
MISTRESSES IN THE MAKING

Lizzie Anna Burwell was like many other white girls growing up in slaveholding households in the Lynesville, North Carolina, area in 1847. She loved flowers and often strolled through her parents' garden with Fanny, the enslaved woman charged with her care. After spending so much time with Fanny, Lizzie Anna developed an intense bond with her, but one day Lizzie Anna became "vexed" with Fanny, so she went to her father and demanded that he "cut Fanny's ears off" and get her, Lizzie Anna, "a new maid from Clarksville." Lizzie Anna was three years old.¹

Although young children commonly express displeasure in extravagant, even violent language, the terms they use reflect their environment, and Lizzie Anna's complaint tells us something crucial about hers: During those walks through the garden, and perhaps while observing her parents interact with the enslaved people around them, Lizzie Anna was learning how to be a slave owner. She was coming to understand the "obscene logic" that made it perfectly acceptable to enjoy the company of her enslaved caretaker in one moment and threaten to mutilate her or buy another slave to take her place the next.² In the comfort of her home, she was recognizing that she possessed the power to command others to do as she wished. And her father did little to discourage her from that belief. In fact, he relayed the incident to his sister with an air of convivial amusement, which suggests that Lizzie Anna's aunt also accepted the justification for her niece's behavior: Lizzie Anna was a mistress in the making. The people around her were crucial to her development as such.

White southern girls like Lizzie Anna learned how to be mistresses and slave owners through an instructional process that spanned their childhood and

adolescence. Over the course of these formative years, white girls practiced techniques of slave discipline and management, made mistakes and learned from them, modified their behavior to meet various conditions, and ultimately decided what kind of slave owners they wanted to become. It should come as no surprise that many of them wanted to be profitable ones.

Slave-owning parents were critical to this learning process in two important ways. They gave enslaved men, women, and children to their young daughters as gifts on special occasions like baptisms, birthdays (especially twenty-first birthdays), holidays, and marriage, or for no reason at all.³ They also bequeathed enslaved people to their daughters in their wills. And when human property was transferred to them, these young women came to value the crucial ties between slave ownership and autonomous, stable financial futures. Parents also offered their daughters vicarious lessons in how to own and control enslaved people through their own words and deeds. As young girls watched their parents manage the enslaved people around them, they observed different models of slave mastery and through a process of trial and error developed styles of their own.

White southern girls grew up alongside the slaves their parents gave them. They cultivated relationships of control and, sometimes, love.⁴ The promise of slave ownership became an important element of their identities, something that would shape their relationships with their husbands and communities once they reached adulthood.

In the colonial period, primogeniture—the practice of leaving all the family property to the eldest son—helped parents determine the size and nature of each child's inheritance or whether a child would inherit at all. During and after the Revolution, however, Americans looked upon primogeniture unfavorably, not only because it disadvantaged many young men and women, but because it was the means by which British aristocrats secured their power and ensured that it remained within their ancestral lines.⁵ The newly declared states moved to abolish primogeniture: South Carolina and Delaware abolished it in 1776, Virginia did so in 1785, and every state except Massachusetts and Rhode Island had abolished the practice by 1786. "By the end of the century," the historian C. Ray Keim observed, "equal portions for all children was generally the rule of inheritance." But even before the abolition of primogeniture in these states, individuals could circumvent it by writing their wills in ways that allowed them to bequeath their property however they chose.⁶ Slave-owning parents thought very carefully about the kinds of property they would give their daughters at various points in their lives, and one of their most critical considerations was the amount of control their daughters, or their daughters' husbands, would have over these gifts after marriage.⁷ Frequently, parents were more inclined to give their daughters slaves than

land, and they often gave them in the expectation that their daughters would take charge of them.

Enslaved people often knew that they would be given to their owners' daughters well before the transfer of ownership took place. Bacchus White recalled that his owners "alwa's sed" that he "wus to belon' to Miss Kathie." Agnes James's master chose her as a gift for his daughter Janie Little, because, as James remembered, "He give all his daughters one of us to have a care for dem."⁸ Just as enslaved people came to anticipate the transition from one owner to the next, young white girls did, too.

As they planned their daughters' futures, some slave-owning parents preferred to give their daughters female slaves, and they began doing so when their children were only infants. In 1836, when Mary Fuller Knight was eight months old, her father executed a deed of gift that gave her an enslaved female named Rose as well as any children Rose might have in the future. When the slave owner and future abolitionist Sarah Grimké was a child, her parents gave her a "little girl," whom they "bought out of a slave-ship." Filmore Hancock's grandmother "was given to missus, as her own de day she [the grandmother] was born." Remarkably, Hancock recalled, "Old missus was only a year old den."⁹

Multiple generations of slave owners adhered to this inheritance practice. Charity Bowery's first mistress "made it a point to give one of [Bowery's] mother's children to each of hers." Charity eventually belonged to her mistress's second daughter, Elizabeth. Mrs. William Keller owned Sarah Thompson Chavis, and she and Chavis gave birth to daughters around the same time. When Mrs. Keller's daughter Julia was still a young girl, Mrs. Keller gave her Chavis's daughter Amy as a "daily gift."¹⁰ These kinds of property transfers continued into the daughters' adolescence.

Slave owners occasionally gave their female family members human property in ritualized affairs that helped mold their young daughters' development as slave owners from early on. The elders would join the hands of young heirs with those of the slaves they were receiving and tell them that the enslaved people in question were their property forever.¹¹ Occasionally, the wills of slave-owning parents and kin divided their property equally among their heirs but did not specifically allocate certain enslaved people to the individual family members who were entitled to portions of their estates. The wills would include statements such as "share and share alike" and would leave decisions about equitable distribution up to the executor. Under these circumstances, estate administrators would arrange "drawing" ceremonies. One formerly enslaved person described how the drawings worked: "When my old mistress died she had four children. . . . When Christmas come we had to be divided out, and

straws were drawn with our names on them. The first straw was drawn, you would get that darkey. . . . Miss Betsey drawed mother and drawed me. Everyone drawed two darkeys [*sic*] and so much money."¹²

The records that slave owners left behind corroborate this narrator's reflections. In the fall of 1844, John Devereux's executors held a drawing during which they portioned out Devereux's slaves to his widow, daughter, and two sons. The groups of enslaved people that each of the heirs drew were documented in the records. It is noteworthy that Devereux's married daughter Frances received the largest portion of his estate.¹³ For reasons that remain unclear, these kinds of estate divisions also occurred when slave owners were still alive. Sallie Crane did not understand why her master's property was being divided because "he wasn't dead nor nothin'," but nonetheless she "fell to Miss Evelyn," his daughter.¹⁴

