CHAPTER 1

"A Negro Wench Named Lucia"

Enslaved Women during the Eighteenth Century

> Absented from her master, a negro wench, supposed to be about 14 years old, named Lucia. She has a black stroke over each of her cheeks as a mark of her country; she has a very particular flesh mark on her upper lip right under the middle of her nose, it consists of a small round hollow spot, in the middle whereof is a smaller protuberance quite round and fastened underneath by a small shank. Whoever takes up said wench, and brings her to the subscriber, shall have ten shillings reward paid by John Reinier.
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> *Royal Georgia Gazette* (Savannah), November 19, 1766

LUCIA, A YOUNG GIRL TRANSPORTED TO THE GEORGIA Lowcountry during the 1760s, brought with her a deft understanding of her provenance. Prior to her forced migration, her father established her identity by placing "a black stroke over each of her cheeks" as a mark of her ethnicity.[1] Her family's conception of their historical reality no doubt included reverence for naming ceremonies, secret societies, and the rituals associated with such societies, including gendered roles, warrior traditions, and untrammeled freedom. For Lucia, running away was the final act of resistance to enslavement. It was a Pyrrhic victory against a system that sought to subsume her traditions and knowledge of herself. Within this system of inhuman bondage, however, enslaved Africans such as Lucia maintained some vestiges of freedom. They retained a sense of themselves and relied upon an informal network of both enslaved and free Africans for support, including the quasi-maroon communities developed by Africans who escaped enslavement.

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Scholars of slavery have largely overlooked the experiences of fugitive women and girls during the eighteenth century. In explaining the low percentage of women in the runaway population, Stephanie Camp, in her work *Closer to Freedom*, has argued that motherhood and gender-based labor assignments kept the vast majority of enslaved women tied to plantations, forcing them to stay in bondage. Despite the limitations placed on enslaved women's resistance, they were able to contest their bondage through the liminal spaces of slavery. This contestation had significant consequences for their mobility and the actions that they pursued as slavery became entrenched during the eighteenth century.

SOUTHERN LABORS

Enslaved women in colonial America lived under diverse circumstances because bondage itself was based on distinct economic systems. While each system relied on enslaved labor, the Northern colonies emerged as "societies with slaves" rather than slave societies. In the Southern colonies, society became increasingly organized around slavery, which was central to its economic production. Most enslaved women lived on small family farms with their enslavers in the Northern colonies, whereas in the Southern colonies, cash crops such as tobacco, rice, and indigo led to a growing demand for plantation labor on large estates. In the first four decades of the seventeenth century, the largest number of enslaved Africans – 43,000 – were imported to the Chesapeake to plant and harvest tobacco. In the eighteenth century, South Carolina and Georgia colonists, aided by enslaved women and men, took the lead in planting rice and indigo. In the mid 1660s, South Carolina had begun to import slaves from Barbados, and by 1708 it became the only colony on the mainland with a Black majority.[2] On the eve of the American Revolution, there were 200,000 enslaved women and men in the Chesapeake colonies of Virginia and Maryland, comprising 40 percent of the population.[3] Georgia's Black population totaled 15,000 in 1773 (which was still equivalent to 40 percent of the population), and South Carolina's enslaved population totaled 82,000 by 1770 (60 percent of the population).[4]

Beginning in the seventeenth century, the English justified slavery by using concepts of race that defined Africans as "the other." According to

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scholar Zakiyyah Jackson, Western science and philosophy viewed Black people as empty vessels, as non-beings, and as ontological zeros. Positioned at the intersection of race and gender, African women were integral to the imposition of a racial and sexual hierarchy on the part of Europeans to establish racial and sexual differences. In order to justify the enslavement of Africans, "Europeans focused on gender and sexuality as markers of civilization, negatively contrasting African women's apparent licentiousness with European women's supposed chastity."[5] Historian Jennifer Morgan explains, "African women's 'unwomanly' behavior evoked an immutable distance between Europe and Africa on which the development of racial slavery depended."[6] Europeans viewed African women as particularly suited to both agricultural and reproductive labor.[7]

