of a political representative in Georgia, an altercation erupted between the local black and white populations. As large numbers of black men arrived at the polling station to cast their ballots, a white Democrat endeavoured to intimidate and bully an unnamed black man. He "put his foot on top of the foot of a colored man and trod on it." The Democrat then ordered the man to get out of his way and leave. The black man simply responded, "I

¹¹⁸ In the context of the First World War, Tim Cook described how soldiers used humour as a safety valve to cope with suffering, pity, and trauma. Tim Cook, "I will meet the world with a smile and a joke": Canadian Soldiers' Humour in the Great War," *Canadian Military History* 22, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 49-62.

¹¹⁹ *KKK Testimony*, 4: 695.

¹²⁰ *Savannah Morning News*, 14 April 1894, quoted in Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the Nineteenth Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 232. This incident is also quoted in Brundage, "The Roar on the Other Side of Silence," 274.

cannot get out of your way with your foot on top mine.” By calmly pointing out the absurdity of the situation, the black man refused to be intimidated and humiliated the hostile white man. The altercation escalated as the Democrat ordered the arrest of the black man. However, the refusal of the black man to bow to subjugation inspired bystanders. When the white men present brandished guns, several black men retaliated by firing into the crowd.¹²¹

Verbal confrontations offered a relatively safe way to resist oppression, although there was always a risk of reprisal. After the unnamed black man stood up to the white Democrat, the resulting gun fight resulted in the death of several black men as well as injuries to several white men. Several black men were arrested for starting an insurrection.¹²² Jacob Aldrich, a black man from Texas, complained that white Southerners frequently beat African Americans if they were seen talking to certain women, especially white women. Aldrich thought that this was foolish and boasted, “If any man had told me dat, dey’d had to hang me.”¹²³ Aldrich, like many African Americans, recognized that open resistance came with a risk of death. But he claimed to be willing to take the risk to uphold his rights as a free citizen. If white men were allowed to freely talk to both black women and white women, he argued, black men should be allowed to talk to both white women and black women.

The omnipresence of death meant that resistance sometimes surfaced during the funeral ceremonies of those killed by racialized violence. Funerals became an outlet

¹²¹ *KKK Testimony*, 7: 1039-1040.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-2.1: 26.

where African Americans could vent their bitterness and pain because they were rarely attended by white Southerners. Therefore, they were a safe place where black men and women could speak out against injustice.¹²⁴ The preachers who presided over the funerals of African Americans, for example, spoke openly against racialized violence. In the early twentieth century, many black people and sympathetic white people in both the North and South began to argue that the savagery of white mobs stood as an abomination contrasting with the American ideals embodied in the Constitution. Reverend William Gaines, who presided over the funeral of McCoy, sharply criticized those who had been involved in the lynching.¹²⁵ Gaines suffered no apparent penalty for his outspoken behaviour, yet other African Americans sometimes aroused anger with similar behaviour. Billy Robertson, for example, preached over the body of Amos Baxter, a black man murdered by the Ku Klux Klan. According to Robertson's daughter, who related the narrative, her father angered the Klan with his boldness. One night, sometime after the funeral, the Klan attempted to kill the preacher. Robertson, however, was never caught.¹²⁶

David R. Roediger, in his study of funeral practices during slavery, revealed that slaveholders did not consistently provide a decent burial for enslaved people. Paternalistic impulses moved some masters to tolerate, and even encourage, funerals for enslaved people. However, racism, labour discipline, and tyrannical authority led others to oppose

¹²⁴ Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 46.

¹²⁵ For a discussion of resistance at the funeral of a later lynching victim, see Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 265-268; and Courtney Baker, "Emmett Till, Justice, and the Task of Recognition," *Journal of American Culture* 29, no. 2 (2006): 111-124.

¹²⁶ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 3.4: 216.

and circumscribe them.¹²⁷ There were no funeral parlours that would conduct burial rites for enslaved people, which meant that the vast majority of funerals were conducted at home.¹²⁸ Slaveholders often had graveyards on their plantations and tasked labourers with building rudimentary coffins for the dead.¹²⁹ Particularly benevolent masters might let their enslaved labourers quit work to mourn.¹³⁰ Others, however, refused to grant enslaved people time off to conduct even the most basic burial rites. Sam Polite described how enslaved people conducted burials by the light of the torch because they were not allowed time off work to bury the dead.¹³¹ In particularly egregious cases, the dead were simply rolled into a hole without ceremony.¹³²

Because burial rites were administered inconsistently during slavery, many African Americans developed a preoccupation with ensuring that the dead received respectable burials after emancipation.¹³³ Booker T. Washington, in a speech at the Tuskegee Institute in the 1890s, articulated how fears about death and burial loomed over the daily lives of African Americans: “The trouble with us is that we are always preparing to die. You meet a white man early Monday and ask him what he is preparing to do, and he will tell you that he is preparing to start a business. You ask a colored man the same,

¹²⁷ David R. Roediger, “And Die in Dixie: Funerals, Death & Heaven in the Slave Community, 1700-1865,” *The Massachusetts Review* 22, no 1. (Spring 1981): 164.

¹²⁸ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 13.4: 78-79.

¹²⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-3.2: 716.

¹³⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-5.4: 1560.

¹³¹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 3.3: 274. See also S1-11: 252.

¹³² *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-3.2: 567.

¹³³ Belief in the supernatural, to some extent, also contributed to beliefs about the importance of burial rites. Susie Branch, an enslaved woman Georgia, revealed that it was common practice to bury the dead in their home region. The body of a young man who died in New York, for example, was brought back to White Bluff for burial. According to Branch, this was to because “duh spirit’Il just wanduh round an nebul be satisfied lessn it burng back home tuh be buried.” Savannah Unit, Georgia Writers’ Project, *Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies Among the Georgia Coastal Negroes* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1973), 77.

and he will tell you that he is preparing to die.”¹³⁴ Ensuring that the dead were treated with respect was especially important because many black men and women recognized that they might not die peacefully of naturally causes, but instead might become the victims of physical violence.

While some African Americans wanted to hold hostile white Southerners accountable for ensuring the burial of those who died as a result of physical violence, others preferred to undertake the task personally. Because lynchings were intended to propagate terror, it was not uncommon for the bodies of lynching victims to be left on display as a warning. Ben Johnson described the lynching of Cy Guy by the Ku Klux Klan. According to Johnson, a sign was attached to the body that read: “He shall hang ‘tween de heavens an’ de yearth till he am daid, daid, daid, an’ dat any nigger what takes down de body shall be hunged too.”¹³⁵ Black men and women did not need to witness a lynching to be terrorized; images of physical violence permeated daily life. Providing burial rites, however, allowed black men and women to mitigate the terror that hostile white Southerners attempted to inflict.

Without the attention of the black community, it is unlikely the victims of racialized violence would have received a respectful burial. Brawley Gilmore, a formerly enslaved man from South Carolina, described how the Ku Klux Klan would “come along at night a riding de niggers like dey was goats.” Some were forced to sit on the banister of a bridge before being shot; their bodies would fall into the river and float downstream.

¹³⁴ Booker T. Washington, *Black-Belt Diamonds: Gems from the Speeches, Addresses, and Talks to Students of Booker T. Washington*, ed. and comp. Victoria Earle Matthews (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 41.

¹³⁵ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 15.2: 10.

When Sam Scaife, a local black man, was murdered in this manner, his family retrieved the body and buried it on the bank of the creek. Although the family wanted to take the body to a proper graveyard, they were not allowed.¹³⁶ Similarly, when Eli McCollum was killed, his family retrieved his body after it had floated three and a half miles down the river. The family buried the body on the banks of the stream because they were not allowed to remove the body.¹³⁷ Indeed, the Ku Klux Klan frequently refused to allow any black person to take the bodies of their victims. Some were thrown in unmarked graves, while others were left to be scavenged by carrion animals.¹³⁸

Oliver Bell encountered the Ku Klux Klan under the leadership of Steve Renfroe, a bandit active in Alabama and Mississippi during Reconstruction.¹³⁹ Bell described how Renfroe approached Enoch and Frank Sledge. The two black men were trading in town, but Renfroe did not want them challenging the economic prosperity of white merchants. Consequently, Renfroe murdered Enoch and the Klan pursued Frank to the river where he was also killed. In defiance of the Ku Klux Klan, the local black community, including Bell, went to the river at night to ensure that the bodies received a proper burial. Enoch and Frank Sledge were buried in Travis graveyard.¹⁴⁰ Jesse Rice, a black man from South Carolina, described a similar scenario. After Alex Leech was murdered by the Ku Klux Klan, his family had a difficult time recovering his body because its whereabouts was unknown. Only after three weeks did a young girl locate the body while milking cows by

¹³⁶ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 2.2: 120-121.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ The testimony gathered by the congressional committee on the Ku Klux Klan refers to this bandit as Stephen Renfeau. See *KKK Testimony*, 11: 14; 11: 24; 11: 29; and 11: 51.

¹⁴⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 6.1: 29-30.

the river. She spotted a large number of carrion animals and, after scaring them away, spotted the decomposing corpse of Leech. Once the body was recovered, Leech's family ensured that he received a proper burial.¹⁴¹ By burying the victims of physical violence, African Americans were able to restore some dignity to those individuals killed by hostile white Southerners.¹⁴²

Resistance to physical violence was facilitated by the creation of black social spaces. African Americans, especially those who belonged to the working class or lived in rural areas, carved out social spaces free from the influence of white Southerners where they could find refuge from the humiliations and indignities that resulted from rampant racism and racialized violence. In rural areas, black men and women established churches, social clubs, and fraternal organizations.¹⁴³ These spaces were exclusively black and enabled African Americans to protect some aspects of their lives from racialized violence. Dances, prayer meetings, quilting bees, and other illicit gatherings had been an important part of life for enslaved people as they provided a means of escape from the daily horrors of slavery. Prayer meetings, in particular, enabled black men and women to integrate resistance and worship. Millie Ann Smith, for example, regularly attended prayer meetings during slavery where she prayed for freedom.¹⁴⁴ Often these prayers were uttered into an overturned wash pot, as many enslaved people believed that

¹⁴¹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 3.4: 15.

¹⁴² For further examples of burial as a form of resistance, see *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 5.4: 46 and 3.4: 15-16; and *KKK Testimony*, 6: 206-210 and 11: 146-147.

¹⁴³ Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 110

¹⁴⁴ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 5.4: 43.

the pot would trap the sound and prevent discovery.¹⁴⁵ During the day, enslaved people might attend the local church with white people, or perhaps listen to sermons delivered by a white preacher. But the focus was always obedience and loyalty to white masters.¹⁴⁶

By creating exclusively black spaces, enslaved people were able to use religion to express their desires for a better life and to pray for an end to racism and violence. Religion remained an important aspect of black culture after the abolition of slavery. For example, Cindy Mitchell, a formerly enslaved woman living in Mississippi, became a spiritual and temporal leader. She had a church known as “Cindy’s Band” on the bank of Bogue Creek. Mitchell built up a following of hundreds of people and helped create a safe space where black men and women could sing, dance, and pray.¹⁴⁷ Lina Anne Pendergrass embraced religion after her father was kidnapped by the Ku Klux Klan. She blamed the epidemic of extraordinary physical violence in the postemancipation South on a lack of religion. She believed that both black and white people needed to participate in prayer meetings because people who engaged in religion did not participate in violent activities.¹⁴⁸ Similarly, Mary Carpenter condemned “hangin an sich” because the Lord says, “Thou shalt not kill.”¹⁴⁹

Religion also provided African Americans with a way to come together in defense of their rights. Coordination for protest required informal networks rooted in the church

¹⁴⁵ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-3.2: 607. See also 5.3: 44; 5.4: 132; S2-10.9: 4070; S2-4.3: 1262; S2-7.6: 2562; S2-7.6: 2614; and S2-7.6: 2909-2910. On religious life among enslaved people, see Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The ‘Invisible Institution’ in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), especially 214-218.