These affairs were not simply for show; the property transfers and acquisitions that took place were significant events in white girls' lives, and even at very early ages these young women assumed partial responsibility for managing the enslaved people their parents and kinfolks had given them. As soon as the transfer was complete, the enslaved men, women, and children would take care of their new owners in whatever way was necessary. When Jennie Fitts was just a girl, her owner gave her to his daughter Annie: "Ise can membah whens de Marster takes me to Missy Annie and sez, 'Ise givin you to Missy, You jest do what she tells you to.'" Taking her master's charge seriously, Fitts attended to her young mistress's every need and want: "Ise wid Missy Annie alls de time and 'tend to her. Ise wid her night and day, Ise sleeps at de foot ob her bed. Ise keeps de flies off her wid de fan, gets her drink and sich, goes places fo' to get things fo' her. When she am ready to go to sleep, eber night, Ise rub her feet." From Annie's head to her toes, Fitts "sho tend to Missy."¹⁵

Jennie Fitts undoubtedly had to learn how to complete many of the tasks that her mistress asked her to perform, but Annie had to develop some important skills, too. She had to learn how to be a mistress, and she thought self-consciously about what kind of slave owner she would be. Fitts often heard her young mistress say, "Ise sho am goin' to take care ob my nigger." And by Fitts's measure, "She sho did."¹⁶

Ownership and control went hand in hand, and for white girls who had slaves, developing techniques of management and discipline was an important aspect of their early training. For those who were newly inducted into slave-owning communities, "the plantation was a school" where they learned how to be propertied women.¹⁷ According to the historian Joan Cashin, "Young white men learned the fundamental lessons in exercising power from older

white men," but white girls learned these lessons, too.¹⁸ Slave-owning parents allowed their daughters to assume the roles of instructor and disciplinarian early on. White parents also taught their daughters the basic principles of slave ownership through naming practices and by requiring enslaved people to use salutations that conferred respect when addressing them and their children.

As the historian Ann Paton Malone observed, "Some owners forbade slaves to name their own children," and in a not-so-subtle way, slave-owning adults indicated future ownership when they named enslaved infants after their own children or even allowed their children to name enslaved infants, as Daniel and Cornelia Johnson allowed their daughters to do. Betty and Mary Johnson named Betty Curlett and her sister Mary after themselves. On one occasion, when Betty's young mistress was trying to teach her the alphabet, Betty became distracted. Her mistress expressed disappointment in Betty's behavior because she thought it was an indication of Betty's lack of intelligence. She regretted the fact that Betty was her namesake and declared to her mother, "If she goin' to be mine I want her to be smart." When Betty began to crochet skillfully, her young mistress's pride was restored.¹⁹

Slave-owning parents also forced enslaved adults and children to use the salutations "Master" and "Mistress" when referring to their children from the moment the infants were born. Louise Martin, an FWP interviewer, claimed that enslaved people had to call white boys and girls "Master" and "Mistress" only after they reached the age of twelve, but some slave owners required enslaved people to greet white infants and toddlers in this way.²⁰

The objective in requiring such deference was simple. Slave owners wanted enslaved people to recognize the power that white children possessed over them, even at the time of their birth. George Womble asserted that his owner wanted the slaves he owned to hold "him and his family in awe"; he compelled them to "go and pay their respects to the newly born white children on the day after their birth. They were required to get in line, and one by one, they went through the room and bowed their heads as they passed the bed and uttered 'Young Marster,' or if the baby was a girl they said: 'Young Mistress.'"²¹

Enslaved people paid a high cost if they failed to use these salutations. Rebecca Jane Grant would not call her mistress's young son "Marster." One day, her mistress wrote a note and asked her to deliver it to a local store clerk. The clerk prepared a package in accordance with the note's instructions and gave it to Grant to deliver to her mistress. When she returned, she quickly learned what was inside: "a cowhide strap about two feet long." Her mistress immediately pulled the whip out of the package and began to beat Grant with it. She did not know why her mistress was beating her until she exclaimed, "You

can't say 'Marster Henry,' Miss?" Grant quickly responded, "Yes'm. Yes'm. I can say 'Marster Henry!'" She bitterly remarked to her interviewer: "Marster Henry was just a little boy about three or four years old. . . . Wanted me to say 'Marster' to him—a baby!"²² When another formerly enslaved woman forgot to refer to her mistress's eight- or nine-month-old daughter as "Miss," her mistress put her "in a stock and beat" her. While she was in the stocks, the woman twisted her leg until it broke, and even then continued to beat her until she was satisfied her point had been made.²³

Sometimes, the punishment went farther. One enslaved woman recalled that "when you called your marster's chillum by their names, they would strip you and let the child beat you. It didn't matter whether the child was large or small, they always beat you 'til the blood ran down."²⁴ Teaching enslaved children to call their owner's offspring "Master" or "Mistress" also served to educate white slave-owning children about their difference from and superiority to all African Americans, regardless of age, and the deference that all African Americans had to show them. Beyond this, compelling and permitting white children to reinforce their superiority through bloodletting discipline allowed the children to practice the more brutal manifestations of mastery that might prove useful later in their lives when they came to own their own slaves.

As they were growing up, slave owners' daughters generally thought of and treated enslaved children as playmates and companions; but these future slave owners eventually came to realize that the African American children were far more. Enslaved children were their property, and they treated them as such.

At age three, newly arrived in Georgia after having spent her earlier years in Britain, Sarah Butler quickly grasped the distinction between slavery and freedom and some of the privileges accorded to those who were not in bondage. Sarah was the daughter of Pierce Mease Butler, the scion of a wealthy Georgia family, and the famed actress and writer Frances Anne (Fanny) Kemble. In a letter to her friend Elizabeth Sedgwick, Frances Kemble recorded an exchange between the young Sarah and Mary, an enslaved chambermaid who was charged with her care. During their exchange, Sarah told Mary that "some persons are free and some are not." Sarah established her own unbound status by telling Mary that she, Sarah, was "a free person." Then she paused and waited for a reply. When she did not get one, Sarah repeated her assertion: "I say, I am a free person, Mary—do you know that?" Finally, her chambermaid responded, "Yes, missis." And the little girl continued, "Some persons are free and some are not—do you know that, Mary?" And again Mary replied, but this time with her own understanding of the subject, "Yes, missis, *here* . . . I know it is so here, in this world." New to the plantation setting, Sarah was discovering a

fundamental distinction between herself and the woman her father owned, and she sought to communicate and reinforce that difference. In this brief conversation, Sarah drew the line between free and unfree, between the powerful and the disempowered. She placed herself on one side of that line, ensured that Mary knew she was on the other, and implied that Mary must not cross it.²⁵ Despite, or perhaps because of, her early immersion in slaveholding culture, Sarah Butler rejected her father's proslavery views later in life.

