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# The Fancy Trade and the Commodification of Rape in the Sexual Economy of 19th Century U.S. Slavery

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THE FANCY TRADE AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF RAPE IN THE SEXUAL ECONOMY OF  
19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY U.S. SLAVERY

by

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Bachelor of Arts  
St. Lawrence University, 2009

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Accepted by:

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## DEDICATION

To my Mommy and Daddy, thank you for laying the foundation. I love you both very much.

To my sister and nieces, I pray that you use your voice to always confront the silence.

And to my boys, thank you for saving me.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project began many years ago while I was an undergraduate student at St. Lawrence University. At that time, I never would have imagined that my curiosity and intrigue with the subject of the Fancy Trade would lead me to this point. My what a journey it has been! And so, I am grateful to Dr. Mary Jane Smith, Department of History (St. Lawrence University) and Dr. Kathleen Self, Religious Studies Department (St. Lawrence University) for their faith in my abilities as a scholar when I failed to have faith in myself. Not only are these two women my mentors, but over the years, they have become dear friends.

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A special thank you to Dr. Florencia Cornet for the phone calls, emails, but most important, her friendship. There were many nights that she sat with me, listened to me, prayed for me, and encouraged me to finish, to keep pushing.

I also place on record, my sense of gratitude to one and all who, directly or indirectly, have lent their helping hand in this venture.

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to examine the Fancy Trade—the buying and selling of mixed-race enslaved women for the primary purpose of prostitution and concubinage—through an intersectionality lens. Therefore, I will explore a culture of rape through the lived experiences of fancy maids, the women who were sold as sex commodities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century domestic slave trade. Who was she? Using an intersectionality framework to answer the proposed questions will achieve the following. First, it will highlight the social constructions of race, gender, and sexuality within the 19<sup>th</sup> century southern context. Secondly, an intersectional methodology will explore the power relationships between enslaved women and white men and women. In addition, the examination will focus on the social institutional arrangements—ideological, political, and economic—that enforce commerce of rape in the antebellum south.

In my research I will show that the trilogy of ‘pleasure- rape- desire’ is as much a pillar of slavery as coerced labor. I argue that white patriarchy buttressed the rape of enslaved women because it was a means to degrade black femininity and masculinity. When these sexual conquests produced fair complexioned offspring, they further symbolized and reconfirmed white patriarchy. It was sadistic, erotic, and a repetitious cycle fueled by the legal structures and political economies of slave societies. Eventually it manifested into commerce of rape whereby white men could purchase enslaved women for the primary purpose of fulfilling their sexual desires and fantasies.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Confronting Silence

At an early age, my mother instilled in me an awareness of the African American experience under bondage. I recall her telling me about the treatment of the many black bonded victims—young and old, male and female—of slavery. My mother’s commitment to educating me about our ancestral history had a lingering effect on me as a scholar and an individual, but more importantly, as an African American woman. Looking back, I did not appreciate or understand her purpose in revealing our ancestral past, but now, I do. She equipped me with the knowledge to combat the American conspiracy of silence around slavery and black women’s sexuality.

Thus, I present to the reader a historical analysis of slavery as a way of understanding African American women’s collective sexual histories. For, as one scholar wrote, “Without a vocabulary to describe slavery, contemporary black women have been without a voice to describe and confront the history of sexual...expropriation and exploitation that slavery entailed.”<sup>1</sup> The following essay explores rape and desire in what Adrienne Davis, legal historian at Washington University, has labeled the sexual economy of slavery, here defined as the interplay of sex and “markets of the antebellum South [that] seized enslaved women’s intimate lives, converting private relations of sex

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<sup>1</sup> Davis, Adrienne, “Don’t Let Nobody Bother Yo’ Principle,” in *Sister Circle: Black Women and Work*, editor S. Harley (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002): 104.

into political and economic relations.”<sup>2</sup> In asserting slavery studies in this manner, the scholar is presented with the complex dilemma of depending on veiled private relations of sex and sexual desire to make claims about social and public structures of power. As a remedy to this problem, I will use Anna Clark’s term, “twilight moments,” or “those sexual practices and desires that societies prohibit by law or custom but that people pursue anyhow, whether in secret or as an open secret.”

### 1.1 TWILIGHT MOMENTS

According to Clark, “concepts of marginal groups and interzones—or spaces where unconventional sex was allowed to take place—are helpful because they force scholars to consider illicit sexual economies.” In such cases, “sexual practices do not result solely from sexual desires,” she writes, “they may also function as services provided by one person to another.” Therefore, “prostitution functions as a sexual economy,” she argues, “albeit a black-market economy” where “its sexual transactions are discrete, twilight moments” that are “difficult to regulate when they are not part of ongoing institutions.”<sup>3</sup> These moments fill “a conceptual gap in the literature on the history of sexuality.” Such a gap, Clark explains, “Makes it difficult to describe sexuality, desires, and practices that were neither celebrated nor utterly forbidden, deviant, or abject.” Since the Fancy Trade was a clandestine prostitution ring, I will combine Clark’s concept of illicit sexual economies with Davis’ definition of sexual economies. In utilizing the metaphor of twilight to expose the submerged sex trafficking of enslaved women this undertaking will examine the contours of the Fancy Trade—the buying and

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>3</sup> Anna Clark, “Twilight Moments,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14 (2005): 148.

selling of mixed-race female slaves for the primary purposes of private prostitution and coerced concubinage.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, this argument does not intend to render the behaviors of white men in a monolithic voice. For it is evident that not all white men partook in interracial liaisons. And of those that did, not all preferred fair-complexioned slave women to other complexions. Nor was participating in the fancy trade a universal practice. Rather my goal here is to examine the relationship between race, rape, gender, sexuality, and markets; to explore how categorizing gender and sexuality based on racial constructs influenced 19th century tensions concerning miscegenation; and how these constructs were institutionalized into the sexual economy of slavery where the rape of black women could be bought and sold.

In addition, to speak of southern slavery in a monolithic voice is as much of an error as claiming miscegenation to be universal.<sup>5</sup> The historian must acknowledge the

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<sup>4</sup> Deborah Gray White is the first historian to give a definition for the Fancy Trade. She defines the Fancy Trade as “the sale of light-skinned black women for the exclusive purpose of prostitution and concubinage.” (White Gray, *Aren't I A Woman* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985), 37. I have added “private prostitution” and “forced concubinage” to Whites’ definition in order to emphasize two points. I use the term private prostitution to denote the hiring out of female slaves for sex under the pseudonym of laundress, washers, and cooks. The transactions were public, but because interracial sexual trysts were taboo in slave societies, they occurred in private, domestic spaces. The hiring out of slaves was a popular practice in maritime metropolis like Charleston and New Orleans. For existing scholarship on this topic, see Beckles, Hilary McD., “Property Rights in Pleasure: The Marketing of Enslaved Women’s Sexuality,” In *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World*, editors Verene Shepherd and Hillary McD. Bekles (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2000), 692. Secondly, I have included coerced concubinage in Whites’ definition in order to emphasize the role of violence and rape in the concubine relationships that existed between master and slave. This does not rule out instances in which such relationships were consensual. However, it is important to keep in mind that some slave women used their position as concubine, or mistresses, as negotiating power. White writes, “Many expected and often got something in return for their sexual favors. There was no reason for them to believe that even freedom could not be bought for the price of their bodies,” (White, 34). Although some consented, this does not rule out the claim that this was rape. In her text, *Scenes of Subjection*, Saidiya Hartman addresses issues of will, consent, and the limitations of nineteenth century rape-law. She writes, “the enslaved is legally unable to give consent or offer resistance, she is presumed to be always willing.” (See: “Seduction and the Ruses of Power”)

<sup>5</sup> See Ira Berlin’s *Many Thousand Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998).

cultural differences that slavery bred across geographical space and time. Slavery in the upper south differed from slavery in the lower regions. Moreover, slavery in South Carolina looked very different from slavery in Louisiana. And thus, the histories, customs, mores, and culture that dictated regional and state race relations were not the same. Yet, what was evidently universal is the subjugation of blacks as enslaved; the contradictions of rape due to the tension between slaves' status as human and chattel; and the metalanguages of race that defined gender and sexuality in the southern context.