Planters argued that African women were an exception to the gender division of labor in order to exploit their productive and reproductive potential. In 1643, Virginia lawmakers concluded that English gender roles did not apply to African women and levied a tax on African women's field labor, categorizing them as laborers with the same productive capacity as men. This tax on African women's labor, according to Kathleen Brown, "created the first legal distinction between African and English women and was the foundation of a race-specific concept of womanhood."[8] Racial animus excluded Black women from ever being viewed as "good" wives and mothers and permanently relegated them to the status of "nasty wenches" associated with the agricultural labor and sexual promiscuity considered unsuitable for White women. During the first decades of the seventeenth century, the term "wench" had applied to English women of low status. By the 1730s, European colonists used it almost exclusively to describe women of African descent.[9] Cynthia Kennedy explains, "The term 'wench' set apart slave women as subservient laborers (an underclass) and denigrated them as a lower form of female, utterly distinct from white ladies and, therefore, legitimate targets of sexual exploitation by their owners."[10]

According to historian Betty Wood, many women enslavers, like their male counterparts, used "the sexually loaded and socially contemptible word *wench*, a term that would never have been applied, except perhaps in jest, to any white woman, however humble her social status."[11] The

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desire to distance themselves from their enslaved counterparts made White women even more reluctant than White men to grant enslaved women the respect of referring to them as women. In her examination of runaway slave advertisements in Lowcountry Georgia newspapers during the post-Revolutionary period, Wood found that female enslavers were more likely than their male counterparts to designate enslaved women as wenches.[12]

As the number of enslaved persons increased in the eighteenth century, Virginia and other Southern colonies enacted a series of codes and laws designed to prohibit interracial marriage and formalize legal enslavement. Virginia laws provided important benchmarks for the status and treatment of slave women that other colonies replicated. For example, in 1662, Virginia passed a law mandating that enslaved children would follow the legal status of their mother as slaves, following the Latin dictum *partus sequitur ventrem*. This law gave slave-hungry enslavers every incentive to sexually assault their female slaves in hope of procuring valuable child slaves. Moreover, Virginia deemed the paternity of slave children meaningless in its attempt to diminish enslaved fathers' influence over their enslaved offspring. Such slave laws were in contrast to "legal customs affecting white society, and they permanently affected enslaved women's lives. Slaveholders increasingly began to regard their female slaves as both laborers and potential reproducers for white men's future economic enterprises."[13] The South's economy grew increasingly dependent on slavery, in contrast to the Northern colonies, where slavery was less legally defined and less significant to economic development.

Enslavers emphasized the moral and physical differences between Black and White women and categorized Black women "legally and culturally as productive, reproductive, and sexual property."[14] Elite White women were key agents in emphasizing these differences, "as their ability to maintain this racially defined concept of womanhood necessitated their distinguishing themselves from their enslaved counterparts."[15] Enslavers expected enslaved women to produce more than White indentured servants because they perceived Black women as physically stronger than White women. Conterminously, enslavers viewed enslaved women's work to be worth only three-quarters of that of enslaved men, while they regarded children as a "half-share" by the age

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of nine or ten. In the Southern colonies, enslaved women "were given the most tedious and monotonous forms of fieldwork, including preparing ground, digging ditches, hoeing, and weeding."[16] Slaveholders also expected women to clean communal areas such as stables. In the minds of enslavers, "Black women were capable of hard physical labor and were consequently a source of rising profits. Some slaveholders took pride in the ability of their female slaves to labor as hard as did their male counterparts."[17]

Enslavers valued enslaved women primarily as laborers who were forced to work like men in the fields, yet they experienced labor differently than did men because of their sex. On tobacco, sugar, and later cotton plantations, enslaved women worked in gangs from sun-up to sundown. In the rice country of Georgia and South Carolina, labor was organized under the task system. "Enslaved laborers completed daily work assignments based on portions of an acre, from one-half to one-quarter, designated according to age and ability. Gender was not a factor in assigning tasks, and many women designated as 'full hands' were expected to do the same amount of labor as did men."[18] Women were the majority of prime field hands on large Lowcountry rice plantations and they engaged in preparing the fields, sowing, cultivating, harvesting, and cleaning rice, and maintaining plantation irrigation systems.[19] A small percentage of enslaved women were given skilled work. They wove baskets and made quilts, drawing on the skills they had acquired in Africa, while others worked in plantation dairies or raised poultry. Some women also became midwives or "root doctors."[20] Frequently, enslavers expected women to use these more advanced skills in addition to the field labor required of them. They expected enslaved women to weave, sew, and quilt at night and to labor in the fields or the plantation house during the day. Women's experiences differed markedly from those of enslaved men, most of whom were expected to use their skills as carpenters, blacksmiths, shoemakers, and bricklayers instead of laboring in the fields.[21]