Slave-owning girls also made it clear that they had the power to claim other human beings as their property when they selected specific enslaved children to serve them. When Betty Cofer was born, her master's daughter Ella was only a little girl, but she nevertheless "claimed" Cofer as her slave shortly after the child's birth. They "played together an' grew up together." Eventually, Cofer became Ella's personal servant, waiting on her, standing behind her chair during mealtimes, and sleeping beside her on the bedroom floor.²⁶ This selection process also happened in reverse. When Letitia M. Burwell and her sister visited the quarters where her family's one hundred slaves lived, she claimed to have heard the youngest slaves quarreling with each other about "who should be his or her mistress." In her will, Elizabeth Onion stipulated that the enslaved people she owned could choose which of her children they would serve after her death. Two of the enslaved people she owned chose to live with and serve her daughters.²⁷

White girls also made claims of ownership in public and in conversations with enslaved people. Ella Washington's "most grown" mistress publicly asserted her ownership after she learned that her uncle-in-law was trying to sell Ella at auction.²⁸ A formerly enslaved woman named Melinda recalled that her young mistress would frequently tell her, "When I get big and get married to a prince, you come with me and 'tend all my chilens." When her mistress married Honoré Dufour, she took Melinda with her as part of their new household.²⁹ As southern girls, young white women thought about how enslaved people would fit into their lives, not just as playmates or companions, but as property. And when they were old enough, they turned their imaginings into reality.

Young white girls began to learn about and practice different management and disciplinary strategies, which helped them develop and refine the skills of slave mastery that they would need once they became mistresses of their own households. Fathers frequently imparted their wisdom about slave discipline to their daughters at second hand, but they also allowed them to participate in such brutality firsthand. In 1863, Solomon Bradley, who was formerly enslaved in South Carolina, told the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission about a man named Mr. Farraby who had committed violent acts against his enslaved

cook in the presence of his daughters. This woman had burned the edges of his family's waffles, and upon discovering her "misdeed," he took her outside and whipped her. Each time she screamed too loudly, he kicked her in the mouth. After he finished whipping her, he lit a candle and poured the melted wax onto her wounds. Throughout the entire ordeal, Farrarby's "daughters were looking at all this from a window of the house through the blinds."³⁰ When a slave-owning parent's brutality caused the death of an enslaved person, evidence of what his or her daughters had witnessed and what they thought about the most violent forms of slave discipline might make its way into the courtroom. The testimony offered in the case *State of Georgia v. Green Martin* provides insight into how young girls in slaveholding households understood the relationships among slave mastery, discipline, and violence.

On May 9, 1857, Alfred, a twelve- or thirteen-year-old enslaved boy who was living in Washington County, Georgia, allegedly told Godfry Martin, the son of his master, Green Martin, to kiss his derriere. Over the course of three hours, Green and Godfry Martin beat Alfred to death. On at least two occasions, Green Martin straddled Alfred, choked him, and threw him to the floor. Godfry poured water on Alfred to prevent him from fainting. Then, after Green was done, Godfry fetched a saddle, commanded Alfred to kneel on all fours, placed the saddle on his back, and sat on him for "a quarter of an hour." After doing so, he beat him with a stick, kicked him and threw him on the ground, and finally dragged him about the yard. Although most southern states had laws that allowed slave owners to punish their slaves with impunity, even if such discipline led to death, such legislation often barred slaveholders from punishing enslaved people with "malice." Many of these laws also delineated in minute detail the instruments slaveholders could lawfully use to punish enslaved people. If they used methods or tools that did not meet the specifications outlined in these laws, they could be punished themselves. Someone in Green Martin's slaveholding community must have considered his actions abhorrent enough to report him to local authorities because Martin soon found himself charged with Alfred's murder.³¹ Martin was convicted and sentenced to execution by hanging, but he appealed to the Georgia Supreme Court and the justices agreed to review his case.

Green Martin's three daughters, at least two of whom were minors, had witnessed much of the violence their father committed and testified about what they saw in court. Mary Martin, who was sixteen at the time of her deposition, saw her father and brother choking, kicking, and whipping the boy, punishment that she said was "continually kept up until the boy's death." Her sister Sarah also saw them abuse Alfred while she was sitting on the piazza and as she

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"passed frequently from the yard into the house." The eldest daughter, Catherine, saw the beating too. The Martin sisters did not know how Alfred died; they just knew that an hour before sunset he was dead, lying face down and naked in their yard. The sisters also corroborated the claim that Godfrey and Green had beaten Alfred because of his alleged words to their brother.³²

We might think that such brutality, which led to the death of an enslaved boy whom they probably grew up with, would have disturbed the Martin sisters or compelled them to intervene. But according to Catherine, "No one attempted to interfere during the events." She further testified that she "did not go to the boy, but saw him while passing [and] he was naked." Why did the Martin girls choose to keep out of the affair? Was it fear of the Martin men? Not necessarily. Catherine and Sarah said they were a *bit* afraid of their father and brother, but the court clearly did not find them convincing. Judge J. Lumpkin, who delivered the majority opinion, which reversed the lower court's guilty ruling, stated that the Martin sisters "were the unwilling," but "not . . . affrighted witnesses to this murder." Mary Martin claimed that she "was not particularly afraid of" her father or her brother and chose not to "pester either because she did not want" to, and because she "knew she was not able to do any good." This sixteen-year-old girl, who was not much older than Alfred at the time of his death, knew that the boy was probably going to die; her father told her so. But even this was not enough to sway her. Ironically, another witness, a fifteen-year-old white boy named John A. Bedgood, who was visiting the Martin estate at the time of Alfred's beating, was so frightened by what he saw that he went to a neighboring plantation to avoid seeing any more. Clearly, not all white southern boys were acculturated to the violence of slavery, but both boys and girls were receiving instruction in it.³³

When the court asked the Martin sisters why they had not intervened, they offered two reasons that had nothing to do with fear: they believed that Alfred deserved the beating and the Martin men were behaving in ways they deemed normal and unexceptional. When asked to describe Alfred's general conduct prior to his death, Catherine said that he "was very saucy and uncontrollable," even though, as she added, "the boy was kindly treated, and was a pet negro." She also stated that the punishment was "no[t] uncommon violence," and her sister Sarah claimed that the Martin men "acted as they usually did."³⁴

While many slaveholding parents tried to shield their children from the brutality they and members of their communities perpetrated against enslaved people, many others, like Green Martin, saw no need to do so. After years of exposure to such violence, the Martin sisters were apparently immune to it. They sat on their piazza and went about their daily routines, which frequently

took them through the yard where their brother and father were torturing Alfred to death. They spoke of seeing the sunset and eating supper as Alfred lay in their yard battered, naked, and dying. The Martin sisters' conduct suggests that this sort of violence was part of their daily lives. And they exhibited a level of indifference to Alfred's suffering that many slave owners and their employees found necessary in their interactions with and control of enslaved people.