This analysis diverges from traditional conventions of narrative historical writing. Because of the nature of the trade whereby desires and sexual acts could not be fully articulated by those who engaged in them, and its terminological ambiguity, this narrative lacks a key element associated with historical inquiry: it is without a measurement of linear change over time.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, the narrative will not trace the chronological trajectory of the Trade from the antebellum period through the Civil War. Rather the purpose of this research is to present an analytical framework that will expose and aid in the exploration of the often silenced history of miscegenation and rape as pillars of slavery.<sup>7</sup> This essay explores the Fancy Trade as the sexualization of race and the commodification and commercialization of rape in the antebellum South. Much of the theory interwoven into the analysis will be a compilation from the works of others who

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<sup>6</sup> According to Clark, "the metaphor of twilight moments can also help us understand those desires and acts that could not be fully articulated even by those who engaged in them. People often do sexual acts and deny them even in their minds; they may not even be able to conceptualize what they have done" (Anna Clark, 153).

<sup>7</sup> Other scholars, too, argue that rape was intrinsic to slavery and slave trading. See: Glyph, Travolta, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Nell Irvin Painter, *Southern History across the Color Line* (Chapel Hill, 2002); Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1997)

have contributed to the discussion on the Fancy Trade, slavery, and African American women's history.

## 1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite mentioning its existence, the Fancy Trade has been overshadowed by discussion on paternalism and the economic components of slave speculation.<sup>8</sup> For decades, historiography on slavery and the domestic slave trade has limited the discussion on the Fancy Trade. In many instances, historians have failed to mention its existence all together. Rather, they focus on the political-economy of the domestic slave trade: the traders and the trade's paternalistic nature, speculative characteristics, scale, organization, and profits.<sup>9</sup> In doing so, the scholarship speaks to the importance of the interregional slave trade in sustaining the lifeline for the United States southern slave system.

Other scholars have explored the cultural implications of the trade in defining, sustaining, or mythologizing racial and social hierarchies. In particular, Walter Johnson's foundational work, *Soul by Soul*, mentions the Fancy Trade as it relates to white males' fantasy and identity formation. Johnson argues that slavery "was best seen in the slave market" where "every slaveholder lived through the stolen body of a slave."<sup>10</sup> It was

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<sup>8</sup> Deyle, Steven, "The Domestic Slave Trade in America: The Lifeblood of the southern Slave System," in *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave trades in the Americas*, editor Walter Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004): 91-116 and *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) Ford, Lacy K. "Reconsidering the Internal Slave Trade: Paternalism, Markets, and the Character of the Old South," in *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave trades in the Americas*, editor Walter Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004): 143-164; Tadman, Michael, "The Interregional Slave Trade in the History and Myth-Making of the U.S. South," in *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave trades in the Americas*, editor Walter Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004): 117-124.

<sup>9</sup> Tadman, Michael, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 214, 216; Johnson, Walter, "The Slave Trader, the White Slave, and the Politics of Racial determination in the 1850s," *The Journal of American History* 87 (Jun 2000): 18.

there that white men and women defined their identity within the southern social order. For example, in the slave markets of New Orleans, “along with the social distinction, honor, and paternalism that could be wrung from the bodies and souls of the enslaved, slave traders were selling the buyers another fantasy: that other people existed to satisfy their desires.”<sup>11</sup> The high prices of the fair skinned fancy maids symbolized dominance, desire, and the luxury of being able to pay for a sexual service that “had no material utility,” but was a “projection of the slaveholders’ own imagined identities as white men and slave masters.” He writes:

The fantasies [slave owners and traders] projected onto their slaves’ bodies served them as public reflection of their own discernment: they were the arbiters of bearing and beauty; their slaves were the showpieces of their pretensions; their own whiteness was made apparent in the bodies of the people they bought. By buying themselves access to ever more luminous fantasies of their own distinction.<sup>12</sup>

Johnson’s observation is valid, as well as, restricted. Although he speaks to the projected fantasies of slave traders onto their slaves, he does not analyze how such fantasies and the construction of white male identity relate to notions of race, gender, and sexuality. Moreover, by depending on source material from Louisiana courts and notarized acts of sale, his narrative is limited in geographical scope.

Edward Baptist takes a similar position. He argues that fancy maids were the “fetish objects of white male desire.”<sup>13</sup> Using Freud’s definition of fetishism and Marx’s notion of the fetishized commodity, Baptist explains fancy women’s appeal: they were desired purchases because they could be raped. He argues the obsession with the fancy maiden was based on a type of sexuality she symbolized: “the promise and the pleasure

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Baptist, Edward, “‘Cuffy,’ ‘Fancy Maids,’ and ‘One-Eyed Men:’ Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States,” in *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave trades in the Americas*, editor Walter Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004):191.

of rape” in the eyes of white men.<sup>14</sup> “White men,” he continues, “repeated the acts of a history of rape” in which the act of consumption—selling, buying, and raping—became powerful and pleasurable. However, dominance and dependence “were not always absolute.” The “physical and symbolic or psychological pleasures of coerced sexuality,” he explains, “were addictive, creating a psychological dependence on being able to assert sexual power over such women.” Both the fetish and the commodity could not exist independently of the other; hence, “the ambiguity of the fetish relationship.”<sup>15</sup>

Baptist’s discussion is limited for a number of reasons. In using letters between Rice C. Ballard and Isaac Franklin, two of the most successful trade speculators during the 1830s, Baptist bases his argument on the implied actions of two men and focuses only on their correspondence within a three-year space of time. Secondly, Baptist uses psychoanalysis as a theoretical paradigm for his argument and to explain desire. Using psychoanalysis to interpret history is a murky, dangerous approach; it assumes the psychological motives of historical subjects. Instead of Baptiste’s use of Freudian theory of fetishism, scholars should rethink illicit sexual economies like the Fancy Trade and its commercialization of “the promise and the pleasure of rape” in the context of intersectionality. This paradigm makes for a more reliable discourse that speaks to the relationship between rape, gender, sexuality, and power.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>15</sup> Baptist, 188-189; Cynthia M Kennedy echoes similar sentiments on the legacy of rape in her chapter on “Mixing and Admixtures.” She writes, “Like their fathers and grandfathers before them, patriarchs-in-training understood that sexual access to slave women came with their positions of power and authority. “Rape,” according to Kennedy, “manifested a murky but persistent feature of patriarchal control and a screaming repudiation of paternalist ideology.” Cynthia Kennedy, *Braided Relations, Entwined Lives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 116.

In all, Baptist's discussion is valuable to the literature on slavery, the slave trade, and the Fancy Trade because it recognizes and connects the sexualization of light complexioned women to the notion of the commodification of rape. His position that the "obsession with fancy maids evolved out of histories personal and social," or in other words a legacy of rape, is correct. Cynthia M Kennedy echoes similar sentiments on the legacy of rape in her chapter on "Mixing and Admixtures." She writes, "Like their fathers and grandfathers before them, patriarchs-in-training understood that sexual access to slave women came with their positions of power and authority. "Rape," according to Kennedy, "manifested a murky but persistent feature of patriarchal control and a screaming repudiation of paternalist ideology." It is this legacy, symbolized by the complexion of the fancy maid that was for sale in the Fancy Trade market.



## CHAPTER 2

### BUYING HYBRID WHITENESS

Fancy girls were mixed-race female slaves—ranging from young girls to adult women—whose hybrid-whiteness, captured by their pigment and legal status as property, was used to market their services as sex laborers. Just as much as the fancy commodities represented dominance and desire through the fantasy of mastery, they also represented the marketing of hybrid whiteness, or “whiteness made salable by the presence of blackness.”<sup>16</sup> The marketing of fancy maidens’ hybrid whiteness according to Walter Johnson, who coined the term, was a performance as much as it was visual.<sup>17</sup> “The ideology that associated hybrid white womanhood with delicacy, gentility, and sexuality,” Johnson explains, “could not exist independent of the immediate appearance and daily behavior of the people it described.”<sup>18</sup> For instance, in his May 1854 journal entry, Orville Browning, the Republican Senator from Illinois, recounts his visit to a Lexington slave pen. He writes, “In several of the rooms I found very handsome mulatto women, of fine persons and easy genteel manner, sitting at their needle work awaiting a purchaser.”

The performance aspect of hybrid whiteness is evident in the Mary Reynolds’s slave narrative. Born a slave in 1837, Reynolds participated in the WPA narratives

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.,17.