¹⁴⁶ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-9.4: 1571.

¹⁴⁷ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-9.4: 1511.

¹⁴⁸ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 3.3: 248-249. See also, for example, S1-6.1: 64-65.

¹⁴⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-3.1: 145.

and local community. These networks made resistance possible, yet they were largely invisible to white Southerners. Ironically, as Robin Kelley notes, segregation facilitated the creation and maintenance of unmonitored social sites in which black men and women could freely express their opinions.¹⁵⁰

Black social spaces were invaluable for the formation and reproduction of resistance techniques. In 1871, African Americans in Meridian, Mississippi were becoming increasingly frustrated by the endless barrage of disguised men who came from Alabama to terrorize the black population. On one occasion, several black men were carried back to Alabama where they were never heard from again. The disguised men claimed to have acted with authority, but investigations revealed that the kidnappings were unlawful. In response, African Americans began to discuss how to defend themselves. Many had already been pushed from rural settlements to larger, urban areas where they sought sanctuary.¹⁵¹

On 4 March 1871, a large group gathered at the local courthouse to address the frequent outrages being committed against black men and women. Those who spoke at the meeting were dissatisfied with the administration of the law and the lack of respect afforded to the black community. Warren Tyler, one of several leading black citizens present at the meeting, denounced the killing of a black man named Williams in nearby Lauderdale County. Williams had been killed roughly six months prior by a group of disguised men, but the perpetrators were never arrested. Similarly, in Lauderdale Springs,

¹⁵⁰ Robin D. G. Kelley, “‘We Are Not What We Seem’: Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South,” *The Journal of American History* 80, no. 1 (1993): 79.

¹⁵¹ *KKK Testimony*, 11: 6-9 and 17-18; 11: 64-69 and 78-80; 11: 100-105, 109, and 122-123; and 11: 170-171 and 200-201; 11: 210.

one unnamed black man was murdered by disguised men, while another was grievously wounded.¹⁵² Tyler spoke at length of those African Americans who had been unjustly killed and called upon the community to take matters into their own hands. Tyler reportedly promised to defend the rights of black citizens because “this is the black man’s county; that they had built the houses, the railroads, and cleared off the forests.”¹⁵³

The meeting at the courthouse immediately preceded the Meridian Race Riot of 1871. Hostile white Southerners decided to force those who spoke at the meeting to leave the city. They began to patrol the streets and, about an hour after the meeting adjourned, a fire started on the second floor of a white-owned local store. The incident prompted an altercation between the white and black populations in Meridian. Three black men who spoke at the meeting – Warren Tyler, William Clopton, and Aaron Moore – were arrested for making incendiary speeches and instigating the fire. At the subsequent trial, a shooting resulted in the death of Judge Bramlette. The defendants fled and a race riot erupted as large groups of white men began to search for Tyler, Clopton, and Moore. When the rioters could not find the defendants, they attacked other black men and women. Over three days, approximately thirty black people were killed before federal troops arrive to restore peace.¹⁵⁴

The exact details of the initial meeting at the courthouse on 4 March are unknown. Many of those who described the meeting were white citizens of Meridian who were not

¹⁵² *KKK Testimony*, 11: 97-102.

¹⁵³ *KKK Testimony*, 11: 157.

¹⁵⁴ O. C. French, a member of the Mississippi Legislature was tasked with investigating the riot. His testimony offers the most complete account of these events. See *KKK Testimony*, 11: 6-23. Appended to his personal testimony was the testimony gathered by the joint committee of the Mississippi Legislature to investigate the race riot. See 11: 23-53.

actually present. Some claimed that attendees used incendiary language and threatened to retaliate against the white population, while others argued that no such language was used.¹⁵⁵ Bill Clopton, another prominent black man, insisted that African Americans stand together and argued that if local officials would not uphold the law, then they would do it themselves. An investigation into the meeting conducted by O. C. French, a member of the Mississippi Legislature, concluded that statements were made to the black attendees that if they could not in other ways prevent outrages from being committed, they would have to try and prevent them by force of arms.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, many of the black people present believed that a show of arms was the only way to secure safety.

African Americans keenly understood the necessity of self-defense. Amy Else, a black woman living in Texas, survived an attack by two soldiers shortly after the Civil War because of her father's willingness to defend his family. One evening, while Else was visiting her parents, two soldiers began to walk by the house repeatedly. Her mother, who first spotted the men, was afraid that the soldiers were "up to some devilment." She insisted that her husband hide under the house. When the soldiers broke in, Else's mother tried to reason with the men. The men refused to listen and struck the black woman. This angered Else's father who emerged from underneath the house armed with an axe. He struck one soldier across the back and forced the other to flee. After the attack, the soldier who fled reported the incident and tried to have Else's father arrested. Else's father, however, was ruled to have acted justly in defense of his family.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ See *KKK Testimony*, 11: 9-10; 11: 65-67; 11: 136-137; 11: 152; and 11: 152-153.

¹⁵⁶ *KKK Testimony*, 11: 6-7.

¹⁵⁷ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-4.3: 1303-1304.

Else's father was fortunate that his story was corroborated by two prominent white men: Judge Adkins and Dr. Evans.¹⁵⁸ Had they not come to his defense, it is unlikely that the local authorities would have taken the word of a black defendant over his white accuser. Even when black men and women successfully warded off an attack, it was not unusual for retaliation to come at a later date. On 1 January 1871, a group of disguised men arrived at the home of Eliza Chalk. As Chalk peered out the window of her home to see who had arrived, she was nearly shot as the men unleashed a barrage of gunfire on the wooden cabin. In an effort to protect their mother, Chalk's three sons took up arms and returned fire. They successfully halted the attack. Several days later, however, all three men were imprisoned. One son became the target of additional violence as he was removed from the prison, marched to a field and shot. He did not die of his injuries but was returned to jail. Chalk visited her son everyday to bring food and tend to his wounds. After several more days passed, the black man was again removed from the jail in a second raid and shot six times. He eventually died of his wounds.¹⁵⁹

Fear of physical violence increasingly led African Americans to sleep outside their homes at night. Charlotte Fowler, a black woman from South Carolina, witnessed the murder of her husband at the hands of the Ku Klux Klan. In her testimony before the congressional committee, she revealed that many African Americans no longer slept in their houses due to fear. Instead, they began "lying out" in the woods to protect themselves just as enslaved people had during slavery.¹⁶⁰ One freedman complained that

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *KKK Testimony*, 4: 1128-1135; 4: 1135-1142; and 4: 1155-1158.

¹⁶⁰ *KKK Testimony*, 3: 386-392. See also *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 4.2: 158; S2-2.1: 141-142; S2-3.2: 780; S2-7.6: 2486; S2-8.7: 3142; and S2-10.9: 4312; *KKK Testimony*, 3: 520-522; 3: 584; 3: 594; 4:

the prevalence of lying out was beginning to cause problems with labour, as many African Americans became sleep deprived and struggled to complete simple tasks.¹⁶¹

William Coleman, a black man from Mississippi, attracted the attention of the Ku Klux Klan because he failed to tip his hat to a white traveller he passed on the road; he was targeted for acting “like a white man.” Several disguised men beat Coleman severely. He tried to defend himself with an axe but was eventually overpowered. After the attack, Coleman started to sleep outside at night. He feared for his life, but reasoned that if he was not home when the Klan conducted its nightly raids, then he would be safe. What is most interesting, however, is that Coleman’s wife remained at home; she continued to sleep inside.¹⁶²

A belief persisted among many African Americans that hostile white Southerners were less likely to physically abuse women even though black women remained the frequent targets of sexual violence. Therefore, when Coleman made the decision to sleep outside, he instructed his wife to remain inside. He explained:

I have left my house and told my wife to stay in there, for [the Ku Klux Klan] don’t hurt women unless some of the women is sassy to some of their wives, or speak like a white woman, and they call that sass; then they go and whip them nearly to death; but I knew my wife wouldn’t say nothing; she says nothing, or only so little that you can’t take no offense at it – can’t get mad.¹⁶³

597-599; 5: 1861-1862; 5: 1869; 5: 1948-1949; 11: 238-239; and 11: 363; Complaint of Mason Parker, 22 November 1868, *Reports of Outrages Committed, 1866 – and 1868*, RG 105, reel 33, BRFAL-SC (M1910); Complaint of Anstrom Culp, 31 October 1868, *Register of Complaints, June – November 1868*, Vol. 103, RG 105, reel 33, BRFAL-SC (M1910); Complaint of Frank Talbert, 9 November 1868, *Register of Complaints, June – November 1868*, Vol. 103, RG 105, reel 33, BRFAL-SC (M1910); and Complaint of Agnes Robinson, 25 September 1867, *Letters Sent Relating to Complaints, March and May 1866 and July – October 1866*, Vol. 282, RG 105, reel 46, BRFAL-MS (M1907).

¹⁶¹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 5.4: 234. See also S2-5.4: 1638.

¹⁶² *KKK Testimony*, 11: 482-488. See also *KKK Testimony*, 3:520-522; 3: 524-526; and *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-3.2: 680.

¹⁶³ *KKK Testimony*, 11: 488. William Hamilton, a black man living in Texas, similarly claimed that the Klan “wasn’t so bad after women.” See *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 4.2: 106-108.

Indeed, many black women found that by feigning subservience, they could redirect the attention of the Ku Klux Klan and thereby protect black men. George Washington Albright, a local leader in the black community, organized a volunteer militia to help African Americans fight off the organized attacks of landlords and former slaveholders. One night, while Albright was living with his sister, a group of disguised men arrived at the house and demanded that Albright turn himself over to the Ku Klux Klan. Albright, however, hid while his sister answered the door. Although the black woman was terrified, she spoke courteously to the intruders and explained that her brother was not home.¹⁶⁴ Her feigned subservience and carefully constructed lie saved Albright.

In South Carolina, the Ku Klux Klan arrived at the home of Patrick W. Tanner in search of his son-in-law William Moss. At first, Tanner lied and claimed that Moss had travelled to Spartanburg. After he was threatened, however, Tanner admitted that the black man was lying in bed at the back of the house. Moss was captured and carried away by the Klan, but he managed to escape and return home. The next night, the Klan returned. This time Tanner's wife and daughter answered the door. Like Albright's sister, the two black women behaved cordially and informed the disguised men at the door that they did not know the whereabouts of Moss. Even when threatened, the two women refused to say otherwise. Because the black women were seemingly nonthreatening and showed deference to the Ku Klux Klan, they escaped the encounter unharmed and ensured the safety of Moss.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-6.1: 18.

¹⁶⁵ *KKK Testimony*, 3: 407-409. See also, for example, 5: 1948-1949.

Not all black women who confronted the Ku Klux Klan, however, escaped unscathed. In Aberdeen, Mississippi, Edward Crosby fled from thirty men by hiding in a nearby smokehouse. Crosby's wife greeted the disguised men and claimed that her husband was away visiting his sister. The men "knocked around a while" before eventually leaving.¹⁶⁶ When the Ku Klux Klan came in search of John Hines, his aunt stood in the doorway and refused to allow anyone to enter the house. She was hit in the side of the head with a gun for interfering, but her actions allowed Hines to escape unharmed.¹⁶⁷

In these instances, black women were able to commit acts of insubordination that hostile white Southerners would not have permitted if committed by black men.¹⁶⁸ In South Carolina, for example, a group of black men clashed with the Ku Klux Klan at New Hope Church. Several members of the Ku Klux Klan were killed. After the fight, the black men responsible for the attack went into hiding.¹⁶⁹ Austin Sanders, a local black man who had not been involved in the attack, occasionally brought food to the survivors, thereby allowing them to remain in hiding. Like many women had done previously, when approached by the Klan, Sanders lied and claimed to be unaware of the location of the wanted men. The food, he claimed, was to set bait for racoons. Where black women in similar situations might be successful in lying to protect the victims of the Ku Klux Klan, Sanders was immediately shot dead; the Klan saw the black man as a threat and did not

¹⁶⁶ *KKK Testimony*, 12: 1133.