When slave-owning girls witnessed scenes of this kind, they could respond in a number of ways. While it was happening, they could interfere, or they could choose inaction (as the Martin sisters did). Later, they might reject violence altogether or adopt less brutal techniques toward their own slaves, or they might embrace their fathers' (and brothers') styles of slave discipline. Young women like James Curry's mistress chose to do the latter.

James Curry's mother had nurtured her master's children for much of their young lives. One evening, she and one of the master's daughters had a disagreement about dinner. The master's daughter struck Curry's mother, and she retaliated by pushing the girl, who fell to the floor. When Curry's master came home, the daughter told him what had happened. The master called Curry's mother outside, beat her fifteen or twenty times with a hickory rod, and "then called his daughter and told her to take her satisfaction of her, and she did beat her until she was satisfied."³⁵

This young white girl and the enslaved woman who had cared for her learned at least two important lessons that day. They came to understand that there was no inherent chasm between violence and ladyhood in everyday life, even in the eyes of white patriarchs. They also learned that the intimacies that might have been forged between them over the years made no difference to the power that their society accorded to this young white girl over her racial "inferiors." In fact, it was that power that made such cross-racial intimacies possible in the first place.

As mothers, white slave-owning women were ideally positioned to teach their children about different methods of slave management and discipline, and they offered their daughters, and their sons, lessons on how to interact with and control enslaved people. Tines Kendrick's mistress owned both the slaves and the land on which they lived, and she was determined to manage her estate without her husband's interference. As a consequence, Kendrick said that her mistress's husband, Arch, "didn't have much to say 'bout de runnin' of de place or de' handlin' of de niggers." Kendrick's mistress enlisted her son's help instead, and she taught him everything he knew about operating a large estate profitably and managing the slaves who worked it. Kendrick recalled that the son "got all he meanness from old mis' an' he sure got plenty of it too." In a striking role reversal, Lewis Cartwright's master asked his own mother to whip

Cartwright when he refused to be beaten without a fight. While the master's decision might have been guided by the idea that most enslaved men would not dare hit a white woman, it is also possible that his mother was a more effective master, and her ability to command obedience from Cartwright and other slaves reflected that.³⁶

On occasion, slave-owning mothers and daughters disciplined enslaved people together. When Henrietta King was about eight or nine years old, she was responsible for emptying her owners' chamber pots. When she went to collect the pot in her mistress's room each morning, she noticed that a piece of candy would be left on the washstand. She knew that her mistress had left it there as a test to see whether she would take it, and at first she resisted. But after several days, King yielded to temptation. (Her mistress, King claimed, kept the people who labored in her home in a state of near starvation.) King's mistress noticed that the candy was gone and questioned her. When she denied stealing the candy, her mistress began to whip her. King refused to remain still, so her mistress grabbed her by the legs and pinned her head under the rocker of her chair while her young daughter whipped her. For approximately an hour, averred King, her mistress rocked back and forth on her head while her daughter beat her with a cowhide. The constant pressure from the rocking chair crushed the bones in the left side of King's jaw. After the beating she could not open her mouth and the left side constantly slid sideways to the right. Her mistress called a doctor, but after examining her, he determined that nothing could be done; her face was irreparably mutilated. Her mistress never brutalized King again, but her disfigurement was disquieting, and the mistress was so disturbed by it that the family decided to give King to a female cousin, who King claimed treated her kindly.³⁷

This one act of brutality affected the rest of Henrietta King's life. She could not chew, so she was forced to consume "liquid, stews, an' soup." The teeth on the left side of her face never grew back. When children saw her disfigured face, they either laughed or cried. Adults would stare at her "wonderin' what debbil got in an' made me born dis way." King also had to contend with encounters with her mistress's children and grandchildren, who apparently knew what happened. On one occasion, when King crossed paths with her former mistress's granddaughter in town, she got the feeling that the young woman was so ashamed that she crossed the street and pretended that she did not see her.³⁸

It's clear that this event affected the rest of King's life, but what about her mistress's daughter? If the testimony of formerly enslaved people offers any evidence, we can be assured that in one way or another, this experience affected the way she treated the slaves who came under her control later in life.

Not all slave-owning mothers taught their daughters to use brutality when dealing with their slaves. As young girls began learning how to manage enslaved people, their mothers occasionally reprimanded them for employing brutal tactics. When Elsie Cottrell saw her daughter Martha abusing an enslaved adolescent, she interrupted her and said, according to her former slave Henry Gibbs, "Don't you know you will never have a nigger with any sense if you bump der heads against de wall?" Looking back, Gibbs believed that his mistress's daughter engaged in this practice because "she was young and didn't know no better." But Elsie wanted Martha to hone her methods of slave mastery in ways that would preserve these enslaved people's usefulness in the long run.³⁹

White mothers often found their children to be willing pupils who easily absorbed their lessons in slave mastery, but some children clashed with their mothers over the best way to deal with slaves. Mary Armstrong's mother belonged to a couple whom she described as "the meanest two white folks what ever lived." In Armstrong's estimation, her mother's mistress was particularly cruel. She thought that "Old Polly" was the "devil if there ever was one," and one incident in particular brought her to this conclusion. Polly beat Armstrong's nine-month-old sister to death because she would not stop crying. Years later, Polly's daughter Olivia eventually came to own Mary Armstrong. During one visit to Olivia's marital home, Polly tried to beat the ten-year-old. Armstrong retaliated by picking up "a rock 'bout as big as half your fist an' hit[ting] her right in the eye." She "busted [Polly's] eyeball an' told her that was for whippin' [her] baby sister to death." When Armstrong told her young mistress what she had done, Olivia said, "Well, I guess mamma has learnt her lesson at last." After years of watching her mother abuse and in at least one case murder the family's slaves, Olivia had chosen a different approach to managing the people she owned as an adult. While Mary Armstrong described Olivia's parents as mean and cruel, she characterized Olivia in a starkly different way: "She was kind to everyone, an' everyone jes' love her." Despite her presumed training, Olivia allowed her slave to defend herself against her own mother; clearly she was making her own decisions about what kind of slave owner she wanted to be.⁴⁰