<sup>17</sup> For additional studies on the performance of race during slavery and on the auction blocks, see Stupp, Jason, “Slavery and the Theatre of History: Ritual Performance on the Auction Block,” *Theatre Journal* 63 (March 2011): 61-84.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

conducted during the 1930s. An educated guess would estimate that her observation took place sometime during the 1850s. The exact date, however, is unknown. In her recollection of slavery, Reynolds recalls the story of Margaret. She narrates:

Once, Massa goes to Baton Rouge and brung back a yeller gal dressed in fine style. She was a semester nigger. He builds her a house 'way from the quarters, and she done fine sewin' for the whites. Us niggers knowed the doctore took a black women quick as he did a white, and took any on his place he wanted, and he took them often. But mostly the chillum born on the place looked like niggers. But this yeller gal breeds so fast and gets a mess of white young'uns. She learnt them fine manners and combs out they hair.<sup>19</sup>

Reynolds observes Margaret's "fine style," which attests to the performance aspect of marketing hybrid-whiteness. Moreover, in the slave markets, "slaves had to be made, sometimes violently, to enact the meaning slaveholders assigned to their bodies." Hence, argues Johnson "the traders' attention to decorating the mixed women they sold for sex and the practice of sending them to sale in gloves or shawls." Johnson provides explanation for the importance the performance of color and a racialized sexuality played in the preferences for and commanding of such high prices for fancy pieces.

The marketing of fancy girls' hybrid-whiteness extended to the showcase in which they were displayed. Browning describes the inside of the apartment as "comfortable, but in many respects luxurious." "Many of the rooms are well carpeted," he writes, "and furnished, and very neat, and the inmates whilst here are treated with great indulgence and humanity." The scene must have had an impact on Orville. For he noted, "I confess it impressed me with the idea of decorating the ox for the sacrifice." So much so that Orville was taken aback by the convincing facade, writing, "And slaves as

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<sup>19</sup> Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 182.

they were, this I confess, rather shocked my gallantry.”<sup>20</sup> Though Reynolds and Browning do not refer to their subjects as fancy maids, their narratives suggest that the women observed were fancy pieces.

The advertising format created ways, both subtle and not-so-subtle, to put certain female slaves into the “fancy” category. Descriptors like “smart,” “intelligent,” “first rate character,” “honest,” or “temperate,” may have aroused in its consumer audience what historian Walter Johnson explains as, “dreamy interpretations of the meaning of their own skin color.” For instance, in the 1850 publication, *The Slave Auction*, its author, Dr. John Tehophilus, recounts the selling of Mary, “Slave No. 46,” at a slave auction in New Orleans. According to Krammer’s account, standing on the platform was Mary, a twenty-three year old female slave. “She,” Kramer explains, is “nearly white; she is not yellow, as they call her.” He continues:

There stands a girl upon the platform, to be sold to the highest bidder...She has a fair waist, her hair is black silky, and falling down in ringlets upon her full shoulders. Her eyes are large, soft, and languishing. She seeks in vain to hide the streaming tears with her small and delicate hands. Her features are fair, like those of the girls of the Caucasian race; they remind me of those of the highland girls of my native country, Switzerland. Who in all the world can have anything against her color? In England she would be called a ‘star;’ in France a ‘belle;’ in Germany, a ‘nice little woman;’ and in the free States of the Union, she would pass, when fashionably dressed, for a ‘fair French lady.’ But, in the Slave States, she is openly sold, as though she were nothing more than a “beautiful mare’ or a ‘splendid cow!’

He ends his description of Mary with the following passage:

If Mary’s father, who is, perhaps, a very much honored gentlemen, ‘one of the best members of his church’—if that great man could see his only daughter, his own flesh and blood, standing upon the platform, with tearful eyes, and sighing in

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

untold misery to be sold like a quadruped—surely, his blood would turn ‘white’ for shame and terror!<sup>21</sup>

In the slaveholding south, scenes Dr. Kramer describes were common. Slaves—male, female, old, and young—were publically displayed, bought, and sold at slave auction. Despite the normalcy of the above described scene, there are a few elements that arouse scholastic inquiry. The emphasis of Mary’s light complexion, her hybrid-whiteness, rumored origins of her pedigree, and most importantly, the location of the auction are subtle indicators that Mary may have been sold as a fancy maid or at least for sexual purposes.

At first glance, such an accusation may seem far-reaching. Upon dissecting the narrative, however, it seems more plausible. First, “fair” and “soft,” words typically reserved for southern white women, were used to describe a slave woman. Because of Mary’s fair complexion, “she would pass, when fashionable dressed” for a respected lady. The gentility assigned to Mary is perhaps due to her complexion, which is a result of her pedigree. But because of her status as a slave, the author near the end equates her to livestock. Not just any livestock, however, she is the “beautiful” and “splendid” type. If we submit to Johnson’s argument that “whiteness was doubly sold in the slave market,” one sees how the marketing of hybrid-whiteness in mulatto slave advertisements—especially for female slaves—represents the buying of white men’s whiteness and “showpieces of their pretensions.”<sup>22</sup> Johnson is correct in his claims regarding the projected interpretation of the meaning of white men’s own skin color onto the enslaved women they purchased as fancy maids. Since enslaved women’s bodies

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 27-28.

<sup>22</sup> Johnson, “The Slave Trader:”18.

were reserved for white men, her status as slave and physical appearance further legitimized the legacy of rape.

Baptiste and Kennedy explain how the sexualization of color and race institutionalized a commodification of rape. Johnson in his critique on the Fancy Trade displays how the marketing of fancy maids' hybrid whiteness permitted sellers to command high prices for such women. Missing from the presented information are the origins of the image being advertised. At what juncture in time did the sexualization of color take hold in the antebellum southern imagination? In other words, how was the legacy of rape, symbolized by the fancy maids' complexion and race (hybrid whiteness), incepted into the southern antebellum economy?

## 2.1 ENGENDERING RACE IN COLONIAL ANGLO-AMERICA

In the slave holding south, categorizing gender and sexuality identities based on racial constructs was not a radically new practice by the nineteenth century. Its origins date back to the age of discovery--a period of European global exploration that started in the 15<sup>th</sup> century—with Europeans' first contact with West African culture. These first impressions of West African cultures, which collided with certain qualities of European religious thought and feeling, contributed to “what seems an unusual hypersensitivity to another people's sexuality,” according to Jordan.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the nakedness of Africans and their polygamous matrimonial practices “no doubt helped support the notion that Africans were highly sexed” in the minds of Europeans. Especially amongst the English, such “depictions of the Negro as a lustful creature” were “long-standing and

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<sup>23</sup> Jordan, Winthrop, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, (New York: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 40.

apparently common notions that Elizabethan travelers and literati spoke very explicitly of.”<sup>24</sup>

Europeans’ perception of Africans as highly sexed was exacerbated in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Multiple factors played a role. For instance, in the Anglo-American colonies of the Chesapeake, children of interracial sexual relations, by law took on the status of their mother; therefore, eliminating any disruptions to the social hierarchical system that slavery depended upon: one in which one’s race (and gender) determined one’s status as master or slave.<sup>25</sup> Historian Kathleen M. Brown expands upon the engendering of race in Anglo-America in her highly praised work on gender, race, and power in colonial Virginia.<sup>26</sup> Regarding the Virginia legislative landmark of 1662, which declared the status of a child followed the status of its mother, Brown writes:

As slavery became a more important form of labor in Virginia, eventually replacing indentured servitude, early construction of racial difference provided the legal background for more blatant measures of legal and social discrimination between African and English women. Perpetual bondage for the children of enslaved women distinguished these mothers from their English indentured counterparts after 1662. This legislative landmark signified a continuing process of evaluation through which racial difference was expressed legally, incorporated into a new social order, and endowed with legal, economic, and social meaning. Rooted in planters’ assumptions about English and African women’s proper roles in the tobacco economy, early definitions of racial difference and the accompanying discriminatory practices resulted ultimately in a race-specific concept of womanhood.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>25</sup> The 1662 Virginia slave law reads: “Whereas some doubts have arisen whether children got by any Englishman upon a Negro woman should be slave or free, be it therefore enacted and declared by this present Grand Assembly, that all children born in this country shall be held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother; and that if any Christian shall commit fornication with a Negro man or woman, he or she so offending shall pay double the fines imposed by the former act.”

<sup>26</sup> See Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 108.