While the task labor system offered a degree of freedom, it was not always beneficial for enslaved women. The health of women working on Lowcountry plantations remained poor, since they were forced to return to field labor soon after giving birth. Women also suffered from a variety

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of ailments, which included fallen wombs, spinal injuries from back-breaking work in rice fields, fevers, pulmonary illness, rheumatism, and foot rot caused by standing knee-deep in water. Moreover, new mothers took longer to complete their assigned task due to the need to stop working to feed their infants. New mothers, as well as pregnant and elderly women, suffered from exhaustion that slowed their pace of work. On many plantations, children aged two to twelve months frequently died as a result of being underweight and exposed to malaria, influenza, whooping cough, lockjaw, and winter fevers. For women, slavery was even more terrible since overt resistance was not a viable option. Retribution through physical violence such as whippings, more abuse or threats, as well as moral anguish, which included separation from their family or surroundings when sold away, remained omnipresent. Sexuality, as historian Catherine Clinton has argued, was a central and significant element in the system of power devised by the slave society.[22]

Cruel and unusual punishments provided the impetus for flight from plantations. The task labor system served as the cornerstone of Lowcountry plantation management; however, implacable hostility was coeval with this labor system. Severe beatings, whippings, and floggings were concomitant with chains, irons, and incarcerations. The threat of retribution through physical violence such as whippings or the moral anguish that would result from separation from their family or surroundings if they were sold away was present. Under these conditions, enslaved women seized opportunities for self-emancipation. The sea islands provided fluid egress for runaways to flee to the nearby pine lands, as well as to seek refuge with the Seminoles in Spanish Florida.[23] In Lowcountry South Carolina and Georgia, 927 enslaved women ran away between 1730 and 1790.[24]

For many women, the task labor system allowed them to manipulate their time to secure their own economic and social spaces. Women could plant and tend gardens as well as raise livestock; however, control and coercion remained central elements of this system. Slavery was a "system of many systems" that affected women on multiple levels. As Deborah Gray White has argued, "women deliberately dissembled their objective reality and masked their thoughts and personalities in order to protect

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valued parts of their lives from white and male invasion."[25] However, the hidden realm of women's lives was the primary domain in which women resisted the process of reduction. Their political, social and economic struggle for full humanity is captured in their narratives which reveal that women's domestic responsibility informed their social reality. Within slave communities, women emerged as cultural interlocutors. They maintained a place of honor and degrees of political power derived from the contributions which they made to the material and cultural life of the quarters. Women sustained family and kinship networks, anchored slave communities, and shouldered the dual burden of field labor for their owners and domestic responsibilities for their households on a daily basis. The status of women in slave communities increased as a result of their work as nurses, midwives, and educators.[26]

On wheat and tobacco plantations the gang system led to greater separation of men and women than under the task labor system. Enslaved women worked under the supervision of a Black slave driver or White overseer, performing different work than men for at least five days of the week. For instance, women worked as gatherers and stackers, whereas men harvested wheat with a scythe. Men carted and plowed while women put up fences, cleared stables, and leveled ditches. Tobacco had a shorter annual cycle than rice and required less heavy labor at certain times, but the work on tobacco was steadier, requiring transplanting, debugging, "topping," "suckering," curing, and packing. Tobacco growing also required plowing and the use of carts for hauling, which remained the domain of enslaved men. This sexual division of labor altered the everyday working lives of enslaved people. For women, working with other women provided support and camaraderie but also left them more vulnerable to sexual assault from enslavers and overseers.[27]

According to an eighteenth-century planter, tobacco was "a plant of perpetual trouble and difficulty." It was fragile and required tedious cultivation. Enslaved women labored from first daylight in the morning until sundown in the evening, usually in small, interdependent groups where their labor was closely monitored by the planter or overseer. George Washington, for example, required his slaves at Mount Vernon to "be at work as soon as it is light, [and] work till it is dark."[28] In the winter months, it was not unusual for women to even work by candlelight