Of course, not all young slave-owning women diverged so significantly from the methods that had worked for their mothers. Some employed the same tactics, only milder in intensity. As Jennie Brown prepared for her upcoming marriage, her parents gave her a pick of their slaves. Elizabeth Sparks was among them. As Sparks and several other enslaved women helped their young mistress get dressed for the day, she remembered her mistress asking them, "Which of yer niggers think I'm gonna git [you] when I git married?" They all responded, "I doan know." Then, suddenly, she turned and looked at Sparks, pointed her

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finger at her, and said, "yer!" Sparks was deeply relieved when Brown selected her because Brown was "a good woman" who would "slap an' beat yer once in a while but she warn't no woman fur fighting fussin' an' beatin' yer all day lak some I know. She was too young when da war ended fur that." Although Brown was prone to inflict physical violence when she deemed it necessary, her mother was far more severe in the forms of punishment she used, beating her slaves "with a broom or a leather strap or anythin' she'd git her hands on," without any legitimate cause. Brown's mother would also manufacture reasons to beat her slaves. She would make Sparks's aunt Caroline knit all day and well into the night, and if she dozed off, Brown's mother would "come down across her haid with a switch." Sparks remembered that "she'd give the cook jes' so much meal to make bread fum an' effen she burnt it, she'd be scared to death cause they'd whup her . . . Yessir! Beat the devil out 'er if she burn dat bread." Although Sparks made a distinction between the intensity of punishments that Jennie Brown and her mother chose to inflict, she also suggested that her mistress might have come to follow her mother's methods of slave management if the Civil War had not resulted in the legal end of slavery.⁴

The lessons of slaveholding parents were only one means by which daughters could learn about proper slave-management techniques. The *Rose Bud*, a weekly juvenile newspaper edited by Caroline Gilman and published through the 1830s, was another. Gilman created the *Rose Bud* "during a moment of growing tension over the slavery question," and she compiled the content in the newspaper with her own children in mind. She later expanded her vision to include a broader readership. The stories Gilman published in the *Rose Bud* were directed toward male and female readers, though the historian Gale Kenny argues that "the education of girls in the *Rose Bud* focused mostly on housework [while] lessons for boys centered around balancing filial obedience and white mastery." Regardless of Gilman's intentions, nothing stopped girls from reading the entire issue. A female reader named Julia submitted a letter to the editor describing how much she loved the magazine and mentioning that her female classmates tried to take it from her so they could read it too.⁴

Children who read the *Rose Bud* acquired extraordinary insight into the daily practice of slave ownership. They learned about the conduct that defined the character of ideal masters, were offered examples of proper and improper slave management, and were assured that the ideal plantations were "regulated with almost military like precision." Young female readers came to understand that "a planter's daughter fear[ed] none but white men." They also came to know what forms of deference they should expect from enslaved people and

were taught that white people referred to enslaved men as "boys." They were advised on proper forms of religious instruction for enslaved people as well as the kinds of funerals and weddings slave owners might permit enslaved people to have. They learned about the pass system, which required enslaved people going from place to place to carry documentation that identified their owners and detailed their travels. And through Gilman's critique of abolitionist literature, her readers even learned how to respond to public assaults upon slavery.⁴³

In 1835, the abolitionist Catharine Sedgwick wrote a three-volume novel, set during the American Revolution, whose protagonists were the Linwoods, a slaveholding New England family. They owned a woman named Rose who was very close to her owner's daughter, Isabella. One day, Isabella asked Rose if she was happy, and Rose replied that she was not because she was a slave. Isabella recounted her parents' kindness toward Rose and remarked how much she and her brother loved her. Rose replied that slavery was a "yoke, and it gall[ed]" her that she could be "bought and sold like cattle"; she would "die to-morrow to be free to-day." Seeing Rose's pain, Isabella promised the enslaved woman that she would be free and asked her father to manumit her. He refused her request, but through a bit of trickery, Isabella was able to keep her promise to Rose.⁴⁴

In response, Caroline Gilman wrote an op-ed in the *Southern Rose*, the new name of the *Rose Bud*, that refuted Sedgwick's description of slavery and characterization of enslaved people as embodied by Rose. She argued that "it is not true that African slaves pine for 'free breath;' they are the most careless, light-hearted creatures in the world." Without reservation, she believed that "the great mass 'enjoy the service they render,'" and that Sedgwick did not understand their character. She also questioned why Sedgwick and other northern women would "waste their sympathy on a subject so distant from their sphere of observation." She encouraged these women to come to the South, where southern ladies would "show them happy black faces enough, particularly on plantations."⁴⁵

Gilman failed to acknowledge that she, like Sedgwick, was northern born. She also ignored the North's long history of slavery, as well as the fact that, even as Sedgwick was writing *The Linwoods*, and when she herself critiqued it, she could have found African Americans in the North laboring under forms of bondage that resembled enslavement. Gilman also did not seem to realize that Sedgwick was referring to the North's history of slavery in her book or that Sedgwick did know at least one enslaved person's "character" quite intimately. In 1781, Catharine's father, Theodore, a prominent Massachusetts lawyer and politician, offered to represent Elizabeth Freeman, an African-descended enslaved woman known as "Mum Bet." In *Brom and Bett v. Ashley*, Theodore Sedgwick successfully challenged Freeman's enslavement under Massachusetts's

1780 constitution, which proclaimed that all men were born free and equal. After Freeman won her case, she served the Sedgwick family for the rest of her life and cared for Catharine during her girlhood. The many parallels between Rose's and Freeman's enslavement and eventual manumission suggest that Freeman served as Catharine's inspiration for the Rose character in *The Linwoods*. Gilman's op-ed, which also criticized Lydia Maria Child's 1833 publication *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans*, was undoubtedly responding to the surge of abolitionist literature written by women. But more important, she was providing her young readers with a ready response to abolitionist attacks on southern slavery.⁴⁶

Enhancing the knowledge gained from slaveholding parents with the lessons they might have acquired by reading the *Southern Rose/Rose Bud*, young white girls learned how to be efficient and effective mistresses. Such guidance equipped young white girls to teach enslaved people the skills necessary to be the kind of servants they would need later on. When Ellen Thomas and her mistress Cornelia Kimball were young girls, Kimball taught Thomas "the arts of good housekeeping, including fine sewing." Her training also involved being "blindfolded and then [being] told to go through the motions of serving" so that she could "learn to do so without disturbing anything on the table."⁴⁷ Nancy Thomas (no relation to Ellen) recalled that she "was de special little girl fo' Mistress Harriett's daughter" Palonia. "Even durin' dem days I would sew and knit," Nancy Thomas recalled. She went on: "I had a little three-legged stool and I'd set it between Palony's legs, while she was settin' down. Den she'd watch me when I knitted. If I done somethin' wrong, she'd pinch my ear a little and say, 'Yo' dropped a stitch, Nannie.'" ⁴⁸ As Ellen and Nancy Thomas's testimony shows, Cornelia Kimball and Palonia Smith were mistresses in the making, responsible for overseeing the production of the enslaved girls they would come to own and disciplining them when it did not meet their requirements. We can also imagine that Kimball and Smith were themselves being subjected to a certain kind of discipline; however, the "discipline" to which they were subjected paled in comparison to the kinds of discipline these enslaved girls might have endured. I am not suggesting that white parents did not inflict corporal punishment on their children but rather that, in these two cases, Kimball's and Smith's behavior conformed to that of other slave-owning women. Their mothers would be more likely to encourage them to continue such behavior than to punish them for it.⁴⁹