Consequently, “white men extended their dominion over their Negroes to the bed, where the sex act itself served as ritualistic re-enactment of the daily pattern of social dominance.”<sup>28</sup> As a final point, the instituting into law that the condition of illegitimate children followed the status of their mother legally protected white men and left enslaved women more vulnerable.<sup>29</sup>

Secondly, New World conditions of racial slavery fostered an intimate, daily contact between Englishmen and Africans in America that in turn lead “inevitably,” Jordan writes, “to sexual union.”<sup>30</sup> Thirdly, as a result of miscegenation, there existed what Jordan calls, a “push and pull of an irreconcilable conflict between desire and aversion for interracial sexual union” that reinforced and was strengthened by the lingering myth of African hyper sexuality. Miscegenation “became in some English colonies an institution in itself” that “rivalled the slave revolt as a source of tension.” This sexual tension was dependent upon racial binary oppositions. Regarding racial binaries, Jordan explains:

Desire and aversion rested on the bedrock fact that white men perceived Negroes as being both alike and different from themselves. Without perception of similarity, no desire and no widespread gratification was possible. Without perception of difference, on the other hand, no aversion to miscegenation or tension concerning it could have arisen. Without perception of difference, of course, the term miscegenation had no meaning.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, white men dichotomized their sexuality, race, and social status from blacks in order to justify the actions committed against the enslaved.

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<sup>28</sup> Jordan, 141.

<sup>29</sup> It is important to dispel the exclusivity of this statement. Jordan notes, “In most colonies virtually all the offspring of these unions were illegitimate, but legally sanctified interracial marriages did occur, especially though not exclusively in New England.” Ibid, 138.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 137.

## 2.2 MISCEGENATION AND CULTURE

Interestingly, according to Jordan, miscegenation “may even have equated the pressure of daily contact as a mechanism of cultural fusion.” Writing decades later, historian Joel Williams makes a similar observation in his history, or approximation, of miscegenation and mulattoes in the United States. Following in the footsteps of Edward B. Reuter’s 1918 publication, Williamson introduces the notion of mulattoes as “new people.” Mulattoes are a new people, “not just in the surface way of a new physical type,” he explains, “but new in the vital way of constituting a new culture that is both African and European, each transformed in America and married to one another.” In the past, the meaning of the term mixed blood referenced more than the scientific, literal meaning of the term. “People often thought that character and culture were carried, quite literally, in the blood,” writes Williamson. Thus, “to be of mixed blood was reference to a persons cultural, as well as physical mixing.”<sup>32</sup>

I concur with both Jordan and Williams. We must understand that racial mixture extended beyond the biological concept of the literal mixing of blood. Racial mixture symbolizes the amalgamation of cultures. Thus, it is no surprise that tensions, especially aversion towards miscegenation, existed. Racial mixture disrupted the status quo that 19<sup>th</sup> century racial slavery operated on. In addition, fancy girls constituted a new sexuality that was both African and European, or what Walter Johnson refers to as hybrid whiteness—whiteness made salable by the presence of blackness.

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<sup>32</sup> Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), xii, xiii.



According to Emily Clark, the term quadroon was part of the eighteenth and nineteenth century Atlantic racial taxonomy that delineated the ratio of African or Negro blood to white amongst people of mixed race. In New World slave societies, an algebraic racial language was adopted to categorize people of mixed race. A Spanish colonial artist through an artistic rendering of mixed race people called *caste* first assigned quantitative meaning, according to Clarke, to the term. Constructed in panels of four, *Casta* paintings featured a man and woman of different races with their children whereby each scene “is labeled with the color terms for the racial taxonomy being depicted.”

By the earlier decades of the nineteenth century, Thomas Jefferson, president of the United States, formulated an algebraic representation of mixed race. In a letter written to Francis Gray, Jefferson constructed a calculus of color that algebraically displayed the ratio of Negro or African blood to that of white blood.<sup>33</sup> The varying measurements of mixed blood were assigned a racial category. The terms commonly in usage during the nineteenth century were: mulatto, quadroon, and octoroon. For most of the eighteenth century, the term quadroon was primarily descriptive applying to persons whose genetic makeup was imagined to have been one-fourth African. The terms have been borrowed from Joel Williamson’s description of racial mixtures in the antebellum and colonial United States.

These terms delineate the varying digress of black blood to white or Native blood that existed in the colonial and antebellum racial taxonomy. I agree with Williamson’s

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas Jefferson produced a calculus of color in 1815 in a letter sent to Francis Gray (March 4, 1815). According to historian Emily Clarke, Jefferson’s “formulaic representation renders race as a kind of chemical compound comprising elements that act on one another in ways that multiply, mix, or cancel one another out to produce predictable result. She continues, “With detached precision, Jefferson produced theoretical mulattos and quadroons devoid of the untidy human elements of desire and power that destabilized the living expressions of his mathematical calculations,” Clarke, 3.

position that “in writing on the history of miscegenation in the United States it is useful to preserve the flavor of the thinking of past times by occasionally using the terms the people themselves used in the ways they used them.”<sup>34</sup> The terms found in table 2.2 were used to compartmentalize racial-mixture in the Americas. These terms will be used through out this essay.

Table 2.1 Racial Taxonomy. In colonial and antebellum Atlantic a racial discourse was adopted that measured the degree of white, black, and Native American blood. Table from Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980).

<b>Term</b>	<b>Mixture</b>
White	Caucasians, no mixture
Black	People of African heritage unmixed with Caucasian
Negro	Groups of people meaning both black and mulatto
Mulatto	A group of people in which the mix of black and white are visible
Quadroon	¼ black
Octoroon	1/8 black
Griffe, Sambo	Terms in Latin cultures, as in Louisiana, to reference a person three-quarters black
Sacatra, Mango	7/8 black
Mustees	Offspring of miscegenation between American Indians and Negros
Mestizos	A person of European and Indian ancestry

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., viiii.

Importantly, The nature of slavery and fluidity of race relations within the different European colonies differed, especially during the colonial revolution eras. The general argument, known as the Tannenbaum Thesis, claims difference among the various slave societies was based upon the colonizing powers' attitudes toward manumission. In his comparative study of the nature of slavery in the Iberian and British Americas, Frank Tannenbaum claims that the Iberian colonies were a “prop riotous environment” for the enslaved because Spanish law, religious beliefs, and social policy supported manumission of slaves and their full incorporation in to the Spanish polity.<sup>35</sup> Greater emphasis, however, is placed on the institution of the Catholic church in buttressing Spanish attitudes toward manumission.<sup>36</sup> Specifically, the Catholic doctrine of the equality of men stressed the humanity of slaves and the status of their souls being equivalent to all men in the sight of God.

In contrast, amongst the British, writes historian Kimberly Hanger, “Anglo common law and Protestantism placed the individual and the protection of property rights above all other consideration.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, race relations operated in a more rigid, vertical hierarchy in which, writes Tannenbaum, “opposition to manumission and denial of opportunities for [slaves]” become hallmarks of the nature of slavery in the British Atlantic and United States.<sup>38</sup> In respect to favorable slave treatment and race relations, Spain and Portugal rank first, followed by France, Holland, and last, Britain. Because Louisiana was under French then Spanish rule prior to being ceded to the United States in 1803, Louisiana—particularly New Orleans—was truly exceptional. Its exceptionalism

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<sup>35</sup> Tannenbaum, Frank, *Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas* (New York: Alfred A, Knopf, 1947), 43, 53.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>37</sup> Hanger, Kimberly S. *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769-1803* (Durham: Duke University, 1997), 3.

<sup>38</sup> Tannenbaum, 69.

was a result of the nature of slavery that Louisiana's colonial history had bred: a tripartite racial order, multicultural migration, and the birth of a free people of color consciousness that would become relevant in nurturing black Atlantic Revolutionary ethos.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE ORIGINS OF NEW ORLEANS' EXCEPTIONALISM

The French were the first to colonize Louisiana in 1682. The region was extensive including most of the drainage basin of the Mississippi River, stretching from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, and from the Appalachian Mountains to the Rocky Mountains. It was established less for economic reasons and more as a strategic colony so to prevent England and Spain from gaining control of the mouth of the Mississippi River. With control of the Mississippi River, Canada, and the St. Lawrence waterway, the French were in a powerful position to dominate the continent, monopolize the trade routes, and exploit its resources.<sup>39</sup>

The first French occupation of the Louisiana territory lasted for a century.<sup>40</sup> After France's defeat to Great Britain in the Seven Years War, the French Louisiana region was distributed between Great Britain and Spain: Canada and the East bank of the Mississippi River—excluding New Orleans—were ceded to Britain; New Orleans and the west bank of the Mississippi River went to Spain. The region was vital to the Spanish in “forestalling the British expansion into the Spanish Caribbean and New Spain (Mexico).” Under Spanish rule, New Orleans developed through the tobacco trade and the

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<sup>39</sup> Hall, Gwendolyn Midlo, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 2.