¹⁶⁷ *KKK Testimony*, 4: 690.

¹⁶⁸ Brundage, "The Roar on the Other Side of Silence," 280.

¹⁶⁹ On altercations between black people and the Ku Klux Klan, see Kinshasa, *Black Resistance to the Ku Klux Klan*, chap. 5.

believe his carefully constructed lie. Witnesses revealed that Sanders was left in the middle of the road “wid a biscuit in his dead mouth.”¹⁷⁰

The Ku Klux Klan inspired widespread fear among the newly freed black population. Occasionally the Klan left warnings of impending raids, but more often the terrorist organization showed up without warning. Most homes did not have locks and it was easy for intruders to break into the houses of freedpeople. William Hamilton, as a young boy, took it upon himself to warn his neighbours about raids. When he spotted hooded figures on shrouded horses, he would run to the road and yell, “De Klux am comin’.”¹⁷¹ While not always successful, this rudimentary warning system gave black men and women some time to retreat to safety. As a child, Hamilton was less likely to be seriously assaulted if he was spotted by the Klan. Indeed, Hamilton took pride in his efforts to protect his friends and family, describing his sentry position as his job after emancipation.

Black women similarly endeavoured to protect friends and family from the Ku Klux Klan. Jane Bensom, for example, singlehandedly held off the Ku Klux Klan when a group of disguised men attempted to break into her family home. After being warned by William Hamilton that the Klan was riding that night, Bensom filled a pail with embers from the fireplace. Just as black women during slavery threw hot ashes at the patrollers, when the first disguised men broke through her door, Bensom unleashed a torrent of embers. The intruders were blinded and Bensom retreated to safety through the backdoor. Later, when the Ku Klux Klan tried to locate the person who had attacked them, the black

¹⁷⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 2.2: 121-122.

¹⁷¹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-5.4: 1638-1639.

community protected Bensom; they refused to “tell on her.”¹⁷² Because open resistance and direct confrontation was considered to be more masculine, hostile white Southerners rarely expected black women to be the instigators. Even when they did act openly against racialized violence, they were less likely to face harsh reprisals because their actions were seemingly less threatening to white Southerners.¹⁷³ Bensom, for example, was able to avoid retaliation because the Ku Klux Klan did not expect that a woman would behave so brazenly.

There are, of course, some instances where black women suffered severe repercussions for their insubordination. For example, in her analysis of women in the antilynching movement, Mary Jane Brown described the murder of Hampton Smith, a white farmer in Georgia. Smith was a notoriously cruel employer; he could only secure labourers by going to court and paying the fines of those who could not pay themselves. These men and women would then have to work for Smith to pay off their debt. When Smith was found shot dead, local rumours suggested a conspiracy. Sidney Johnson, a black labourer employed by Smith, was initially blamed. Later several other African Americans were implicated. Mary Turner, the wife of one of the alleged conspirators, was one of six African Americans lynched as a result. Turner was pregnant at the time, and during the lynching her abdomen was cut open and child was removed. The infant was then trampled to death by the mob.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-5.4: 1638-1639.

¹⁷³ Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 24.

¹⁷⁴ See Brown, *Eradicating This Evil*, 113.

The dangers of open resistance often prevented black men from acting overtly. In 1915, the *Chicago Defender* lamented the rarity of black men's forcible resistance to lynch mobs.¹⁷⁵ When it was not safe for black men to engage in open resistance, black women sometimes came forward to protect victims from potential lynchings. In 1916, when a lynch mob attempted to apprehend a young boy in Louisiana, several black women endeavoured to protect the child from harm. The women openly mocked the mob and refused to be dispersed.¹⁷⁶ In a society that sought to suppress the rights of African Americans, it was often black women who were best able to agitate for change.

The lower status of women in society meant that they could often circumvent the restrictions placed upon black men; however, the actions of black women to confront racialized violence also promoted gender anxiety. Patricia A. Schechter, in her study of the antilynching movement, argued that the antilynching activism of Ida B. Wells blurred the boundaries between public and private. When black women committed acts of insubordination, they challenged ideas about gender that confined women to the private sphere.¹⁷⁷ As a result, black men were often not receptive to the resistance efforts of black women. Anna Julia Haywood Cooper, a prominent black scholar writing in the late nineteenth century, wrote that “the average man of our race is less frequently ready to admit the actual need among the sturdier forces of the world for woman's help or

¹⁷⁵ *Chicago Defender* (Chicago, Illinois), 4 September 1915, quoted in Patricia A. Schechter, “Unsettled Business: Ida B. Wells Against Lynching, or, How Antilynching Got Its Gender,” in *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South*, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 308

¹⁷⁶ “Mob Dispersed by Women,” *Chicago Defender* (Chicago, Illinois), 2 December 1916, quoted in Schechter, “Unsettled Business,” 308.

¹⁷⁷ Schechter, “Unsettled Business,” 308.

influence.”¹⁷⁸ Yet black women remained on the frontlines of resistance, often finding a middle ground between protecting their families and resisting racialized violence.

On 7 March 1870, the Ku Klux Klan arrived at the home of Jim and Rosy Williams at approximately two o’clock in the morning. As the disguised men gathered outside the house, Jim retreated under the house to hide. He eventually came out, however, to relinquish the guns that he had in his possession. After handing over the weapons, Jim insisted that he had complied with the demands of the terrorist organization; he swore that he had no more guns in the house. The Klan, however, did not believe Jim. Even when Rosy corroborated the assertion, the disguised men refused to listen and carried the black man away. Because her children were at home, Rosy had no choice but to go inside. At daybreak, however, when she could safely leave the children alone without fear of the Klan returning, Rosy set out in search of her husband. Despite being terrified, the black woman knew she needed to find help. Rosy managed to gather a small group of neighbours, several of whom belonged to the local militia, and together they set out in search of Jim. Unfortunately, Rosy was too late to save her husband. Jim was found dead hanging from a pine tree.¹⁷⁹

Thousands of African Americans died at the hands of hostile white Southerners in the postemancipation South. As a result, when a human life was in jeopardy, both black men and women resisted by whatever means necessary. When disguised men arrived on the doorsteps of formerly enslaved people or when lynch mobs set out in pursuit of black

¹⁷⁸ Anna J. Cooper, *A Voice from the South* (Xenia, Ohio: The Aldine Printing House, 1892), 135.

¹⁷⁹ *KKK Testimony*, 5: 1720-1723. For additional testimony regarding the murder of Jim Williams, see 5: 1712-1715 and 5: 1757-1762.

men and women, at times the only option was to take up arms in self-defense. Those who did not defend themselves were likely to be killed regardless. As Kwando M. Kinshasa has explained, assessing the benefits of self-defense is difficult as those benefits are always relative to what might have been lost if no resistance had been attempted.¹⁸⁰

W. E. B. Du Bois called for African Americans to take up “the terrible weapon of self-defense.”¹⁸¹ This meant meeting hostile white Southerners with bricks, clubs, and guns. In the face of extraordinary physical violence, it was important to respond in equal measure. The call for self-defense was not new, as prominent black leaders had long called for black people to respond to physical violence in kind. John Mitchell Jr. and Ida B. Wells both called for black men and women to arm themselves in defense of their basic rights as citizens of the United States. In *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law In All Its Phases*, Wells made a rousing call for resistance. On 9 March 1892, an angry mob of white Southerners lynched Thomas Moss, Calvin McDowell, and Will Stewart. The three black men owned and operated the People’s Grocery Store in Memphis, Tennessee, a store in competition with a grocery owned and operated by a white man. After a shootout in defense of the store resulted in the injury of three white men, the business partners were arrested. That same evening they were kidnapped from jail and shot to death. Wells, a close friend of Moss, was devastated. Her immediate response was to encourage black migration to Kansas or Oklahoma. She quickly realized, however, that armed resistance was perhaps a more feasible option for many African Americans who could not afford to relocate easily or who otherwise wished to remain in the South for a variety of reasons.

¹⁸⁰ Kinshasa, *Black Resistance to the Ku Klux Klan*, 172.

¹⁸¹ W. E. B. DuBois, “Opinion,” *The Crisis* 18, no. 5 (September 1919), 231.

Although Wells was initially inspired to take up antilynching activism by a single event in Tennessee, she recognized that lynchings were occurring across the United States. Therefore, black men and women needed a way to resist that could be applied in every state, regardless of the geographic context. Wells proclaimed, “A Winchester rifle should have a place of honor in every black home, and it should be used for that protection which the law refuses to give.”¹⁸²

Many African Americans felt compelled to defend themselves, as well as their communities. In Galveston, Texas, many African Americans found success following emancipation. A few managed to purchase small plots of land and began to support themselves. Those who succeeded, however, attracted the attention of the Ku Klux Klan. Successful black farmers were often murdered in their homes or dragged off into the woods to be whipped. Finally, after several black men were taken from jail and murdered, the community appealed to the state government for help. The governor agreed to arm several black men with decommissioned rifles. These weapons allowed the black men to form a volunteer militia to protect the black community. Pierce Harper, who lived in Galveston at the time the militia was formed, described how the militiamen acted “like reg’lar soldiers.”¹⁸³ They practiced drills and trained regularly. Many were killed in altercations with the Ku Klux Klan, but the militia offered a semblance of security to a terrorized community.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Ida B. Wells, “Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases,” in *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900*, ed. Jacqueline Jones Royster (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997), 70.

¹⁸³ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 4-2: 112-113.

¹⁸⁴ On the formation of black militias, especially in Texas, see Alwyn Barr, “The Black Militia of the New South: Texas as a Case Study,” *The Journal of Negro History* 63, no. 3 (July 1978): 209-219; Alwyn Barr,

Occasionally black men and women organized spontaneously to ward off hostile white Southerners; few towns had an organized militia to offer protection to the black community. In 1899, Matilda Hope, a white woman from McIntosh County, Georgia, gave birth to a dark-skinned child.¹⁸⁵ She claimed to have been raped by her neighbour, Henry Delegale.¹⁸⁶ When news of the accusation reached the general population, Delegale immediately turned himself over the local sheriff. Lynch mobs often formed to punish alleged rapists and Delegale believed that he would be safer under the protection of local law enforcement. The sheriff, however, wanted to relocate Delegale from Darien to Savannah for safekeeping. While the decision to relocate Delegale was perhaps made with good intentions, it enraged the local black population. It was not uncommon for lynch mobs to intercept their targets during transport; men and women moved between jails often ended up dead.¹⁸⁷

To prevent Delegale from being lynched or taken away from McIntosh County, several hundred African Americans armed themselves with pistols and shotguns.¹⁸⁸ Every

“The Texas ‘Black Uprising’ Scare of 1883,” *Phylon* 41, no. 2 (1980): 179-186; and Bruce A. Glasrud, ed., *Brothers to the Buffalo Soldiers: Perspectives on the African American Militia and Volunteers, 1865-1917* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2011).

¹⁸⁵ Matilda Hope only reported the alleged rape upon the birth of her child. She claimed that she had remained silent because Delegale had threatened to kill her and her father if she reported. “Protecting a Brute,” *The Weekly News and Courier* (Charleston, South Carolina), 26 August 1899.

¹⁸⁶ Newspaper reports from the time of the incident variously record the name of the accused black man as Henry Delegall and Henry Delegal. Secondary sources that describe the event, however, consistently refer to the accused as Henry Delegale. I have chosen to use ‘Delegale’ for consistency. See, for example, W. Fitzhugh Brundage, “The Darien ‘Insurrection’ of 1899: Black Protest During the Nadir of Race Relations,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 234-253; Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 133–137; and Kinshasa, *Black Resistance to the Ku Klux Klan*, 168–171.

¹⁸⁷ “Protecting a Brute,” *The Weekly News and Courier* (Charleston, South Carolina), 26 August 1899. See also Brundage, “The Darien ‘Insurrection’ of 1899,” 234 and Tolnay and Beck, *A Festival of Violence*, 209-211.