It is important to note that young white southerners, by virtue of their skin color, were empowered by law and custom to exercise control over any enslaved person they crossed paths with, even those they did not own. The landscape

architect Frederick Law Olmsted published an account of his travels throughout the region that included an encounter he had with a southern girl and an elderly enslaved man:

I have seen a girl, twelve years old in a district where, in ten miles, the slave population was fifty to one of the free, stop an old man on the public road, demand to know where he was going, and by what authority, order him to face about and return to his plantation, and enforce her command with turbulent anger, when he hesitated, by threatening that she would have him well whipped if he did not instantly obey. The man quailed like a spaniel, and she instantly resumed the manner of a lovely child with me, no more apprehending that she had acted unbecomingly, than that her character had been influenced by the slave's submission to her caprice of supremacy; no more conscious that she had increased the security of her life by strengthening the habit of the slave to the master race, than is the sleeping seaman that he tightens his clutch of the rigging as the ship meets each new billow.⁵⁰

When interacting with enslaved people in this way, girls like the one Olmsted encountered learned important lessons about the power of whiteness and its pricelessness.

White girls learned one lesson about the value set on different groups of human beings; enslaved people learned quite another. The historian Daina Ramey Berry describes the ways enslaved children first learned about and reckoned with their bound and unfree status. She argues that the "visual cues, including coffles . . . heading to auctions," the separation of kin and loved ones, and the slave auctions themselves quickly taught enslaved children where they stood in the southern hierarchy.⁵¹ White girls also learned about their place in the hierarchy and the inestimable value of their white skins when they witnessed these spectacles. They were present when enslaved families were torn apart in their parents' fields, and they saw slave coffles pass by their homes. They attended slave auctions with their families on court days or sale days: they watched the bidding process unfold, and they heard the wails of the enslaved as they were separated from their loved ones. All around them, white girls found evidence of their difference from and superiority to enslaved people, as well as of the many privileges their whiteness brought them. They recognized who was and who was not chained to others in slave coffles; who was and who was not shrieking and reaching for a child torn from a family's arms. They noticed who was and who was not missing from the fields and the household, and whose absences the remaining enslaved people mourned. All these observations enabled them to understand the chasm between the free and enslaved, between those seen as human

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Although it might be deeply problematic and should be approached with caution, some evidence does suggest that enslaved people sometimes developed caring and, perhaps, loving relationships with their young owners. But no matter how affectionate relations between white girls and enslaved people might have been, these young slave owners frequently articulated and exercised their power over their enslaved companions as mistresses in the making. Some girls and young women enthusiastically assumed their roles as mistresses early on, in their daily interactions with enslaved people; some also exhibited signs that they might evolve into brutal ones. A formerly enslaved woman recounted the cruelties that she suffered at the hands of all the white women in her household, but she dwelt in particular on her encounters with "the meanest" of her mistress's daughters. Her young mistress, she recalled, would whip her and then make her "kiss the switch" that she used to beat her.⁵²

When parents gave their daughters enslaved people, those daughters assumed a new identity: they became slave owners. Over the course of their lives, they learned valuable lessons about the importance of property and how to be effective slave owners. They also learned how to determine when, if, and in what ways to allow other people to interfere with any aspect of their wealth in slaves.

When these young women married, they put all their knowledge, training, and experience to good use. Frequently their parents and others would give them additional slaves to mark the occasion. Formerly enslaved people related that they considered this kind of gift giving common, and married women's accounts corroborate their assertions.⁵³ Enslaved people also remembered slave-owning women giving their children human property, which contradicts historians' claims that bequests and gifting of enslaved people were practices in which only slave-owning men engaged. As Julia Casey recalled, her "Missis's mammy . . . gib me, mah mammy, mah sister Violet, mah two br'ers Andrew en Alfred ter Miss Jennie fer a wed'un gif." Similarly, Anna R. Ellis gave an enslaved mother and her child to her daughter Rhoda as a wedding present when Rhoda married. No matter whether they were mothers, grandmothers, aunts, or sisters, slave-owning women gave enslaved people to their female relatives, and ensured that they would possess them in their own right.⁵⁴

For reasons that could have been related to incompatible personalities or economic inefficiency, a slave-owning woman might not approve of the enslaved people her parents gave her when she married. When Adeline Blakely was five years old, her master gave her to his daughter Elizabeth as a wedding gift. After

settling into her new home, Elizabeth decided that the girl "was too little and not enough help to her"; she would make another mouth to feed without being economically productive. So she sent Blakely back. Even though Blakely remained in her master's home for another two years, Elizabeth still owned her because her father had "made a bill of sale for [Blakely] to his daughter, in order to keep account of all settlements, so when he died and the estate [was] settled each child would know how he stood."⁵⁵ Blakely eventually returned to Elizabeth's home and was responsible for the care of her mistress's children. When Elizabeth's daughter married H. M. Hudgens, Elizabeth gave Blakely to the daughter as a gift, just as her father had given Blakely to her years earlier.⁵⁶

Some young women were able to avoid situations like this because their parents permitted them to choose the slaves they wanted to take with them to their new homes. James Winchester of Nashville, Tennessee, wrote to his daughter Maria Breedlove informing her that she could "have her choice of [his] negresses to wait upon you." When he did not receive a reply, he followed up with another letter asking her to let him know which one she wanted. He cautioned her against choosing the "two which your mother might not like to part with," although he believed that his wife would probably "yield to accommodate" Breedlove if she did choose one of her mother's personal favorites.⁵⁷

Elite members of the planter class presented their children with enslaved people at elaborate events following their wedding processions. The formerly enslaved Bill Homer provided a remarkable account of how grand these ceremonies could be. When his mistress Mary Homer married William Johnson, her father gave her fifty slaves, and Bill Homer was one of them. Bill recalled that on Mary's wedding day, her father ordered the fifty enslaved people to line up, and he presented them to Mary by saying, "Fo' to give my lovin' daughter de staht, I's give you dese 50 niggers." Mary's new father-in-law presented his son with fifty enslaved people as well, with just as much ceremony.