<sup>40</sup> In 1801, the French military leader and soon to be emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte, acquired Louisiana for two years before disposing of the territory to the United States in 1803. The cession of Louisiana from France to the United States is known as The Louisiana Purchase.

administration's efforts to encourage emigration. However, Spanish Louisiana was a Spanish colony with a French population and merchant class with close ties to France.<sup>41</sup> "French culture," writes historian Nathalie Dissents, "prevailed by the force of majority but also through tradition and because no forced acculturation was ever attempted by the Spaniards." For instance, Spanish officials not only spoke French, but also intermarried with the francophone society of New Orleans. And so, the Hispanicization of the territory was relatively superficial and more noticeable in government documents, records, and legislation. Spain's occupation of Louisiana did not last long enough to leave as strong a cultural imprint as was left behind by the French. Yet, this does not negate the importance of Spanish Louisiana to the evolution of New Orleans and Louisiana exceptionalism. As one historian writes:

Spanish traditions, however, had their most lasting effect in New Orleans, the colony's administrative center. It was in New Orleans that Spanish laws protecting slaves and free blacks and advancing their interests came to full force, and it was New Orleans' urban environment that fostered economic and demographic conditions favorable to the rise of a notable libre population.

Other than contributing to the growth of the free people of color community, the Hispanization of Louisiana was very superficial in comparison to the French who left a strong francophone cultural legacy.<sup>42</sup>

Along with the extensive possession of land came the need for labor. Like many European colonizers of New World settlements, the French and Spanish turned to Africa to supply its labor demand. The influx of African slaves from Senegambia during the early decade of the 1720s "occurred at a crucial period in the development of French

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.,317.

<sup>42</sup> Dessens, Nathalie, *From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans: Migrations and Influences*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida), 36.

Louisiana,” writes Atlantic and Louisiana historian Gwendolyn Midlo Hall.<sup>43</sup> Three years prior to the first slaves’ arrival in 1721, New Orleans, the French capital of Louisiana was established in 1718. With the founding of New Orleans and efforts to “populate and develop the colony and introduce African slaves, the true colonization of Louisiana began.” New Orleans transformed Louisiana from a military post to a cultural incubator whereby new cultures were formed through the encounter of peoples from Europe, Africa, and the Americas contributing to a “cohesive and heavily Africanized culture.”<sup>44</sup> In fact, New Orleans was “the most Africanized slave culture in the United States.”<sup>45</sup>

New Orleans, much like the majority of French and Spanish Louisiana, was an “extremely fluid society where a social hierarchy was ill defined and hard to enforce.”<sup>46</sup> According to Hall, in early French New Orleans, “being black did not necessarily mean being a slave. Nor was whiteness associated with prestige and power.”<sup>47</sup> For instance, many of the French soldiers and settlers were poor or criminals who had been deported from France “because they would not accept their place in society.” Moreover, “Slaves in French Louisiana,” writes Hall, “had a strong sense of justice and demanded their rights within the framework of slavery.” She continues, “some of them demonstrated sophisticated knowledge of their rights under the Code Noir,” a decree that defined the conditions of slavery in the French colonies.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Hall, 58.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.,158.

<sup>45</sup> Hall,160-161.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.,2.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.,128.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

In contrast, Africans and Spaniards shared a mutual understanding of “the proper relationship between ruler and subject” in the Spanish Atlantic. The Spanish monarch was dependent upon his subjects to defend the Iberian frontiers. Therefore, according to Atlantic Historian, Jane Landers, he “almost always supported the Atlantic Creoles” by admitting them into the Spanish polity in exchange for their loyalty.<sup>49</sup> Those Africans newly admitted into the Spanish polity, were “quick to pursue the rights and privileges accorded them through membership in centuries-old Spanish legal, religious, and military corporations.” She writes, “Loyal subjects generated reciprocal obligations from those they served, and both groups organized their societies as sets of interlocking corporate and family structures.” Consequently these cultural similarities “ allowed even those Africans newly admitted into the Spanish polity to quickly learn Spanish legal and cultural norms.”<sup>50</sup> Consequently, the Spanish administration’s “lenient attitude toward manumission embodied in Spanish slave codes and social practices” made it possible for a free black class to exist in a Spanish world. Though Landers’ analysis is of Atlantic Creoles throughout the entire Iberian Atlantic, her observation is applicable to Spanish Louisiana as well.

The cession of Louisiana from France to Spain, and eventually to the newly independent United States in 1803, occurred during a period in which multiple revolutionary movements took place in the Atlantic mainlands. During the age of revolution, migration patterns were prevalent in correlation to the constant shifting geo-

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<sup>49</sup> The term creole means a native-born person of a particular locale. For example, Louisiana Creoles were descendants of the French, Spanish, Native-American, and or African settlers of colonial Louisiana. Many of which had descendants from one or multiple of the aforementioned ethnic groups. An Atlantic Creole is a broader term for a native-born in the Atlantic having a multi-ethnic ancestral background.

<sup>50</sup> Landers, Jane, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolution*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 7-8.



political conflict between the European powers in the Americas. That is to say that frontier conditions and the ever-shifting geo-political borders resulted in a degree of racial fluidity and opportunity for social mobility for Africans and slaves alike. In other words, survival and defending frontiers were more important than enforcing a rigid racial hierarchy. In turn, the concentration of a substantial free black population in New Orleans by the end of the Spanish era resulted in the development of a libre group identity that would be further solidified after the immigration of Saint-Domingue refugees into New Orleans in the antebellum era.

Research shows that Louisiana’s free people of color population grew exponentially during Spanish rule, especially in New Orleans. In her study on the position of free African Americans within larger slave societies, historian Kimberly Hanger examines the growth of the free people of color community—whom she calls libres—in Spanish Louisiana, their lasting effect on New Orleans culture, and their resistance to the Americanization of the crescent city. According to Hanger, “slaves continuously entered the libre population in larger and larger numbers toward the end of the eighteenth century.” Their numbers “jumped from 7.1 percent of the city’s African American population in 1769 to a high of 33.5 percent in 1805.” Similar to Landers, Hanger attributes the growth of New Orleans’ libre population to slaves’ own political negotiation efforts within the Spanish polity, Spanish legislation and social practices.<sup>51</sup> “These creoles, explains Hanger, “were able to forge the kinship networks, join corporate entities like the militia and the church, accumulate the capital to invest in businesses,

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<sup>51</sup> Hanger, 2.

slaves, and other property.” And in doing so, were able to “develop the social organization needed to create libre cohesiveness and identity.”<sup>52</sup>

Race mixture was widely accepted and practiced in both French and Spanish Louisiana. Concubinage between white men and black women “was openly accepted.” Interestingly, both white men and women accepted concubinage between white men and women of color. In many instances it is believed that such acceptance is due in part to the gender demographics that were prevalent in frontier settlements. However, a shortage of white women is not always an explanation for the acceptance of race mixture between white male settlers and nonwhite women. Hall points out that in the Point Coupee post, for example, where racial mixture was the most prominent, “free women of marriageable age who were counted as white often substantially outnumbered men.”<sup>53</sup>

It is important to note here that the fluidity of race may have distorted the numbers. Because white in the colonial context was flexible, the outnumbering may not reflect the true racial demographics that existed in Louisiana, especially in the Point Coupee post. Many concubines of color were listed as white in the censuses regardless of their color, particularly under Spanish rule. The Spanish corporatist concept of racial hierarchy sought to create separate social groupings based upon varying degrees of race mixture, promoting the emergence of separate groups among the free population of African descent: blacks, mulattoes, quadroons, pardos. These concepts were foreign to the French creoles and created an awkward dilemma for local census-takers, a dilemma

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 12,16,17.

<sup>53</sup> Hall, 240.

that was resolved by including many free people of African descent among the whites. This early pattern of race relations was quite resilient.<sup>54</sup>

Interracial sexual liaisons and concubinage also contributed to the growth of a free people of color community in colonial Louisiana. Hall explains that “white men who were well off economically and had the means to marry white women often preferred dark women, sometimes their own slaves.” They freed them, maintained lifelong conjugal relationships with them, provided for their children and sometimes openly acknowledged them. As a result, these women were provided with immense social mobility and were “highly respected members in the community.” White fathers would also provide for the children from such relationships. “French colonists of Louisiana were more considerate of their mixed-blood children,” Hall writes. She continues, “They accepted them as members of their families, freed them, and educated them.” Consequently, a free people of color community formed almost immediately.<sup>55</sup>

Colonial Louisiana was not a racial utopia. It is not my intention to portray it as such. To the contrary, Louisiana was “a brutal, violent place.” And I concur with Hall’s position that colonial Louisiana “cannot be understood by projecting contemporary attitudes toward race backward in time.” “Africans and their descendants,” Hall argues, “were competent, and far from powerless” in the colonial Louisiana context. She writes, “mere survival was on the line, and notions of racial and/or cultural and national superiority were a luxury beyond the means of the colonists.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 240-241.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 155.