¹⁸⁸ Reports indicate that the number of African Americans greatly surpassed the number of white people (approximately 5:1). “Citizens Under Arms,” *The Milwaukee Sentinel* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin), 27 August 1899.

time the sheriff attempted to move Delegele, a sentry would ring the bell of a nearby church. Hundreds of black men and women responded by surrounding the jail. Without visible organization or leadership, large numbers of African Americans engaged in collective action to protect Delegele and prevent the formation of a lynch mob. Indeed, the protest was so successful that Mayor Kenan of Darien finally had to telegraph the governor and request protection from the state militia.¹⁸⁹

White Southerners responded harshly to the insurrection in Darien. Upon receiving the request for troops, Governor Candler dispatched the state militia to report to the sheriff of McIntosh County. There was a growing concern that a race war might erupt; and the insurrection needed to be settled swiftly.¹⁹⁰ Indeed, white Southerners often became fearful when black people organized. In Chester, South Carolina, the Ku Klux Klan threatened the life of Captain Jim Wilkes, the leader of a black militia. Fearing for his life, Wilkes organized his men to go to Chester to see what protection he could secure. When the men arrived in Chester, armed and prepared to defend themselves, the local white population became very alarmed. The mayor asked the militia to either leave or relinquish their weapons. While a few black men agreed to relinquish their weapons, many refused because “if they did they would all be killed.”¹⁹¹

The feared race war never materialized. When the state militia arrived in Darien, armed black men and women watched with interest as the troops restored order; they never interfered and there was no appearance of disorder in the city. Following

¹⁸⁹ “The Negro Saved,” *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, Louisiana), 24 August 1899.

¹⁹⁰ “Race War in Georgia,” *Morning Oregonian* (Portland, Oregon), 28 August 1899; “Race Trouble in Georgia,” *The Weekly News and Courier* (Charleston, South Carolina), 30 August 1899.

¹⁹¹ *KKK Testimony*, 5: 1580-1591.

assurances that Delegale would be safely transported to Savannah by the state militia, the black crowd eventually dispersed.¹⁹² In Chester, the black militia agreed to leave and set up a blockade outside the town. They had no intention of causing harm and simply wanted to defend themselves against outrages by the Ku Klux Klan. Yet many white Southerners feared the large number of armed black men stationed outside the town; some began to fire on the militia and several black men were killed. Throughout the altercation, however, the black militia never returned fire.¹⁹³ Henry Delegale, first arrested in Darien, was honorably acquitted following a trial in Savannah.¹⁹⁴

The formation of black militias across the postemancipation South regularly angered white Southerners. Robert W. Shand, a local magistrate from Columbia, South Carolina, received frequent complaints that African Americans were behaving “in a very boisterous manner, firing off their guns, holding meetings, setting sentinels on the road, keeping parties from passing.” In 1868, when the Ku Klux Klan was beginning its reign of terror, white Southerners took offense as black labourers occasionally abandoned their crops to attend meetings or practice drills. Some planters, according to Shand, actively tried to prevent the formation of militias because they believed it caused black labourers to neglect their work.¹⁹⁵ More likely, however, few white Southerners, especially those in Ku Klux Klan, liked the idea of having armed black men patrolling the area.

It is difficult to assess the success of organized protest and black militias. While such resistance offered some protection and occasionally thwarted outrages against the

¹⁹² “The Negro Saved,” *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, Louisiana), 24 August 1899.

¹⁹³ *KKK Testimony*, 5: 1580-1591.

¹⁹⁴ “Courage in Georgia,” *Boston Daily Advertiser* (Boston, Massachusetts), 21 September 1899.

¹⁹⁵ *KKK Testimony*, 4: 968-974

black population, hostile white Southerners were especially cruel to those who took up arms. Jerry Clowney, for example, was tied to the ground and severely whipped by a group of disguised men because he belonged to a black militia.¹⁹⁶ After the Darien Insurrection, and despite the ultimate acquittal of Delegale, twenty-three black people were convicted of rioting and received harsh prison terms and stiff fines.¹⁹⁷ Such conclusions demonstrate the willingness and ability of hostile white Southerners to suppress organized black protest. The *Charleston News*, a white newspaper, opined, “Negro militia can never stop the evil, no matter how strong in number ... Negro militias are powerless against [hostile white Southerners].”¹⁹⁸

There were more opportunities for African Americans to resist physical violence on an individual level. It was not uncommon for black men and women, sometimes aided by family members, to take up arms in defense of their own lives. One black man, enraged at the federal government’s refusal to aid the black population, spoke openly at the Ku Klux Klan hearings against the abuse of black men and women. He believed that self-defense was the only way to ensure survival. He vowed that “he would die any day before he would submit.”¹⁹⁹

The primary goal of armed self-defense was to ward off bloodshed. In other words, black men and women retaliated physically because they wanted to survive. The

¹⁹⁶ *KKK Testimony*, 5: 1859-1861

¹⁹⁷ “Guilty of Riot,” *Boston Daily Advertiser* (Boston, Massachusetts), 2 September 1899; “Trial of the Rioters,” *The News and Observer* (Raleigh, North Carolina), 2 September 1899; “Are Guilty,” *Bangor Daily Whig & Courier* (Bangor, Maine), 2 September 1899; “Trying the Rioters,” *The Weekly News and Courier* (Charleston, South Carolina), 6 September 1899; and “The Riot Trials Concluded,” *The News and Observer* (Raleigh, North Carolina), 6 September 1899.

¹⁹⁸ “The Ku-Klux Klan: Origin and Aims of the Mysterious Organization,” *Charleston News* (Charleston, South Carolina), 15 February 1871, reproduced in *KKK Testimony*, 4: 1007-1009.

¹⁹⁹ *KKK Testimony*, 12: 670-671,

Darien Insurrection, then, was an exception; attacks by black men and women on hostile white Southerners were rarely premeditated. Rather, most attacks were made in the heat of the moment and intended to buy enough time to escape. George, a black man living in Fort Worth, Texas, confronted the Ku Klux Klan when a group of disguised men arrived at his house. Having heard rumours of Klan activity in the area, George was prepared to defend himself; he retreated to the loft of his house and spoke to the disguised men through an upstairs window. George calmly explained that he had done nothing wrong and asked the men to leave. If they did not leave, George warned, he would open fire. Unsurprisingly, the disguised men refused to leave, and one man began to climb a ladder. George shot him dead. Another attacker began to shoot through the floor, but he could not spot the location of the black man from the floor below. From his position above, however, George could see the man and killed him, too. The Ku Klux Klan retreated.²⁰⁰

Alfred Richardson was attacked twice by the Ku Klux Klan because he was “making too much money.” On one occasion, a group of approximately twenty-five men arrived at the black man’s house. They tried to break in and, when they failed, began to dismantle the door with an axe. Richardson initially planned to hide. His wife leaned out through the window to call for help. She was shot at “twelve or fifteen times through that window while she was hallooing.” While she did not manage to summon help, her actions tricked the Klan into thinking that Richardson had escaped through the window. The majority of the men began to retreat. Richardson, then, took the opportunity to retrieve his pistol. When one of the men spotted Richardson as he was leaving, Richardson fired his

²⁰⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 4.2: 176 and S2-5.4: 1845-1846.

pistol and caused the disguised men to scatter.²⁰¹ The Ku Klux Klan rarely expected African Americans to defend themselves. In many situations, this gave black men and women an advantage as hostile white Southerners often did not know how to respond when faced with open resistance.

H. B. Holloway, a successful foreman in Atlanta, Georgia, successfully warded off an attack by the Ku Klux Klan. As he was walking home one night, Holloway was cornered by several men who advised that the Klan would be visiting his home that night. He was immediately defensive and responded, “You might kill me, but you can’t beat me.” Rather than cower in fear, Holloway endeavoured to protect himself and his family. Holloway had three sons, between twenty and twenty-eight years old, whom he armed with a Winchester rifle, a shotgun, and a pistol. He kept an axe for himself. The four men then positioned themselves facing the door and, when the Ku Klux Klan arrived, Holloway knocked the first intruder over the head with his axe. The sons then fired their weapons as more Klansmen attempted to enter the house. The Ku Klux Klan was repelled; all the men fled.²⁰²

Notably, Holloway’s wife did not support the decision to take a stand against the Ku Klux Klan. When she learned of the imminent attack, she wanted to flee and seek safety elsewhere.²⁰³ Indeed, it is important to acknowledge that African Americans did not speak with a united voice when opposing racialized violence. While some believed in the power of armed resistance, others counselled caution. Joseph F. Galloway, for

²⁰¹ *KKK Testimony*, 6: 1-4.

²⁰² *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 9.3: 298-300.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

example, a respected teacher and preacher in the black community, acknowledged that shooting at the Ku Klux Klan might scare them away. However, he argued “it was not our business to go and shoot them.” Galloway suggested that African Americans should “get along as well as they could.” He believed “the United States would take it in hand before long and give [African Americans] their rights.” Galloway never counselled armed resistance unless it was an absolute necessity to save a life.²⁰⁴ Many African Americans justifiably feared that self-defense might engender reprisal from hostile white Southerners.

Attempts by African Americans to exert their authority and rights as citizens were rarely met with enthusiasm. Joseph Herndon, a white resident of Yorkville, South Carolina, described African Americans as being “a great deal more insolent” once they began to take up arms for self-defense.²⁰⁵ White Southerners expected black men and women to be completely submissive and, when that did not happen, they often retaliated harshly. Reverend W. B. Allen, a black man interviewed by the Federal Writers’ Project, cited a long list of offenses for which African Americans might be attacked. This included talking back to a white person, hitting another black person, fussing, fighting, making noise, lying, loitering on the job, and stealing.²⁰⁶ William Coleman was severely beaten because he failed to lift his hat when he met a white man in the road. As he was being whipped, his attacker reportedly shouted, “God damn you, when you meet a man in the road lift your hat; I’ll learn you, God damn you, that you are a nigger, and not to be

²⁰⁴ *KKK Testimony*, 12: 670-671.

²⁰⁵ *KKK Testimony*, 3: 207-208.

²⁰⁶ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S1-3.1: 21.

going about like you thought yourself a white man; you calls yourself like a white man, God damn you.”²⁰⁷ White Southerners expected submissiveness and obedience from black men and women. When this did not happen, the resulting violence encouraged many African Americans to migrate from cities and rural areas where attacks occurred regularly.²⁰⁸

For those black men and women lacking protection against hostile white Southerners, migration was a relatively safe way of resisting extraordinary physical violence. The decision to flee the South, although often motivated by white activity, did not require direct interaction with those who would inflict violence upon African Americans. Black men and women could make the decision to relocate without fear of reprisal. Scott Hooper was one of many freedpeople who decided to remain with her former master following the abolition of slavery. She lived with her parents on a rented piece of land for seven years; however, the increased violence perpetrated by the Ku Klux Klan caused Hooper to live in fear. When interviewed by the Federal Writers’ Project, she recalled how many African Americans were afraid to go out at night, or even to sleep in their houses for fear of being attacked. In 1872, her father decided to relocate the family.²⁰⁹ Louise Matthews and her family were similarly driven to migrate from Shelby County, Texas. After two black men were shot trying to defend themselves, Matthews’

²⁰⁷ *KKK Testimony*, 11: 482-484.

²⁰⁸ *KKK Testimony*, 6: 55. There is a vast collection of literature available regarding African American migration within the United States during the twentieth century. Alferdteen Harrison, ed., *Black Exodus: The Great Migration from the American South* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1991); and Kenneth L. Kusmer, *The Great Migration and After, 1917-1930* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991).