These affairs also underscored the economic relationship between slaves and young white women's coming of age because white parents often sold enslaved people in order to help finance their daughters' weddings. Ben Johnson's master, for example, sold Ben's brother Jim in order to pay for his daughter's wedding dress.⁵⁸ Transactions such as these served as a brutal lesson for the other enslaved people in Ben Johnson's community, and an equally important one for the new bride: she could always sell one of her slaves, separating him or her from everything and everyone he or she knew and loved, if a more pressing need, like the purchase of a dress, arose.

Even after marriage, white slave-owning parents and other kin offered their daughters and female family members enslaved people as gifts. When Kittie

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Stanford was ten, her female owner Mrs. Lindsay transported her to her daughter Etta's house and gave her to Etta so that she could care for Etta's baby. Stanford remembered Mrs. Lindsay saying to Etta: "I brought you a little nigger gal to rock de cradle." In her account, Stanford said nothing about whether her own mother came with her to Etta's home, so she probably did not. But Stanford's old mistress seemed unconcerned about the distress that *Kittie's* separation from her own mother would bring.⁵⁹

Slave-owning mothers' deeds of gift, like the one devised by Ann V. Hicks of Marlborough District, South Carolina, on August 17, 1831, not only offer more concrete support for enslaved people's claims that their owners gave them to married daughters; they also show that these property transfers preserved their daughters' legal titles to these slaves as well. Hicks drew up a deed of gift that conveyed six enslaved people and their future children to her three married daughters. It stipulated that she gave these enslaved people to them "without any right in the husbands which they now have or may hereafter have, to exercise any control over said property, or in any manner to intermeddle therewith." The deed also expressed Hicks's intention to "convey a separate and exclusive interest in the said negroes to [her] daughters . . . and their children, without subjecting them in any manner to liability on account of any contracts of their husbands."⁶⁰

Hicks envisioned a certain kind of life for her daughters, one that did not leave them subject to whatever financial blunders their husbands might make. She also sought to grant them a measure of economic stability that might extend beyond their first marriages and into any subsequent marriages. Other parents, such as Theodorick Bland of Virginia, took similar precautions. In 1784, after his daughter Frances married St. George Tucker, he drew up a deed of gift that indicated that he had given several enslaved people to Frances. It was a "parol" or oral gift, however, and not a written property transferal. In order to ensure its legality, he devised a formal written deed of gift that confirmed his earlier gift to Frances and granted the slaves to her for her "sole and separate use and benefit."⁶¹

When family and kin gave women slaves for their "sole and separate use and control," they often had specific ideas about how they wanted them to use that property, but women like Catharine V. Phillips frequently had plans of their own. When Phillips gave birth to her first child, her brother James Anthony gave her a twelve-year-old enslaved girl named Charlotte by deed of gift, "for her sole and separate use" during her lifetime. He did this to "relieve her in part from the drudgery to which, in her situation [motherhood], she was subjected to." He placed Charlotte and any children she might have in a separate trust for Phillips. Her family continued to grow, and to help her perform her maternal and household

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* duties, her brother-in-law Weldon Phillips also gave her a sixteen-year-old enslaved girl named Louisa for her "sole and separate use," and he directed that Louisa should be "free from the direction or control of [Catharine's] husband, and under no event to become liable for [his] debts or contracts." This he did even (or especially) though her husband "was then somewhat embarrassed."⁶²

Catharine Phillips did not use her slaves as her donors imagined she would. She established a boardinghouse with funds she brought into her marriage, and instead of having Charlotte and Louisa assist her in household and maternal duties, she set them to work in her new business and used them to sell her poultry and dairy products. Her business activities, along with Charlotte and Louisa's earnings, brought Catharine enough profit to buy a forty-five-year-old enslaved man named Handy from one A. M. Clanton. She paid Clanton two hundred dollars up front, and "after full consultation with her and under her instructions," Catharine's husband delivered the balance of what she owed from funds she provided to him. When Clanton drew up the bill of sale, it reserved Handy in trust for Catharine's sole and separate use.⁶³

While parents presented their daughters with both enslaved males and females as inheritances upon marriage, they more frequently gave them female slaves. From a logical perspective, their decision to do so might seem motivated by the rationale that enslaved women and girls would be more useful to daughters, who bore the bulk of the domestic responsibilities in and management of their households, and sometimes this was the case. But they also gave enslaved girls and women (especially those of childbearing age) to their daughters, because females possessed the reproductive capacity to add to their daughters' labor force.

Of course, slaveholders in the colonial period did not value enslaved females' reproduction in the ways that their counterparts would in the nineteenth century. In the colonial period, especially before the abolition of the African slave trade to America in 1808, many slave owners discouraged enslaved women from reproducing. They considered enslaved infants to be time-consuming financial burdens who prevented their mothers from devoting all of their attention to their white households. Slave owners often sold such women simply because they were conceiving and delivering children too frequently. After 1808, however, when slave owners could no longer depend upon a steady supply of newly imported African captives, they had to rely on a domestic supply of enslaved laborers, and they became invested in the "natural" reproduction of the enslaved labor force. Hence, they increasingly sought women who could reproduce and had already given birth to healthy children.⁶⁴ By the third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century, slave owners prized enslaved females of childbearing

age, affixed higher values to them because of their ability to bear children, and came to see them as sound investments that would augment their wealth with little effort or additional expense.

A parent's decisions to give a daughter a female, as opposed to a male, slave, however, could also be made because the parent was more concerned about the daughter's well-being than her husband's. When Mary Lindsay's mistress married Bill Merrick, her father would not give her any enslaved men or boys as part of her inheritance, and Lindsay wondered why. When she asked her mistress about her father's decision, her mistress speculated that her father had given her female slaves "because he didn't want to help her husband out none, but just wanted to help her. If he give her a man her husband [would] have him working in the blacksmith shop."⁶⁵

Pragmatism and parental concern were only two reasons why slave-owning parents tended to give their daughters female slaves; there were legal and financial justifications, too. By the 1660s, colonies such as Virginia and Maryland enacted laws that ensured that children inherited the bound or free condition of their mothers. Other colonies followed suit in law or in custom. They further provided that whoever owned an enslaved woman also owned her offspring, regardless of who owned the father of the children she bore. Exceptions were sometimes made, however, if both owners were willing.⁶⁶

Slave-owning parents knew about the legal and pecuniary benefits of owning enslaved women, and so did their daughters.⁶⁷ Enslaved men, particularly those in their most productive years, possessed a higher value in slave markets because they were strong, skilled laborers, and in this sense, they were exceptional financial investments in the short term.⁶⁸ But over the long term, enslaved women, because of the children they would potentially produce over the course of their lives, were far more valuable. If slave owners were patient, "producing children was a cheap alternative to purchasing them at the market."⁶⁹ Henrietta Butler's mistress Emily Haidee clearly knew the value that enslaved women possessed, and she developed two long-term financial strategies to maximize their worth. She not only forced Butler's mother to engage in nonconsensual sex with enslaved men so she could "have babies all de time," she made Butler do the same. When the coerced sexual liaisons that Haidee orchestrated produced offspring, she was known for "sellin' the boys and keepin' the gals."⁷⁰

Multiple generations of women could benefit from their elders' decisions to keep enslaved women and girls. Three generations of enslaved women in the Linier family served as nurses to Aaron and Francis Hudson Haynie's female descendants. Lucy Linier nursed Aaron and Francis's daughter Ann. Lucy's daughter Patsy in turn nursed Ann's children. And Patsy's daughter Emma

nursed the children of Ann's daughter Fanny.⁷¹ Generation after generation, slave-owning women benefited from the reproductive and maternal labor of the enslaved women they owned.