Moreover, Hall is correct in her assertion that the Africanization of Louisiana, public acceptance of miscegenation, the formation of a free people of color community, and the widespread passing of mixed bloods into the white population are “pivotal in understanding race relations in colonial Louisiana.” First, racial fluidity created a racially “flexible, permeable world” that contrasted sharply with the pattern in Anglo North America. Contributing to Louisiana’s dissent from emerging southern norms. Secondly, the total absorption of mixed-race descendants into the white Creole population produced a pronounced process of acculturation that would play a pivotal role in the interplay of 19<sup>th</sup> century race relations as well as creating an environment conducive to the St. Domingue refugees that would migrate to the area in the early decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>57</sup> Consequently, these factors are just as important in understanding how Louisiana’s uniqueness contributed to the allure and perception of the fancy girl within the Anglo-American mind.

### 3.1 A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Historian Nathalie Dessens, author of *From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans*, traces the Saint-Domingue refugees’ migration to and influences on New Orleans during the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. New Orleans was an attractive asylum to the Saint-Domingue refugees. First, Louisiana and Saint-Domingue shared a French colonial past, and therefore, the two populations had been subjected to similar colonial policies and legislation.<sup>58</sup> Secondly, New Orleans society “largely revolved around French cultural traits despite the Spanish takeover of the last three decades of the eighteenth century.” She explains, “The Saint- Domingian refugees found, upon arrival, a culture that was

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.,238-241.

<sup>58</sup> Dessens, 35.

similar to theirs, especially since the dominant religion had remained Catholic.” Moreover, Louisiana’s social hierarchy resembled the same model as that in Saint-Dominique: “a large substratum of slaves and a white society that comprised both nonslaveholding and slaveholding categories; and a three tiered society of whites, free people of color, and slaves.” Thirdly, Louisiana, like Saint-Domingue was economically structured as an agricultural plantation society that relied heavily on slavery to produce its staple crops—tobacco, indigo, and eventually cotton in the late eighteenth century.<sup>59</sup>

Between 1791 and 1815, roughly 15,000 refugees from Saint-Domingue settled in the New Orleans vicinity.<sup>60</sup> The biggest migrant wave occurred between 1809 and 1810. The records show at least 9,059-recorded persons reached Louisiana from Cuba. There were people belonging to the three categories of population composing the societies of Saint-Domingue, Cuba, and Louisiana. Each group amounted roughly to one-third of the migratory wave: 2,731 whites, 3102 free people of color, and 3,226 slaves.<sup>61</sup> The refugee population was made up of whites, free people of color, and slaves. According to Dessens, “The new influx thus represented an increase of 43 percent in the white population, 134 percent in the slave population, and 38 percent in the slave population.” Consequently, within a two-decade span, New Orleans’ free people of color population more than doubled in size. In short, concludes Dessens, “between 1791 and the late

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>60</sup> Note that many of the refugees were exiled in Cuba, Louisiana, and small portion in Philadelphia. In many instances, the Saint Dominique refugees traveled between Cuba and Louisiana in search of stability and opportunity. See: Jane Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolution*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>61</sup> Dessens, 28.

1850s, Louisiana was a land of welcome for many former residents of Saint-Domingue”  
and a meeting place for the diaspora.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 4

### BUYING A MYTH

The records reveal that many of the migrants were women. For instance, in 1809, the schooner *Swiss* transported nearly 1369 refugees from Cuba to New Orleans, of which 608 were adult women and 178 adult men. Many of the women were from the free women of color class and were métissage.<sup>63</sup> According to Clarke, “Almost certainly the life partners of many, if not most, of the white men on the *Swiss* were among the free women of color on board.” As a result, a powerful discourse developed in prerevolutionary Saint-Dominique that portrayed free women of color as dangerous, sexually irresistible figures who seduced French men away from the attachment they should feel for French women and, by extension, France itself.” Here sexual and colonial allegiance is equivalent. In essence, these women became the scapegoats for the overthrow of the French colonial system in St. Dominique.<sup>64</sup>

Some of the women were quadroons. In the years following the Haitian Revolution, the quadroon as a racial category was gendered. French writers linked the term to the “dangerous beauties who seduced French men away from their proper loyalties.”<sup>65</sup> After the Haitian Revolution, these beautiful seductresses became known as

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<sup>63</sup> Métissage is the process of race mixture not necessarily to conubinge. Concubinage was sometimes involved; but métissage is a more general term.

<sup>64</sup> Clarke, Emily. *The Strange Career of the American Quadroon* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 45.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 6, 45.

the Quadroon. Her notoriety had preceded her arrival on American shores. Emily Clarke, early American and francophone Atlantic historian at Tulane University, in her 2013 publication, *The Strange Career of the American Quadroon*, traces the history of the quadroon in New Orleans. In the American imagination she symbolized captivating beauty, enigmatic charm, but more importantly, a threat to white colonial power.<sup>66</sup> Clarke explains:

When the Haitian Revolution drove thousands of mixed-race women from the Caribbean to American shores, the figure of the quadroon supplied something more accessible than algebraic abstraction to neutralize the threat embedded in mixed race people. The foreign female of color who migrated to the United States from the blood-soaked shores of Haiti could be mastered and controlled by white American men. This fantasy of sexual triumph supplied an antidote to the terror inspired by the image of Haiti's virile black man poised to export their war on slavery to the American mainland.<sup>67</sup>

In the imagination of the white Atlantic, the Caribbean quadroon was a threat to white mastery. Her sexuality had to be mastered, and the contagion of black revolt had to be contained.<sup>68</sup> In addition, the tension and aversion encompassed by the Anglo-American fantasy of sexual triumph led to the allure of the quadroon woman. Moreover, the legacy of the New Orleans Quadroon, peculiarity of Louisiana's exceptionalism, and the free people of color's social practices buttressed the quadroons "unique amalgam of race and

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<sup>66</sup> It was believed that "black men who might rise in bloody rebellion represented the most terrifying of the threats posed by the Dominguan influx of 1809, whereby nearly 9,000 Haitian refugees migrated to New Orleans. But the lopsided shipboard demography of the *Swiss* "and the "living arrangements" of some of its passengers stoked another fear: the métissage, Clarke 45. See chapter 2: From Métissage to Placée

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>68</sup> According to Dessens: The slaves that arrived were "systematically the objects of all fears from the authorities" because it was believed they carried with them revolutionary ideals that had led to the overthrow of the French in Saint-Domingue; the free people of color were considered with almost as much distrust as the slaves and were not exactly welcomed by Louisiana authorities;" but the white refugees were "warmly welcomed by the already present Saint-Domingans as well as by the Creole population of New Orleans. Dissense adds, " To these Creoles, who strongly dissented with the new American owners of Louisiana, the arrival of the white refugees was an incredibly beneficial addition. For the same reason, the refugees were considered as a negative influx of French-speaking population by the American authorities who hoped for a quick Americanization of Louisiana." Dessens, 43-44.



gender politics the city cultivated during the antebellum period.” Resulting in the fancy maid becoming a commodity in the sexual economy of Anglo-American antebellum slavery.