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into the evening hours, curing, stripping, and packing tobacco. The planting cycle for tobacco began in January as enslaved people cleared or burned the land and prepared the soil for early planting. Between February and March, women sowed tobacco seeds in specially prepared beds of mulch. Transplanting began in April and the workload steadily increased as new fields were cleared and prepared to receive the transplanted tobacco plants. During the summer months, women were kept busy weeding, transplanting, replanting, and removing ravaging caterpillars from the tobacco leaves. Harvesting took place from August to October; however, drying, stripping, and packaging kept women busy through December, after which the cycle repeated itself.[29]

Gender-based labor assignments fostered female unity since working in female gangs, as well as working under the task labor system, allowed Black women to develop an independent female culture. Within their community, women held their own definitions of Black womanhood, "based upon African cultural traditions reshaped to accommodate the realities of their experiences in slavery. Black women rejected the notion that femininity required chastity, submissiveness, and weakness. Instead, they valued labor performed for their families and communities, prided physical and emotional strength, recognized female leadership, and celebrated resistance."[30] Historian Brenda Stevenson argues that enslaved women "revered resistance as a female trait, which enabled them to protect their most fundamental claims to womanhood . . . their female sexuality and physicality, and their roles as mothers and wives."[31]

During the second half of the eighteenth century, Virginia's enslaved population grew due to a combination of the continued importation of enslaved people across the Atlantic and natural increase, as enslaved women bore more children than was necessary to replace the preceding generation. Likewise, the South Carolina slave population began to experience natural increase in the second half of the eighteenth century. Black and White women's fertility rates rose over the Colonial period from forty-two births per one thousand in 1670 to fifty-eight per one thousand in 1789. Still, enslaved children's lives remained fragile, and many infants fell prey to early mortality. Enslaved women also bore their first children at a relatively young age, typically aged sixteen, and children were born close together, mostly twenty-five to thirty months apart.

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Therefore, the majority of enslaved women gave birth about every other year and bore many children over their lifetime, not all of whom survived.[32]

As the slave population increased, planters began valuing enslaved women for their productive and reproductive abilities. Thomas Jefferson declared that "a woman who brings a child every two years [is] more profitable than the best man on the farm [for] what she produces is an addition to the capital, while his labor disappears in mere consumption."[33] Jefferson was not the only slaveholder who valued a self-producing labor force. A planter in 1719 declared as he purchased two fifteen-year-old girls that "nothing is more to the advantage of my son than young breeding negroes."[34]

Enslaved women were at risk of sexual assault and physical violence by enslavers because they often lived and worked within the plantation house. Colonial mistresses could be particularly cruel when they suspected their husbands of engaging in illicit sexual relationships with their female slaves. In 1748, Hannah Crump of Lancaster County, Virginia was accused of murdering a woman named Jenny, who was enslaved by her husband. Hannah suspected that the two were intimately involved, and Jenny bore the brunt of her wrath regardless of the forced nature of Jenny's relationship with Hannah's husband.[35] Likewise, William Byrd recorded several extramarital affairs with female domestics, despite being in his late sixties. Having relationships with enslaved women whom he kept in his house allowed Byrd to affirm his sexual prowess and illustrates the power of White men in colonial American society. The mental and physical violence enslaved women faced within White people's homes grew more pronounced over time.[36]

The South Carolina Stono Rebellion of 1739 affected enslavers' attitudes toward reproduction. Led by Angolan slaves who killed twenty-one Whites, the revolt heightened fear within White society about the continued importation of Africans who could foment rebellion. Hence, rather than importing slaves from Africa, enslavers sought to encourage enslaved women's fertility as a more facile way to increase the colonies' supply of slaves. A decade after the rebellion, colonists raised the duties on imported slaves to prohibitively high levels, which caused the importation of enslaved women and men from Africa and the Caribbean to the