²⁰⁹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 4.2: 158.

father decided to relocate the family for safety.²¹⁰ Hannah Flourney originally lived in Columbus, Georgia but relocated to Atlanta, Georgia after she witnessed the murder of a white Republican by the Ku Klux Klan. For weeks after the murder, she sat up at night with a double-barrel shotgun in her lap. She then decided to move to a larger city where such incidents of violence were not tolerated as freely.²¹¹

The pace of black migration within the United States accelerated in the twentieth century. As many as 500 000 African Americans left the South between 1915 and 1918 to escape civil rights violations, racialized violence, and poor employment conditions; they set out in search of better prospects. This marked the start of the Great Migration. In the 1920s, after a brief economic depression following the First World War, at least another 700 000 black Southerners journeyed to the North.²¹²

African Americans had ample reason to leave the South. As Alferdteen Harrison acknowledged, the majority of black men and women remained agricultural workers

²¹⁰ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, S2-7.6: 2608.

²¹¹ *KKK Testimony*, 6: 532-533. For additional examples of migration as a method of resistance, see *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 4.1: 209; 4.2: 11-13; S1-8.3: 1143-1144; S1-9.4: 1459-1460; S1-9.4: 1731; S1-10.5: 2060-2061; S2-3.2: 649-650; S2-4.3: 1271-1275; S2-5.4: 1880; *KKK Testimony*, 3: 400-401; 4: 1083; 4: 1158-1160; 6: 11; 6: 465; 6: 468; 6: 520-522; 7: 610-611; 7: 653-655; 7: 666; 7: 684-685; 7: 689-690; 7: 692-694; 7: 694-695; 7: 730-731; 7: 731; 11: 51; Complaint of Tom Carter, 30 September 1868, *Reports of Outrages Committed, 1866-1868*, RG 105, reel 33, BRFAL-SC (M1910); and Complaint of Henry Robinson, 22 August 1867, *Register of Complaints, August 1867 – January 1868*, Vol. 112, RG 105, reel 15, BRFAL-MS (M1907).

²¹² James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 3; Carole Marks, *Farewell – We're Good and Gone: The Great Black Migration* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); and Lawrence R. Rodgers, *Canaan Bound: The African-American Great Migration Novel* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 11. Scholars disagree on the exact number of African Americans who relocated to the North. More conservative estimates suggest a maximum number of 400 000 African American migrants. Others have put the numbers higher. Joe William Trotter, Jr., for example, suggests a range of 700 000 to 1 000 000, with an additional 800 000 to 1 000 000 moving North and West during the 1920s. Mark Andrew Huddle, "Exodus from the South" in *A Companion to African American History*, ed. Alton Hornsby, Jr. (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 451; and Joe William Trotter, Jr., *The African American Experience* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 378.

following the abolition of slavery.²¹³ The system of sharecropping that emerged allowed white Southerners to maintain control of the land, sources of credit, supplies, and any crops raised on the land.²¹⁴ The widespread use of physical violence by hostile white Southerners was a powerful means of fostering obedience and submissiveness. In other words, physical violence was used to uphold structural violence. While scholars have long debated the socioeconomic push-pull explanation for black migration, it is important to recognize that the exodus of African black men and women from the South, regardless of their economic or social status, stemmed in part from their fear of widespread physical violence.²¹⁵ In Mississippi, the state that experienced the greatest number of lynchings, widespread violence produced a state of ongoing terrorism. A white observer noted that some African Americans took to sleeping outside, but many others abandoned their crops entirely and relocated to urban centres. Indeed, testimony from the Ku Klux Klan hearings indicated that black men and women “wanted to go some place where they could lie down and sleep at night.”²¹⁶

In 1892, the triple lynching of Thomas Moss, Calvin McDowell, and Will Stewart in Memphis, Tennessee inspired a particularly strong response. Thousands of African Americans attended the funeral and resolutions were passed in favour of migration as a method of resistance. As previously mentioned, Ida B. Wells, whose antilynching activism was inspired by the incident, further popularized the idea of migration. Across the postemancipation South, black men and woman willingly abandoned their crops and

²¹³ Harrison, *Black Exodus*, vii.

²¹⁴ For detailed discussion of labour and plight of African Americans, see Chapter 2.

²¹⁵ Tolnay and Beck, *A Festival of Violence*, 218-219.

²¹⁶ *KKK Testimony*, 11: 374.

ended their contracts to seek safety elsewhere. A 1918 lynching in Georgia, which included the pregnant Mary Turner, prompted the immediate migration of more than five hundred African Americans. Many more expressed a desire to leave as soon as they could harvest their crops and sell their property.²¹⁷ As Alfred Richardson explained in his testimony before the Joint Select Committee, “They cannot stay around where they have lived without being killed or whipped.”²¹⁸

The mass migration of African Americans contributed to the decline of nightriding and lynching in the postemancipation South. Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, in their statistical study of lynching, suggested that the Great Migration resulted in the decline of extraordinary physical violence. In the mid-1920s, lynching declined rapidly. While significant and horrifying racialized violence persisted, only 206 African Americans were lynched in the 1920s compared to 799 in the 1890s.²¹⁹ After 1900, even as many black men and women continued to circulate within the South, many more began to move to the North. This resulted in the rapid departure of the cheap and pliable labour source that the South relied on to maintain the economy. If they wanted to halt the exodus, Tolnay and Beck argued, white Southerners had to suppress physical violence and improve the plight of African Americans in the South.²²⁰

Industrial jobs in the North attracted thousands of people, but black men and women were more likely to abandon the South if they felt threatened by the activity of

²¹⁷ Walter White, “The Work of a Mob,” *The Crisis* 16, no. 5 (September 1918): 221; and *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States* (New York: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, National Office, 1919), 26-27. Walter White joined the NAACP in 1918 and worked as an investigator. He later led the organization as Executive Secretary from 1929 to 1955.

²¹⁸ *KKK Testimony*, 6: 11.

²¹⁹ Tolnay and Beck, *A Festival of Violence*, 202.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 220.

hostile white Southerners. Charles Gabriel Anderson, a formerly enslaved man who migrated from the South, emphasized the safer conditions in the North. In contrast to his counterparts still living in the South, Anderson claimed that he had never been bothered by the Ku Klux Klan.²²¹ While the Great Migration did not bring about an end to racialized violence, the loss of black labour forced white Southerners to curb the most visible and dramatic manifestations. Tolnay and Beck, for example, confirmed that those counties which experienced an exodus of black labour were able to reduce the number of lynchings.²²² Less concrete and immediate violence, however, persisted throughout the South.

Physical violence – any act that causes injury, abuse, trauma or destruction by way of physical force – remains the most immediate and easily observable manifestation of violence in the late antebellum and postemancipation South. For this reason, most scholarship on racialized violence has focused almost exclusively on physical assault, race riots, and lynching. There is no denying that physical violence was a significant part of daily life for black men and women. The records of the Freedmen’s Bureau, the testimony gathered at the Ku Klux Klan hearings, and the Slave Narrative Collection are replete with both explicit and veiled references to physical violence. The trauma of physical violence was so great that those who were interviewed by the Federal Writers’ Project continued to recall incidents of physical violence decades later. But as my dissertation has demonstrated, physical violence was one of many manifestations of

²²¹ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 11.8: 22.

²²² Tolnay and Beck were vague regarding the exact mechanisms that secured this decline. Tolnay and Beck, *A Festival of Violence*, 230.

racialized violence. We must understand physical violence as it relates to epistemic violence, structural violence, and sexual violence because these manifestations of racialized violence often existed in conjunction. Only with this wider view can we fully understand how black men and women engaged in resistance.

Conclusion

To fully understand how black men and women resisted racialized violence, it is important to understand limitations imposed on the newly freed black population. With the abolition of slavery, millions of African Americans were left to support themselves after years of enslavement. Many did not have access to land, stable employment, or effective political rights that would allow them to participate fully as free citizens. Indeed, as this dissertation has demonstrated, white Southerners went to great lengths to approximate the conditions of slavery in the postemancipation South. Racialized violence – epistemic violence, structural violence, sexual violence and family trauma, and physical violence – demonstrated the firm commitment of hostile white Southerners to limiting the civil, social, and economic advancement of African Americans.

Because many formerly enslaved people continued to work for their former masters after emancipation, they often maintained close relationships of dependence with them. In these situations, black men and women might avoid engaging in acts of resistance. To do so might further jeopardize their safety and livelihood. Instead, black men and women might rely on the paternalistic benevolence of their employers for protection against racialized violence committed by hostile white Southerners. Millie Barber, for example, remained in close contact with her former master, Will Durham, after emancipation. When the Ku Klux Klan came to her house inquiring after her husband, she immediately asked Durham for advice and protection; she believed that seeking the help of a white ally was the only way to ensure her husband's safety. This tactic, referred to as white guardianship by W. Fitzhugh Brundage, reinforced the relative

power of white Southerners and the vulnerability of black Southerners.¹ While white guardianship helped to maintain relationships of dependence, it was often an effective way of deterring violence. While Barber did not provide details, she noted that Durham resolved the conflict with the Klan. The next year Barber and her husband moved to a property belonging to Durham.²

Sam Kilgore, a freedman from Texas, went to his former master and current employer for help after the Ku Klux Klan burned down his home. Kilgore, like many other African Americans, was increasingly afraid to work the land; he feared being killed if he did not relocate. Kilgore's employer responded by having a group of white men dig a ditch around the cotton field close to the road. When the Klan returned, the white men used the ditch as a defensive position and returned fire.³ That Kilgore's employer opposed the Ku Klux Klan does not necessarily equal a condemnation of racialized violence. Rather, it seems that he opposed the intrusion of the Klan into his personal property. Kilgore's employer, like many former slaveholders, continued to view his black labourers as his dependents. If a labourer needed to be punished for insubordination or an apparent infraction, it was the employer's responsibility. Kilgore's employer did not want reckless white Southerners to undermine his authority and drive away his black labourers. It was therefore in his best interest to offer protection as a means of asserting his own authority.

¹ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "The Roar on the Other Side of Silence: Black Resistance and White Violence in the American South, 1880-1940," in *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 276.

² *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 2. 1: 40-41.

³ *The Slave Narrative Collection*, 4.2: 258. For additional examples, see 7.1: 104 and S2-10.9: 3997.

White guardianship created a delicate balance. While it offered protection against racialized violence, it also required that black men and women rely upon the paternalistic benevolence of white Southerners whose motivations could be complex and deeply rooted in their own self-interest. Those who turned to white Southerners for protection upheld a racial hierarchy in which black people were denigrated and the practical realities of slavery endured; black men and women remained subordinated to and dependent upon white Southerners. Indeed, it was impossible to ask for protection without demonstrating a certain degree of deference.⁴

Black men and women who made the decision not to resist, or who relied on former slaveholders for protection, were making the best decisions they could for themselves and their families. And while we might celebrate the efforts of those men and women who adopted clandestine methods of resistance, we should not use their achievements to belittle those who made different decisions. The postemancipation South was a hostile place for many African Americans. As this dissertation has demonstrated, race relations between white people and black people in the United States have long been shaped by violence. In the slave states of the antebellum South, violence was intimately linked to slavery. Enslaved men and women were routinely silenced (epistemic violence), forced to labour for the benefit of others (structural violence), sexually assaulted (sexual violence), and often beaten or killed (physical violence). The abolition of slavery did not bring about an end to these manifestations of racialized violence. Instead, hostile white Southerners continued to employ epistemic violence, structural violence, sexual violence,

⁴ Brundage, “The Roar on the Other Side of Silence,” 276–77.

and physical violence as a means of approximating the conditions of slavery, demonstrating continuity in a period of apparent discontinuity.

Hostile white Southerners persecuted black men and women mercilessly and overt attempts at resistance were often met with harsh reprisals. As a result, black men and women responded to racialized violence in myriad ways. Freedpeople travelled long distances to lodge complaints with the Freedmen's Bureau regarding their mistreatment; sharecroppers stole foodstuffs as recompense for lost wages; entire families relocated in search of fair labour contracts and just employers; young women spoke openly about sexual abuse; mothers reclaimed children who were illegally apprenticed; black men took up arms in defense of their friends and families; wives lied to the Ku Klux Klan about the whereabouts of their husbands; and some members of the black community endured the horrors of racialized violence because it was all they could do to survive. When H. B. Whitfield spoke before the Joint Select Committee on 4 August 1871, he advised that black men and women would need to protect themselves from hostile white Southerners.⁵ This is exactly what thousands of African Americans did as they transitioned from slavery to freedom.