As the influx of Atlantic refugees continued and Louisiana’s free people of color community doubled, a new tradition was being introduced to New Orleans nightlife: public balls. The public ball tradition began in the 1790s with support from the Spanish colonial government. An exclusive license was granted to a man by the name of Filberto Farge “ to hold public balls for white people.” Following in the footsteps of Farge’s business success with white public balls, the French born Bernard Coquet was granted an exclusive license to hold dances for free people of color in 1898. “slaves, free-people of color, and whites alike”, attended Corquet’s balls. And perhaps,” writes Kenneth Aslakson, “Coquet’s balls set the precedent for the quadroon balls that would become popular in the preceding years.<sup>69</sup>

The first quadroon ball was hosted by August Tessier, a refugee of the Haitian Revolution. The first ball took place on November 1, 1805 in the same venue that featured the first tri-color ball hosted by Bernard Coquet. Unlike Farge and Coquet, Tessier was unable to secure a license for his balls because during the time Tessier began hosting balls, Louisiana was purchased by the United States from the Spanish. American officials, in comparison to the Spanish government, prohibited monopolies on ballroom licensure. Operating in an open market, Tessie distinguished his balls from his competitors through his advertising strategies. For instance “ he played upon and

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<sup>69</sup> Aslakson, Kenneth, “The ‘Quadroon-Placage’ Myth of Antebellum New Orleans: Anglo-American (mis)interpretations of a French-Caribbean Phenomenon” *The Journal of Social History* 45: 720-721

contributed to the exoticized image of quadroon beauty” by renaming the ballroom space ‘La Salle Chinoise,’ meaning “The Chinese Room.” Similar advertising methods were used to market fancy maids to potential Fancy Trade buyers, Two, he advertised the balls exclusively for free women of color and white men. Tessier’s balls were very popular during the 1805-1806 carnival season. The balls remained popular in New Orleans. In fact, “through the course of the antebellum period,” writes Asklacson, “seven different ballrooms hosted quadroon balls.”<sup>70</sup>

Due to Americas intrigue with the tri-color balls, British and American travelers romanticized the practice. The Quadroon-Plaçage mythical narrative that emerges combines the French practice of plaçage with the mystic of the New Orleans Quadroon. The Quadroon-Placage myth is as follows:

“The ‘lovely and refined’ quadroon woman came to the ball ‘dressed in the most fashionable gown and chaperoned by her mother’ looking for a wealthy white gentlemen. ‘After dancing with a man, if the girl were attracted, he would be allowed to speak with her mother to make ‘arrangements’...[which] would include a furnished home that the [woman of color] would own and financial arrangements for her and any children.’<sup>71</sup>

The relationships negotiated between white men and women of color were called plaçage and the woman une plaçée. Usually, the plaçée benefited greatly from the plaçage arrangement. According to Asklacson’s research on the Quadroon-Plaçage Myth, “A woman of color greatly benefited from the patronage of an elite white man.” He

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 720.

continues, she “often used the money bestowed upon her to establish herself in business ‘usually as a dressmaker, milliner, or by operating a boarding house.’” Put differently, the plaçage arrangement was a means for women of color to improve their social class in a world where their options were very limited.<sup>72</sup>

Returning to the subject of the Quadroon-Plaçage narrative, notice the similarities between the quadroon balls description and fancy girl discourse. Both narratives emphasize her hybrid whiteness. However, the difference here is the negotiator: the plaçée’s mother versus the slave auctioneer. Consequently, the ballroom floor found in the Quadroon-Plaçage myth becomes an extension of the auction block, an argument historian Monique Guillory presents in her research on the cultural legacy of the New Orleans Quadroon balls.<sup>73</sup> According to Guillory, the fancy girl enterprise was the precursor to the New Orleans Quadroon Balls. I take an opposite position. The popularity of the fancy market was a result of the Anglo-American misinterpretation of and romanticization of an Atlantic practice.

The juncture in time in which the Quadroon-Plaçage myth propelled in popularity is interesting. According to historian Monique Guillory, the Quadroon balls’ “gradual popularity concurred with the nineteenth century surge in the domestic slave trade and concurred with the American purchase of the Louisiana territory.”<sup>74</sup> This makes logical sense. First, Eli Whitney’s mechanical cotton gin caused exponential growth in the production of cotton in the United States. Thus, the demand for slave labor increased. With the abolishment of the Atlantic Slave Trade in 1807, the labor supply was weakened

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Guillory, Monique, “Some Enchanted Evening on the Auction Block The Cultural Legacy of The New Orleans Quadroon Balls,”(PhD diss. New York University, 2008), 3.

and the demand for slaves led to the institutionalization of the interregional slave trade in sustaining slavery in the United States. Simultaneously, the free people of color community in New Orleans experienced tremendous growth as a result of the Saint-Domingue refugee migration. These refugees brought with them Atlantic cultural ethos and practices in which racial mixing and concubinage were socially accepted.

Moreover, their arrival solidified an already developing libre consciousness. The arrival of the refugees and solidifying of the libre identity occurred during the period when Louisiana was being Americanized. More specifically, a region whose “inhabitants were usually open about interracial relationships due to the cultural influence of the French and Spanish” was being culturally annexed to Anglo-America ideas of race, gender, class, and sex. Therefore, it is no surprise that the Quadroon-Plaçage myth is an Anglo-American misinterpretation of a French Caribbean phenomenon and influenced by Anglo-American’s fascination with interracial sex.

#### 4.1 RAPE, POWER, AND THE FANTASY OF SEXUAL TRIUMPH

The fantasy of sexual triumph that Clarke speaks to is equivalent to a form of domestic colonialism that uses rape as a tool of empire. In her epic work on the juxtaposition of women, race, and class, Angela Davis, political activist and scholar, was one of the first to assert that white patriarchal systems utilized rape as a “weapon of domination, a weapon of repression, whose covert goal was to extinguish slave women’s will to resist, and in the process, to demoralize their men.” “Slave owners,” Davis writes, “encouraged the terroristic use of rape in order to put Black women in their place.” She continues:

If Black women had achieved a sense of their own strength and a strong urge to resist, then violent sexual assaults—so the slaveholders might have reasoned—would remind the women of their essential and inalterable femaleness. In the male supremacist vision of the period, this meant passivity, acquiescence and weakness.

In submitting to Davis' argument, it is fair to conclude that the white patriarchal fantasy of sexual domination over the exotic mixed-race black women was a means of debasing black masculinity, while simultaneously, quarantining black rebellion that the Haitian Revolution had birthed.<sup>75</sup>

Angela Davis is correct. However, there is more at play. Domination, power, and the right to rape enslaved women, and thus, degrade black men, had pornographic implications. I take caution in using this term so as not to project contemporary concepts onto past events. To assist in what is meant by the pornographic implications of power, dominance, and rape, I rely on historian Nell Painter's discussion of Susan Griffin's term the pornographic mindset.

In *Sex Across the Color Line*, Painter applies Griffin's term to her discussion of white supremacy ideology and segregation practices during Jim Crow. White men's obsession with "relegating blacks to inferior public service," "treating them all like servants," and the ritualistic behavior of lynching, she argues, is attributed to a pornographic mindset. Paraphrasing Griffin's definition of the pornographic mindset as equivalent to the chauvinistic mindset which "objectifying what it hates, seeks to injure and humiliate the object," Painter concludes, "the essence of pornographic power is degradation."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Davis, Angela, *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Random House, 1987), 23-24.

<sup>76</sup> Nell Irvin Painter, *Southern History across the Color Line*(Chapel Hill,: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 130-131.; See Griffin, Susan, *Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge Against Nature*(New York: Harpers Hill, 1981).

This concept is also applicable to the sexual violence perpetrated on slave women. White patriarchy buttressed the rape of enslaved women because it was a means to degrade black femininity and masculinity. When these sexual conquests produced fair complexioned offspring, they further reconfirmed white patriarchy. It was sadistic, erotic, and a repetitious cycle fueled by the legal structures and political economies of slave societies. Eventually it manifested into commerce of rape whereby white men could purchase enslaved women for the primary purpose of fulfilling their sexual desires and fantasies. The core meta-argument here is that rape, sexual pleasure, and desire were as much pillars of slavery as coerced labor.

#### 4.2 DEFINING RAPE

Thus far, the goal of this essay has been to synergize the work of Adreine Davis, Edward Baptist, Walter Johnson, Anne Clarke, Emily Clarke, Nell Painter, and Angela Davis into a complete narrative on the Fancy Trade that exposes the power relations operating within the economic system in southern slave societies. However, their failure to construct a clear, applicable definition of rape debilitates this effort. In the 1828 John Webster's Dictionary the legal definition of rape is the "carnal knowledge of a woman forcibly and against her will."<sup>77</sup> Despite the inclusive language of "woman," enslaved women were excluded from legal protection against rape because of their "dual invocation of person and property made issues of consent, will, and agency complicated and ungainly."<sup>78</sup> In order to understand the commodification and commercialization of rape within the Fancy Trade and the sexual economy of slavery, it is imperative that historians adopt a working definition of rape. This will create a discourse on African

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<sup>77</sup> "1828 Webster's Dictionary," last modified December 13, 2013, <http://1828.mshaffer.com/d/word/rape>

<sup>78</sup> Hartman, 82.

American women's sexual histories, enhance the preexisting literature on slavery, and expose the power relations at play in sexualizing African American women's race and gender.

In the text, *Scenes of Subjection*, Saidiya Hartman, Associate Professor of English at the University of California-Berkeley, interrogates the legal definition of rape, the limits of law, and the seduction and ruses of power within slavery. According to Hartman:

The dual invocation of the slave as property and person was an effort to wed reciprocity and submission, intimacy and domination, and the legitimacy of violence and the necessity of protection. By the same token, the law's selective recognition of slave humanity nullified the captive's ability to give consent or act as agent and, at the same time, acknowledge the intentionality and agency of the slave but only as it assumed the form of criminality.