A woman's interest in the reproduction of the enslaved women she owned could manifest in calculated and methodical ways. In their letters, diaries, and family Bibles, mistresses tabulated gains and losses in the wealth that was bound up in the bodies of the infants and children they owned.⁷² And when these mistresses died, the pecuniary advantage of owning enslaved women emerged in their wills and estate inventories, documents that reveal the "natural increase" of their slaveholdings. Rachel O'Connor was a large-scale Louisiana slave owner and planter, and between 1826 and 1844 she offered an often joyful and proud accounting of the enslaved infants born on her plantation on twenty separate occasions. In most of these passages, she merely identified which women gave birth and indicated whether the infants were born healthy or otherwise. But several of her notations made it clear why she was so meticulous in her tabulations: these infants were future laborers and they increased her wealth.⁷³ During this time O'Connor owned almost twice as many enslaved women and girls (fifty-three) as she did men and boys (twenty-eight). Twenty-five of the enslaved females O'Connor owned were identified as "women" age fifteen years and older, while the remaining were identified as "girls" age two to thirteen years. According to the family pairings noted in the inventory, half of the eighty-one people O'Connor owned were the offspring of the enslaved women on her plantation. When O'Connor died, her estate was valued at over \$30,000; her slaves were worth 84 percent of her total wealth (\$27,875). Other women, such as the Louisiana divorcée Jane Kemp, also left no doubt about the importance of these women and their reproductive capabilities when they compiled lists of the slaves they owned. Kemp emphasized their value by creating a separate list of "women with families."⁷⁴

White women's prideful exclamations about the offspring that enslaved women produced frequently took on a more ritualistic aspect when they put enslaved children on display for their guests. Whenever Ryer Emmanuel's mistress Miss Ross entertained visitors, she would gather together all the enslaved children she owned so her guests could admire them. According to Emmanuel, her mistress would then turn to her guests and ask, "Ain't I got a pretty crop of little niggers coming on?" Emmanuel remembered that there were so many enslaved children that "de yard would be black wid all different sizes." Her mistress chose a rather crass manner of expressing her pride in her growing group of laborers, but she was one of many slave-owning women who routinely told their friends and family about the births and maturation of enslaved children on their estates.⁷⁵

Enslaved people grew to recognize white women's interest in their reproduction and the value they placed upon it. One formerly enslaved woman remembered overhearing her mistress tell a prospective buyer that she "wouldn't sell her for nothing" and "wouldn't take two thousand for her" because she was her "little breeder."⁷⁶ In another community, a white traveler named Eli West remembered one enslaved woman who simply could not, or would not, conceive. After she continually failed to become pregnant, her mistress had her stripped naked and whipped her severely. When this brutality proved ineffectual in remedying the problem, her mistress sold the woman to slave traders.⁷⁷

Medical innovations have made us more knowledgeable about reproduction than those who lived in the nineteenth century could ever be. We now know that a host of environmental and physiological factors could have interfered with an enslaved woman's capacity to reproduce. Despite the fact that this was widely assumed in the case of white women, slave owners acted as though enslaved females' ability to carry their pregnancies to full term and deliver healthy infants was a certainty. In spite of copious evidence to the contrary, slave owners counted on the probability that these things would happen. As the historian Jennifer Morgan has demonstrated for the colonial period, slave owners' preoccupation with enslaved women's "issue and increase" persisted in the face of data showing high rates of infant mortality and infertility and low rates of childbirth among women of childbearing age. The historian Richard Follett's examination of fertility rates on Louisiana sugar plantations in the nineteenth century supports Morgan's findings. He found that the labor required to cultivate sugar had deleterious effects upon enslaved women's quality of life, their life expectancy, and, most especially, their capacity to reproduce. Frances Ann Kemble described similar reproductive difficulties among the enslaved women who worked the lands that her husband owned in Georgia.⁷⁸

In addition to physical ailments and arduous labor conditions, nutritional deprivation affected the fertility of enslaved women, as has been shown by the historians Edward Baptist and Walter Johnson. Baptist tracked the brutal intensification of labor that slave owners required of enslaved people in the West, and Johnson determined that enslaved people barely received the calories necessary to perform a fraction of the work demanded of them on a daily basis, let alone facilitate conception and sustain the unborn.⁷⁹ This was undoubtedly why some enslaved women, such as the one Eli West described, failed to conceive. West stayed with the mistress who owned this woman for a year and remarked on the near starvation, beatings, and unceasing labor on her plantation.

White slave-owning women did not want to leave enslaved reproduction or infant health to chance. They tried to create more favorable working and living

conditions for enslaved women that might enable them to carry their pregnancies to term and give birth to viable infants.⁸⁰ They also took great care to nurture enslaved infants and children and keep them healthy. As enslaved people told it, these mistresses often had profit in mind.

White slave-owning women further underscored their investments in the children enslaved women bore when they made efforts to provide for their nutritional and physical needs. While such actions might seem benevolent or "maternalistic," the economic advantages of caring for the children they enslaved often motivated these women's choices, and frequently these mistresses had their eyes on the slave market. Sallie Paul reasoned that slave owners in her community fed enslaved children well in large part because they wanted to "make dem hurry en grow cause dey would want to hurry en increase dey property."⁸¹ John Brown's experience gives credence to her assertion. Brown's mistress Betty Moore would summon all the enslaved children to the "big house" each morning and give each of them a dose of garlic and rue, a medicinal plant used to treat a variety of ailments. To keep them physically fit, she would order them to "run round a great sycamore tree in the yard." When the children did not run fast enough to suit her, she would crack a cowhide whip at them, a disciplinary tool she kept by her side at all times. Brown said that she did this to keep them "wholesome," and to make them "grow likely for market."⁸²