The records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, the first-person testimony culled from the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, and the Slave Narrative Collection of the Federal Writers' Project reveal how black men and women experienced and responded to racialized violence. By speaking with government officials, black men and

⁵ *KKK Testimony*, 5: 427.

women were able to speak publicly about the abuses they suffered at the hands of hostile white Southerners. This is not to say, however, that the testimony considered in this dissertation is without problems. Each primary source collection poses a series of unique problems for scholars, particularly once we recognize that the mediated nature of these sources makes their production a potential site of violence as well as a site of resistance. Many black men and women recorded their experiences and created witnesses to their trauma, but others made the decision to deflect, self-censor, or remain silent because they did not feel safe to speak. Hostile white Southerners, many of whom continued to occupy positions of power in the South, endeavoured to silence testimony that challenged nostalgic views of the plantation South. It is necessary, therefore, to remain critical of the sources considered in this dissertation, acknowledging that there are narratives we will never be able to access. Still, the Freedmen's Bureau, the Ku Klux Klan hearings, and the Federal Writers' Project provide a heterogeneous and diverse collection of primary sources detailing how black men and women viewed life in the South and, more importantly, how they responded to racialized violence and understood acts of resistance.

This dissertation confirms the prevalence of racialized violence in the late antebellum and postemancipation South. It demonstrates how black men and women adopted and transformed resistance techniques developed to oppose slavery. Long accustomed to combating the violence inherent in the peculiar institution, many black men and women recognized that they could draw upon a long history of resistance to confront the rising tide of racialized violence in the postemancipation South. To study racialized violence in the postemancipation South without acknowledging the legacy of

slavery is to miss half of the story. Although scholars acknowledge the continuities between slavery and freedom, the tendency to use the Civil War as a dividing line in American history has resulted in a general failure to explore those continuities by placing the experiences of the enslaved alongside the free as part of a sustained discussion. My dissertation contributes to the existing historiography by pivoting between the experiences of black men and women in the antebellum South and postemancipation South throughout. In doing so, it draws attention to continuities regarding racialized violence and the methods of resistance employed in response.

Many black men and women did not know what to expect from freedom. Some expected to be supported by the government. Others expected to receive land and farming implements in order to support themselves.⁶ Yet despite the ambiguous nature of emancipation, many recognized that racialized violence was incompatible with freedom. Across the South, thousands of black men and women adopted and transformed resistance techniques first used to combat slavery – theft, physical resistance, flight – while using their newfound freedom to cultivate new avenues of resistance. Black men and women, as this dissertation has shown, responded to racialized violence in its totality of forms by refusing to remain silent; they resisted subjugation and protected themselves.

There is no particular moment that serves as an obvious conclusion for this dissertation. The ebb and flow of racialized violence in the southern United States is complex. Certain manifestations of violence reached epidemic levels at certain points in

⁶ Leslie A. Schwalm, *A Hard Fight For We: Women's Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina*, *Women in American History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, Revised Edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999); Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to Present*, Revised (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

time before entering a period of decline. Yet they never disappeared entirely. The Ku Klux Klan, for example, actively terrorized black men and women from 1865 until 1871. The efforts of the Joint Select Committee to bring members of the terrorist organization to justice ultimately broke the back of the Ku Klux Klan, but supporters later found renewed strength with the release of D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*.⁷ Lynching, similarly, reached epidemic levels in the 1880s and persisted until the 1930s. But even as the overall number of lynchings declined, examples of horrific lynchings persisted into the twenty-first century.⁸ As I revised this dissertation, on 25 May 2020, George Floyd was the victim of what historian Arica Coleman called "a modern-day lynching."⁹ Derek Chauvin, a white police officer, subdued Floyd for allegedly possessing a counterfeit twenty-dollar bill. Chauvin pressed his knee into Floyd's neck for eight minutes and 48 seconds. Floyd died despite pleading for his life repeatedly. The actions of white police

⁷ Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), chap. 25. On D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of the Nation* and the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan in the early twentieth century, see David Mark Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The First Century of the Ku Klux Klan, 1865-1965* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), chaps. 3 and 4; Melvyn Stokes, *D. W. Griffith's The Birth of a Nation: A History of "The Most Controversial Motion Picture of All Time"* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Tom Rice, *White Robes, Silver Screens: Movies and the Making of the Ku Klux Klan* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015); and Katherine Lennard, "Old Purpose, 'New Body': *The Birth of a Nation* and the Revival of the Ku Klux Klan," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 14, no. 4 (October 2015): 616-620.

⁸ For example, the lynching of Emmett Till made national headlines in 1955. See Courtney Baker, "Emmett Till, Justice, and the Task of Recognition," *Journal of American Culture* 29, no. 2 (2006): 111-124; and Darryl Mace, *In Remembrance of Emmett Till: Regional Stories and Media Responses to the Black Freedom Struggle* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014).

⁹ Arica Coleman, quoted in Deneen L. Brown, "'It was a modern-day lynching': Violent deaths reflect a brutal American legacy." *National Geographic* <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/2020/06/history-of-lynching-violent-deaths-reflect-brutal-american-legacy/> (accessed 27 July 2020).

officers who continually assault, murder, and abuse black citizens clearly demonstrate that racialized violence has not ended in the United States.¹⁰

Although this dissertation only extends to the end of the first wave of the Great Migration, black men and women continued to adapt longstanding resistance techniques to confront new challenges. Kidada Williams, in her discussion of the antilynching campaigns of the early twentieth century, acknowledged that antilynching crusaders failed to meet their objective of securing federal antilynching legislation.¹¹ But it was through this campaign to end violence that black men and women, along with their allies, learned the skills and strategies necessary for later success.¹² We can see the same pattern in the unorganized resistance methods adopted by black men and women to confront racialized violence immediately following emancipation. When we study forms of protest and civil disobedience during the Civil Rights Movement – the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955-1956), the Greensboro sit-in (1960), the Freedom Riders (1961) – we can see the legacy of those black men and women who stood up to racialized violence in the late antebellum and postemancipation South.¹³ More recently, the protests that have erupted

¹⁰ Other black people murdered by the police in the United States include: Eric Garner (New York), Michael Brown (Missouri), Tamir Rice (Ohio), Walter Scott (South Carolina), Alton Sterling (Louisiana), Philando Castile (Minnesota), Stephon Clark (California), and Breonna Taylor (Kentucky).

¹¹ On the efforts to secure federal antilynching legislation, see Herbert Shapiro, *White Violence and Black Response: From Reconstruction to Montgomery* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988); Jonathan Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching: Racial Violence and Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Charles Flint Kellogg, *NAACP: A History of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1909-1920* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1967); and Robert Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909-1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980).

¹² Kidada E Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me: African American Testimonies of Racial Violence from Emancipation to World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 224.

¹³ On the Civil Rights Movement, see Steven F. Lawson, “Civil Rights and Black Liberation,” in *A Companion to American Women’s History*, ed. Nancy A. Hewitt (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2008), 397–413; Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance - A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New

across the United States as part of Black Lives Matter, a decentralized movement advocating for civil disobedience against incidents of police brutality and racially motivated violence, reveal a familiar pattern of continuity. Race relations between white people and black people in the United States have long been characterized by multiple forms of violence. But resistance to violence remains an important part of that narrative.

York: Vintage Books, 2010); Steven F. Lawson, “Long Origins of the Short Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1968,” in *Freedom Rights: New Perspectives on the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Danielle L. McGuire and John Dittmer (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 9-37; William T. Martin Riches, *The Civil Rights Movement: Struggle and Resistance*, 4th Edition (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Janet Dewart Bell, *Lighting the Fires of Freedom: African American Women in the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: The New Press, 2018); and Steve Hallock, *A History of the American Civil Rights Movement Through Newspaper Coverage* (New York: Peter Lang, 2018). On the Montgomery Bus Boycott, see David J. Garrow, ed. *The Walking City: The Montgomery Bus Boycott, 1955-1956* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1989); and J. Mills Thornton III, “Challenge and Response in the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-1956,” *Alabama Review* 67, no. 1 (January 2014): 40-112. On the sit-in at a Woolworth’s lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina and subsequent sit-ins, see Miles Wolf, *Lunch at the 5 & 10*, Revised and Expanded Edition (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1990); Iwan Morgan and Philip Davies, eds., *From Sit-ins To SNCC: The Student Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012); and Christopher W. Schmidt, “Divided By Law: The Sit-ins and the Role of the Courts in the Civil Rights Movement,” *Law and History Review* 33, no. 1 (February 2015), 93-149. On the Freedom Riders, see Jason Paul Clabaugh, “Reporting the Rage: An Analysis of Newspaper Coverage of the Freedom Rides of May 1961,” *Southern Historian* 14 (April 1993): 41-55; and Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and The Struggle for Racial Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

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Appendix: Digital Humanities Methodology Reflection

Studying racialized violence in the late antebellum and postemancipation South poses certain methodological challenges, especially given the sheer volume of testimony gathered by the Federal Writers' Project, the Joint Select Committee, and the Freedmen's Bureau. Even after restricting the parameters of my dissertation to focus primarily on Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas, the amount of available testimony by black men and women is immense. To manage my sources effectively and, more importantly, to understand the ways in which black men and women resisted racialized violence, I employed digital humanities techniques to support and enhance my research. With the assistance of the Lewis and Ruth Sherman Centre for Digital Scholarship, I learned how to create, manage, and query my own relational database featuring the testimony of both the victims and witnesses of racialized violence. The goal was to extract data on individual incidents of racialized violence – the victims and perpetrators, geographic locations, forms of violence, methods of resistance – in order to identify thematic trends. In particular, I wanted to identify any relationships between specific forms of violence and the methods of resistance employed in response.

As Matthew Davis acknowledged, scholars have traditionally utilized databases to store data for later retrieval.¹ A repository approach would undoubtedly have significant benefits for a project of this nature, allowing me to store a large volume of archival

¹ Matthew Davis has been an invaluable source of knowledge and support for this project. His thoughts on how databases can be used as a methodological tool have greatly influenced my own research and inspired me to incorporate a relational database as a key component of my dissertation. Matthew E. Davis, "The Database as a Methodological Tool," *Digital Medievalist*, 10 August 2017, <https://digitalmedievalist.wordpress.com/2017/08/10/the-database-as-a-methodological-tool/> (accessed 19 August 2017).

documents for later review. However, I am more interested in the methodological applications of a relational database for my research. Rather than simply storing data, a relational database can be used to clarify points of tension between my research questions and my sources. Therefore, to supplement my dissertation, I developed a relational database that not only stored data according to a predetermined list of keywords, but that forced me to think critically about my sources and complicate conceptions of data as objective. Creating a database required critical reflection on the role of the scholar as a mediator of data and, as a result, made it possible to clarify points of tension between my research questions and my sources.

For my previous work on black resistance to lynching in the postemancipation South, I created a rudimentary database of interviews from the Slave Narrative Collection using Microsoft Excel.² This database, comprised of independent and unrelated tables, served little purpose beyond its record-keeping functions; it had limited ability to identify relationships across multiple documents because each document was entered without consideration for those around it. Any analysis, therefore, had to be done manually. A relational database, however, is more complex. Comprised of multiple interconnected tables, a relational database can identify relationships across multiple tables by matching common data. In other words, a relational database can identify patterns, relationships, and connections between documents.

² Sarah Whitwell, “Rejecting Notions of Passivity: African American Resistance to Lynching in the Southern United States,” *Past Tense Graduate Review of History* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2017), 71-95.