If the enslaved are "will-less objects or chastened agents" how can one classify the sexual violation of enslaved women by white men as rape when the "legal definition of the enslaved," writes Hartman, "negates the very idea of 'reasonable resistance?'"<sup>79</sup>

Hartman proposes, and I echo her proposition, that scholars interrogate "instances of sexual violence that fall outside the racist and heteronormative framing of rape." Rape defined as the "sexual exploitation of slave women cloaked as the legitimate use of property" becomes an applicable explanation of the commodification of rape through the buying and selling of mixed-race slave women for the primary purpose of private prostitution and coerced concubinage.<sup>80</sup>

Examining the Fancy Trade through Davis' and Harman's conceptual framework of sexual economy and rape is well founded. Yet, the definition for the Fancy Trade still

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<sup>79</sup> Enslaved women were also sexually violated by black men, both free and enslaved. However, for the purpose of this essay, the focus is on the sexual violation of enslaved women by white men.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 82.

remains ambiguous. According to Cynthia Kennedy, “the common practice of sexual mingling in the slave south complicates facile definitions of concubinage and prostitution, consensual sex and coerced sex, sexual victimization and empowerment.” In comparison, prostitution is understood to be the practice of engaging in sexual intercourse for money. Taking in consideration the meaning of the two terms, what truths are being implied by the phrases “private prostitution” and “coerced concubinage” when slaves’ dual invocation of property contradict the general understanding of the two practices? Kennedy explores the subject matter further. She asks:

At what point did a house slave, whose owner legally enjoyed access to her body as well as her labor and who routinely exploited and raped her, become a concubine? If the key is voluntary cohabitation, what are the measures of acquiescence and coercion? For women of color in the slave south were so unencumbered by sexual and racial prescriptions so as to render truly free their choice to become a concubine. Put another way, when and how did the concubine become (or cease to be) her own sexual agent?

Regarding prostitution in slave societies, she writes:

Similarly, prostitution is defined as the practice of engaging in sexual intercourse for money. But was a slave a prostitute because she provided sex with the exception of material rewards for herself or her children? Had not the institution of slavery already prostituted her with its customary sexual protocols? How could a chattel slave (herself property) sell part of that property, and which forms of sexual mixing constituted prostitution?

These are valid questions that must be answered in order for scholars to engage the dynamics of the Fancy Trade.

For instance, in William Goodell’s 1853 publication, *The American Slave Code*, the author explains to his readership the various “uses of slave property.” He writes:” Forced concubinage of slave women with their masters and overseers, often coerced by



the lash, constitutes another class of facts, equally undeniable.”<sup>81</sup> Goodell speaks to two key elements of rape that have been mentioned thus far: enslaved women as property used primarily for sexual purposes, as well as, the role of violence and force in sustaining such relationships.

Rape of enslaved women was not limited to concubinage. In the sexual political economy of slavery, it is a possibility that sexual labor also constitutes prostitution disguised as the hiring out of slave labor. For example, Goodell hints at the hiring out of female slaves, particularly “beautiful young mulatto girls for sale,” as a form of prostitution. He writes:

...take occasion to quote from Wheeler’s Law of Slavery the express language of the judges, placing the issue of female slaves, when hired out for five years, upon the same footing, and to be awarded upon the same rules, as in the case of the increase of ‘brood mares’ or other ‘female animals.

Another use of slave property (sometimes, probably, connected with the preceding) is indicated by advertisements of beautiful young mulatto girls for sale; and by the fact that these commonly command higher prices than the ablest male laborers, or any other description of slaves.<sup>82</sup>

The hiring out of enslaved women for sexual services was another form of prostitution in the sexual economy of slavery. However, they are separate subjects. I suggest that additional research on the subjects and relationship between concubinage and prostitution, if there is any, will enhance historians understanding of rape, markets, and the construct of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Furthermore, if we include under the category of rape of enslaved women private prostitution, or the hiring out of enslaved women, it will expose what Caribbean historian, Hillary McD. Beckles calls the “institutionalization of the slave-owners’ right to unrestricted sexual access to slaves as an intrinsic and discrete product,” this will

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<sup>81</sup> Goodell, William, *The American Slave Code in Theory and Practice: Its Distinctive Features Shown by Its Statutes, Judicial Decisions, and Illustrative Facts* (The American Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1853), 85-86.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

expand the boundaries and scope of what constitutes a commerce in rape, desire, dominance, and power.<sup>83</sup> By bringing to the forefront the buying and selling of mixed-race women for the sole purpose of becoming concubines or prostitutes, the Fancy Trade becomes a commerce network for private prostitution and coerced concubinage that commercialized the legacy of rape—the institutionalization of the repeated history of the sexual exploitation of slave women cloaked as the legitimate use of property—and commodified white male’s “fantasy of sexual triumph” over the black body.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Beckles, Hilary McD., “Property Rights in Pleasure: The Marketing of Enslaved Women’s Sexuality,” In *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World*, editors Verene Shepherd and Hillary McD. Bekles (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2000), 692.

<sup>84</sup> Clarke, Emily, 9.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### BREAKING THE SILENCE

African American women's experience under slavery existed in a sexual economy of slavery that was defined by their "economic purpose of replenishing the slave labor supply" and "buttressing planter hegemony." This history has a lingering effect in how women of color are perceived today. For example, the Jezebel as a symbol of the hypersexed black woman is a popular controlling image in hip-hop and pop-culture media-narratives.<sup>85</sup> This controlling image of black sexuality, whose origins date back to United States slavery, continues to shape popular perceptions of present day black femininity. In addition, the continuity of the controlling images of black female sexuality illustrates the double jeopardy of race and sex both then and now.

The exploration of the process of racial othering used to justify the rape of enslaved black women is not a novel subject. For instance, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham discusses the metalanguages of race as they intersect with the construct of other social identities—class, gender, and sexuality. She writes, "Race must be seen as a social construction predicated upon the recognition of difference and signifying the simultaneous distinguishing and positioning of groups vis-a-vis one another. " Just as

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<sup>85</sup> The term controlling image is coined by sociologist Patricia Hill Collins in her important work on "how Black women's paid work is organized within intersecting oppressions of race, class, and gender." Collins, Patricia Hill, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 45. See also Collins, Patricia, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2004) and Collins, Patricia, *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

important, she recognizes that these differences very much depended on relationships of power. “Race, “ she explains, “is a highly contested representation of relations of power between social categories by which individuals are identified and identify themselves. “

She continues:

The recognition of racial distinctions emanates from and adapts to multiple uses of power in society. Perceived as ‘natural’ and ‘appropriate,’ such racial categories are strategically necessary for the function of power in countless institutional and ideological forms, both explicit and subtle.<sup>86</sup>

In other words, white men compartmentalized their sexuality, race, and social status in opposition to blacks in order to justify the actions committed against the enslaved.

Moreover, the conspiracy of silence surrounding African American women’s sexual histories is just as important. Silencing the sexual violence perpetuated on enslaved women and its importance in buttressing white patriarchy, contributes to the continuation of the oppression of women of color in present day society. Voice is important. It is how we communicate with others, express ourselves, and share our experiences. In a sense, voice is a form of liberation through expression. So how then can we as historians capture the voice of a group that has no representation?

The answer lies in the analytical framework being implemented hence the importance of an intersectionality approach to African American women’s history. It is imperative that scholars rethink illicit sexual economies like the Fancy Trade and its commercialization of the promise and pleasure of rape in the context of an intersectionality framework. Intersectionality also emphasizes the ways in which multiple systems of inequality, dominance, and subordination intersect and co-constitute

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<sup>86</sup> Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks, “African- American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” *Signs* 17 (1992): 251-274.

one another similar to the ways that race, class, gender, and sexuality are co-constructed in the context of the fancy trade. Within intersectionality, identifying the historical origins and context within which oppressive systems operate contributes to exposing the power relations at play. More importantly, adopting an intersectional lens to examine the histories of African American women permits a discourse on the rape of enslaved women of color and benefits the discussion on race, gender, and sexuality in the present American context.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> On the double-jeopardy of race and gender see Patricia Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Rutledge, 2005); On the silencing of African American women's sexual histories see Evelyn M. Hammond, "Toward a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality: The Problematic of Silence" in *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, editors M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (New York: Routledge, 1997).

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