This reflection considers the value of utilizing digital humanities techniques in historical inquiry.³ Although there is no substitute for the traditional close-reading methodology when considering the lived experiences of marginalized peoples, a relational database can serve as a valuable methodological tool to analyze primary source documents. Because I extracted multiple points of data on incidents of racialized violence in the postemancipation South, it was possible for me to query the database to reveal a number of patterns, relationships, and connections. For example, I could query my database to return all incidents where violence was perpetrated by the Ku Klux Klan. These results could be further refined on the basis of geography, the type of resistance employed in response, or even the primary source collection where the testimony originated in order to understand how violence unfolded on the ground and how black men and women responded.

A database can be used to ask a wide variety of questions.⁴ Containing numerous points of data on individual incidents of violence – the victims and perpetrators, geographic locations, forms of violence, methods of resistance – it is limited, to some

³ This reflection is largely based upon a series of blog posts I wrote for the Lewis and Ruth Sherman Centre for Digital Scholarship. See Sarah Whitwell, “Building a Database: African American Women and Racialized Violence in the Postemancipation South,” *Lewis and Ruth Sherman Centre for Digital Scholarship*, 28 November 2017, <https://scds.ca/building-a-database-african-american-women-and-racialized-violence-in-the-postemancipation-south/>; “Resistance, Racialized Violence, and Database Design,” *Lewis and Ruth Sherman Centre for Digital Scholarship*, 26 February 2018, <https://scds.ca/resistance-racialized-violence-and-database-design/>; “DH@Guelph - Visualizing My Data,” *Lewis and Ruth Sherman Centre for Digital Scholarship*, 26 June 2018, <https://scds.ca/dhguelph-visualizing-my-data/>; “The Importance of Narrative,” *Lewis and Ruth Sherman Centre for Digital Scholarship*, 1 December 2018, <https://scds.ca/theimportanceofnarrative/>; and “Resistance, Racialized Violence, and Database Design (Part 2),” *Lewis and Ruth Sherman Centre for Digital Scholarship*, 19 June 2019, <https://scds.ca/resistance-racialized-violence-and-database-design-part-2/>.

⁴ On the value of digital humanities projects for posing research questions, see Stephen Roberston, “Putting Harlem on the Map,” in *Writing History in the Digital Age*, eds. Jack Dougherty and Kristen Nawrotzki (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 186-197.

extent, only by the questions that the user can invent. Beyond its ability to answer questions, a database is a useful methodological tool because it encourages specificity. Indeed, all decisions must be documented and justified.⁵ To create the schema for my database, I had to make important decisions about what data to extract from my archival documents. Some data – bibliographic information, dates, geographic locations – do not require significant forethought. Other data, however, require clearly defined keywords and a rigid workflow. When inputting data on incidents of racialized violence described in my primary sources, for example, I had to decide how to code types of violence. What types of violence should be included? How would I define those types of violence? How would I handle situations where certain types of violence overlap? These are not always easy questions to answer, but in trying to answer them I found that I needed to develop clear definitions to underpin my research. In many ways, then, it was creating a database that led me to challenge how scholars have traditionally talked about violence and resistance.

As scholars, we regularly make decisions regarding what sources to include, what geographic regions to sample, and what information to highlight. Often, however, this mediation is not transparent. The creation of a database, in many ways, ameliorates this problem of transparency because it is not possible to create a successful database without documenting all decisions. To create my database, I had to think critically about how I understand violence and resistance. What criteria, for example, must be met for an incident to qualify for inclusion in the database? Having defined both violence and

⁵ Davis, “The Database as a Methodological Tool.”

resistance, I decided that each document included must reference an incident of violence and a corresponding act of resistance.

Simply defining violence and resistance, however, was insufficient. To capture how black men and women experienced and responded to racialized violence in the postemancipation South, it was also necessary to delineate a list of keywords to identify different types of violence (e.g. physical assault, sexual harassment, verbal abuse, etc.) and different methods of resistance (e.g. discursive insubordination, migration, self defense).

I created a typology of violence intended to represent a wide variety of incidents:

1. ***Nightriding*** – nocturnal acts of violence committed by disguised men
2. ***Lynching*** – acts committed by a group of two or more individuals which deprive any person of his/her life without regard to law in the service of justice, tradition, or race.
3. ***Verbal Abuse*** – acts of forceful criticism, insults, or denunciation
4. ***General*** – non-specific references to violence
5. ***Deprivation/Neglect*** – acts that deny an individual or group their rights/freedoms.
6. ***Slavery*** – acts of violence committed during slavery (prior to emancipation) that have a lingering effect on the individual
7. ***Rioting*** – acts of public disturbance committed by a crowd
8. ***Destruction of Property*** – acts that damage or destroy property committed by someone who is not the owner
9. ***Sexual Assault*** – acts of unwanted sexual contact
10. ***Physical Assault*** – acts resulting in physical harm
11. ***Intimidation*** – acts intended to frighten or coerce the victim without causing physical trauma
12. ***Silencing*** – acts that limit, alter, or distort the personal recollections of an individual
13. ***Confinement*** – acts that restrict an individual within certain limits of space
14. ***Humiliation*** – acts intended to shame or embarrass the victim, or to reduce the victim to a lower position in society.

Similarly, I created a typology of resistance:

1. **Occupation** – the physical occupation of space (a form of protest)
2. **Physical Retaliation/Self Defense** – the defense of one’s person or interests through the use physical force (sometimes with weapons)
3. **Boycott** – the refusal to buy a product or take part in an activity as a way of expressing disapproval
4. **White Guardianship** – the reliance on white people to ensure safety from violence
5. **Migration** – the movement of people to a new area in order to escape violence (permanent)
6. **Discursive Insubordination** – the expression of discontent through verbal confrontations (insults, humour, music, taunts)
7. **Theft** – the theft of another’s property as a way to retaliate or compensate for acts of violence
8. **Congregation** – the gathering of people for support against oppression (often in a religious context)
9. **Sabotage** – the deliberate destruction or obstruction of something as a way to undermine efforts at subjugation
10. **Legal** – the utilization of government officials (municipal, state, federal) to halt violence or to seek redress for violence
11. **Testimony** – the act of giving a written or formal statement on racialized violence and its impact
12. **Burial Rites** – the reclamation of deceased victims of violence for the purpose of ensuring proper burial
13. **Education (Racial Uplift)** – the advancement of black rights through education (either formal or informal)
14. **Flight** – the movement of people away from a place or situation of danger (temporary)
15. **Mischief/Pranks** – the act of causing the perpetrator of violence to become the subject of humiliation or mockery
16. **Protection** – the protection of a targeted victim from their attacker
17. **Protest** – the physical or verbal rejection of an act of violence
18. **Voting** – the act of casting a ballot in spite of efforts to prevent political participation
19. **Isolation** – the refusal to interact with another group for self-preservation
20. **Investigation** – the informal investigation of the perpetrator(s) of an act of violence with the goal of bringing them to justice
21. **Arson** – the act of deliberately setting fire to property as a means of retaliation for acts of violence

These definitions ensured that I coded my data as consistently as possible. If the Ku Klux Klan raided the house of a black politician at night, I knew to code the violence as

nightriding. If a black woman lied about the whereabouts of her husband when confronted by the Ku Klux Klan, I knew to code the resistance as protection. The significance of these definitions can be seen across my dissertation, as my typologies of violence and resistance irrevocably shaped how I understood the ways in which black men and women experienced and responded to racialized violence.

My list of keywords is not necessarily exhaustive. It was created to reflect the incidents of violence and resistance described in the three collections of archival documents utilized for this project. Moreover, when I began this project, I originally intended to focus exclusively on the postemancipation period. As a result, incidents of violence during slavery have been coded broadly with a focus on their lingering effects after emancipation. Future iterations could easily be expanded, not only to include more manifestations of violence but also to more fully incorporate incidents of violence during slavery. By including a list of clearly defined keywords, future scholars could add additional states or primary source collections at a later date while maintaining the structural integrity of the original database.

While my database is useful for understanding and clarifying the relationships between specific types of violence and the methods of resistance employed in response, I have found that it is less useful (read: not user-friendly) for elucidating those relationships to anyone who is not familiar with Structured Query Language (SQL), the standard programming language used to communicate with relational databases.⁶ For this reason,

⁶ MySQL Workbench, a database design tool that integrates SQL creation and maintenance into a single integrated development environment, mitigates some of the challenges of database creation by providing an interface that more closely resembles the kinds of tables one might create in Microsoft Excel. To add data

in addition to creating my relational database, I have also begun to create a series of visualizations using Gephi, an open-source network analysis and visualization software package that can be used to map the relationships between people, places, and ideas.

Rooted in the theory of social network analysis, Gephi represents people, places, and ideas as individual nodes.⁷ Each node can then be linked to other nodes based on the relationships between them.⁸ Figure 1, for example, showcases every incident of violence and resistance described in the records of the Freedmen’s Bureau, the Ku Klux Klan hearings, and the Slave Narrative Collection from Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas. There are 2780 unique incidents culled from 1497 documents.⁹ The orange

to existing tables, one can simply type the data into the appropriate field and click apply. MySQL Workbench will then draft the necessary statement using SQL. Retrieving data, however, is more complicated. In order to have the database return query results, one must know how to draft select statements. While MySQL can draft select statements to return the entire contents of a table with relative ease, more complex queries require that the user be able to draft their own select statements.

⁷ Social network analysis is the process of investigating social structures using network and graph theory. It analyzes networked structures in terms of individual objects within the network and the relationships between them. On social network analysis, see John Scott, *Social Network Analysis*, 4th Edition (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2017).

⁸ I have drawn heavily on the work of Micki Kaufman, a doctoral student at the University of New York, for inspiration. Kaufman has made extensive use of Gephi to analyze the Kissinger Collection, a collection of approximately 17 500 meeting memoranda and teleconference transcripts detailing Kissinger’s correspondence between 1969 and 1977. She uses force-directed diagrams to display the relationships between the memoranda, their topics, mentioned individuals and organizations, and the passage of time. To see the possibilities of computational analysis, particularly using Gephi, see Micki Kaufman, “‘Everything on Paper Will Be Used Against Me’: Quantifying Kissinger,” *Quantifying Kissinger*, <http://blog.quantifyingkissinger.com/> (accessed 20 August 2017).

⁹ The disparity between these numbers is because each incident must be coded with a unique identification number. If a single narrative mentions multiple incidents, then it will appear multiple times in the database. Because violence was so widespread, it was not uncommon for the same person to relate multiple incidents in their interviews. Similarly, if multiple people resisted a violent act in different ways, then the incident would have to be coded into the database multiple times. Sam McAllum’s interview, for example, is represented twice. One night a group of African Americans were hosting a party when the KKK carried off Miler Hampton and killed him doing “somethin’ bad.” The next day McAllum, along with several other black men, went to the local whites for help. Then, they bought up all the ammunition they could afford in order to defend themselves at the next party. The KKK never bothered this particular group again. Although there is only one incident of violence described – the murder of Hampton – there are two distinct acts of resistance occurring here: 1) the act of requesting assistance from white Southerners against violence; and 2) the use weapons to defend their interests against violence.

nodes represent the keywords used to denote violence, while the blue nodes represent the keywords used to denote resistance.¹⁰

What is more useful about this visualization its ability to quickly communicate a number of ideas. The size of the nodes, for example, indicates the relative weight of a particular keyword. In other words, the larger the node, the more prevalent that particular type of violence or resistance. Almost immediately it is possible to see that manifestations of physical violence – nightriding, physical assault/murder, lynching – are the most common types of violence described in the primary source documents. There are two possible explanations for this: 1) physical violence was widespread in the postemancipation South, particularly as a holdover from slavery; or 2) the apparent concreteness and immediacy of physical injuries heightens their visibility and ease of observation. Deprivation/neglect, however, also emerges as a prevalent type of violence, confirming the importance of broadening our definition of violence to include those acts that do not necessarily result in immediate physical trauma, but that threaten or result in incidental injury or cause psychological trauma.

Because I extracted a broad spectrum of data when creating my database, it is possible to create visualizations dealing with more specific questions. For example, we can refine the use of resistance to showcase only those examples where the person resisting was female (Figure 2). There are 855 unique incidents of female resistance found across my three primary source collections. Not included are those incidents where both men and women resisted together. This visualization suggests that black women

¹⁰ There are 36 unique nodes represented in this diagram.

were particularly drawn to non-violent methods of resistance, such as testimony, seeking support from government officials (legal), protest, and discursive insubordination.

Data visualizations are not without their limitations. In particular, the flattening of data or the loss of narrative is problematic. It is important to showcase my data in a way that does not reduce the experiences of black men and women to mere numbers. Kidada Williams, in a reflection on the study of lynching, argued that the emphasis on extraordinary physical violence has dehumanized the victims. Rather than considering the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the victims, sensationalized accounts reduce them to casualty numbers.¹¹ The victims become mere objects upon which violent acts are committed.¹² My research endeavours to understand how black men and women experienced and responded to racialized violence. If they are reduced to mere numbers, they are denied the capacity to respond in meaningful ways.

Although my research utilizes a database to help identify the relationships between specific types of violence and the methods of resistance employed in response, I have not eliminated a more traditional close-reading methodology. My dissertation still embraces the richness of narrative. To accomplish this, I made a conscious effort to capture the testimony of African Americans within my database. While I code incidents of racialized violence using a series of keywords, I have also created an important ‘Notes’ column that allows me to preserve the testimony alongside the coded data. Because of this, the database can, in theory, stand on its own without the original archival documents

¹¹ Kidada E Williams, “Resolving the Paradox of Our Lynching Fixation: Reconsidering Racialized Violence in the American South after Slavery,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 6, no. 3 (September 2005): 324.

¹² *Ibid.*, 341-342.

available. Each incident includes a full description of the testimony given and any relevant interpretative notes. While perhaps not a perfect solution, it has ensured that those black men and women who shared their experiences are not reduced to mere numbers.

It is more difficult to preserve narrative, however, in a data visualization. A visualization might represent the relationships between types of violence and methods for resistance, but the visualization is devoid of narrative. Each node represents the lived experiences of multiple individuals, yet the testimony that serves as the basis for my research is lost. For this reason, I am hesitant to make my data visualizations available without the accompanying source data. Indeed, in the absence of the underlying data, it can be difficult to properly understand a visualization and to grasp the full extent of the data represented. For example, the data visualizations included here do not show the number of documents referenced in the creation of the visualization, nor do they show the total number of incidents included. While I have endeavoured to make this information available where possible, such reporting is not easily reconciled with the design of the visualization. Moreover, while we can look at the visualization and understand that one node is large relative to another, we cannot know the exact number of incidents that comprise that node. This creates the risk of over- or under-representing certain data.

It is also important to consider the limitations imposed by the source data. In the postemancipation South, African Americans were perceived to be mentally and

physically inferior.¹³ The ability of African Americans to claim knowledge, then, was severely undermined, especially if that knowledge was not supported by dominant epistemic practices. This means that we must assume that certain testimony has been smothered or quieted. While there are hundreds of incidents of racialized violence described in the Slave Narrative Collection, the testimony of the Joint Select Committee and the records of the Freedmen's Bureau, we must assume that there are many additional incidents that were never recorded.

Moreover, each primary source collection utilized in my research was created for a different purpose. The Slave Narrative Collection, for example, was created because folklorists in the 1930s wanted to record folk cultures – language, music, stories – to a public domain. While many black men and women spoke of their experiences relating to racialized violence, these interviews represent a small minority. The majority of interviews focus on the recovery and preservation of folkways. Similarly, the testimony gathered by the Joint Select Committee was gathered with the stated goal of elucidating the epidemic of violence plaguing the postemancipation South. Because black men and women were specifically asked to testify about the activities of the Ku Klux Klan, this particular collection of documents overwhelmingly features incidents of physical assault, nightriding, and lynching. Such differences do not make any single collection of primary sources more or less valuable, but these differences must be considered when crafting visualizations to create the most accurate representation of how black men and women experienced racialized violence.

¹³ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 5.

The limitations of data visualizations should not deter historians from integrating such methods into historical inquiry. Not only do visualizations serve to make clear relationships that might otherwise go unnoticed, but they make research more accessible for public consumption. Too often scholars are accused of residing within the ivory tower of academia. If digital humanities techniques, such as database creation and data visualizations, can facilitate the dissemination of research to those who might otherwise be deterred by the rigours of peer-reviewed research, then we should reconsider the ways in which we approach historical inquiry. That said, I do not suggest replacing a traditional close-reading methodology entirely. Instead, I argue that we integrate digital humanities techniques with a traditional close-reading methodology as we move forward with the study of history.

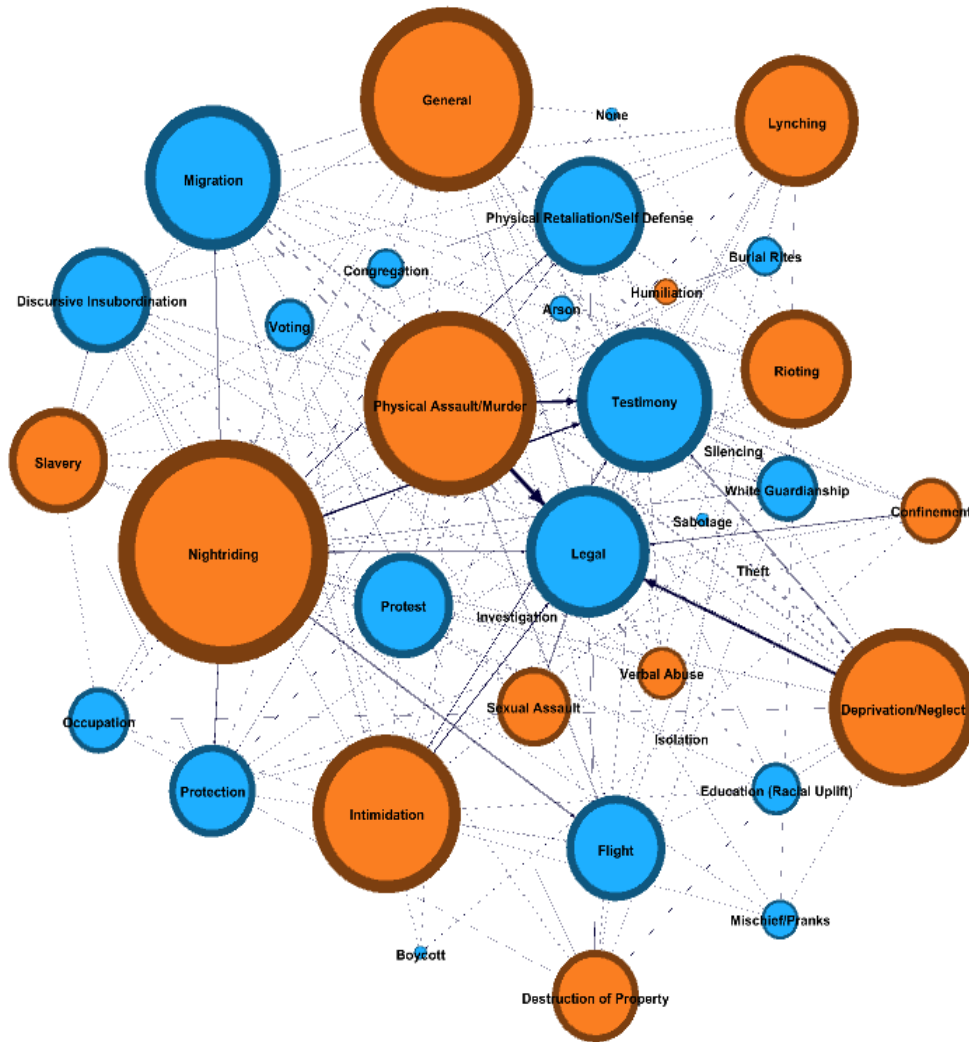


Figure 1: Violence and Resistance in Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas. This force-directed graph highlights the relative frequency of the various manifestations of violence and resistance described by black men and women in Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas after emancipation. The lines connecting the nodes indicate which methods of resistance were deployed in response to which manifestations of violence. This graph was created using data culled from the records of the Freedmen's Bureau, the Ku Klux Klan hearings, and the Slave Narrative Collection. A total of 2780 unique incidents are represented.

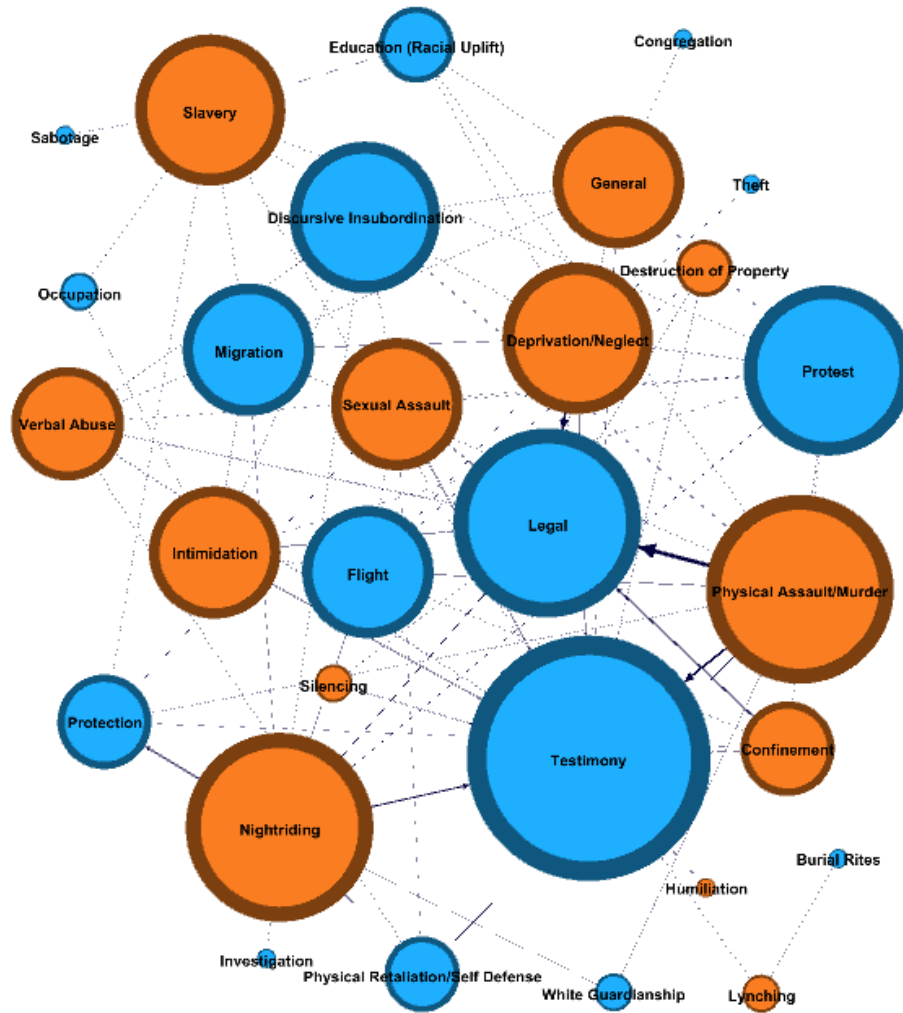


Figure 2: Violence and Resistance by Black Women in Georgia, Mississippi, South Caroline, and Texas. This force-directed graph highlights the relative frequencies of the various manifestations of violence experienced by people after emancipation and the specific ways in which black women resisted. This graph was created using data culled from the records of the Freedmen's Bureau, the Ku Klux Klan hearings, and the Slave Narrative Collection. A total of 855 unique incidents are represented.