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Carolinas to decline to one-tenth of the rate of importation that prevailed during the 1730s, which had been 1,000 per year.[37] This effort by lawmakers served to halt the importation of new Africans to ensure that imported slaves would never constitute so high a proportion of the colony's population as they had in the late 1730s.[38] Childbirth was thus used by enslavers to maintain, if not increase, the slave population.[39] The encouragement of frequent pregnancies led to conflict between enslaved women and enslavers as women resented their interference in matters related to their choice of spouse and the number of children they bore. Enslaved women also grew more exhausted as they balanced the demands of frequent childbearing with exacting physical labor.[40]

Enslaved women's bitterness and resentment toward callous and interfering enslavers led them to resist their oppression in various ways, including trying to limit the number of children they bore and escaping their bondage. Evidence suggests that "female slaves brought knowledge of plants that could induce miscarriages with them from West Africa, which some women used to restrict the number of children they bore as a result of white men's sexual abuse."[41] Others aborted pregnancies simply because they did not want to raise their children as chattel. According to Emily West, running away from hated enslavers was easier for bondwomen during the Colonial period than for those who lived during the antebellum years of slavery, "because over time white society grew more adept at tracking and capturing runaway slaves," especially following the Revolutionary War.[42] During the Colonial Era, small groups of runaways known as maroons existed in the swamplands of the Carolinas and along the border of Virginia and North Carolina as well as elsewhere in the colonies. Spanish Florida also became a haven for runaway slaves. Two women, an infant girl, and eight men were among the first recorded groups of slaves to escape from Carolina to Florida in 1687. After escaping by boat to St. Augustine, the two women worked as domestics for the Spanish governor and subsequently converted to Catholicism. This began a pattern of flight south where fugitives sought freedom with Spanish authorities.[43] They based their flight on a 1693 edict in which the "Spanish Crown offered freedom to all fugitives – men as well as women – who converted to Catholicism. Thereafter, Spanish officials in Florida provided 'Liberty and Protection' to all slaves who

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reached St. Augustine, and they consistently refused to return runaways who took refuge in the colony."[44]

Enslaved women who were mothers fleeing bondage in colonial times disrupts the narrative that all female slaves with children were bound to their enslavers through their offspring. For example, the *South Carolina Gazette* on June 3, 1760 advertised that twenty-three year old Martilla ran away with her child "about twelve months old."[45] Both were bought at the sale of Mrs. Mary Baker's Estate and were well known in Charlestown where her enslaver believed "she is supposed to be harboured [*sic*]."[46] Men were most likely to flee together, while women either ran away alone or with family members, including mothers, children, and husbands. In some cases, men ran away with their children. In 1772, for instance, South Carolina enslaver Mrs. Dellahow reported "that two sensible Negro fellows," Ramspute and his son George, had run away, and were probably "harbored with his wife in Charleston."[47] Similarly, "Bristol and his thirteen year old son" ran away from John Rawn in April 1767.[48] Runaway slave advertisements were also placed for couples, which is an indication that fugitive couples' marriages were just as important to them as their freedom.[49] Overall, more men than women escaped bondage. In South Carolina, from 1732 to 1737, males outnumbered females by three to one. Seventy-seven percent of runaways advertised in colonial South Carolina during the 1730s were men.[50] While this pattern persisted through the century it was not unique to South Carolina. According to Herbert Aptheker, in Virginia from 1705 to 1790, 1,367 men attempted to escape bondage, compared to only 184 women.[51] However, these figures are not definitive as not every runaway generated an advertisement. It is thus feasible that the actual number of runaways was at least double the extant number since not all newspapers were published consistently and many enslavers did not advertise for the return of runaways. In fact, many enslavers refused to pay the newspaper advertisement fees. Not only did they have to worry about paying publishers for the space, but they also had to "pay the informer (black or white), the warden, and the person who initially delivered the fugitive to the warden."[52] Delivery of the runaway was expensive.[53]

The scholarship on enslaved women has frequently focused on how women's work as unskilled laborers bound them more firmly than men to

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plantations and limited their options for resistance.[54] On large plantations, enslaved men were given skilled positions, such as craftsmen, that granted them a degree of mobility as they were often hired to work on neighboring plantations. Additionally, men "held positions as coachmen and boat hands that took them throughout the countryside and to town. As a result, men were able to gain a sense of geography, making them much more capable and successful runaways."[55] Betty Wood concluded that women did not run away in similar numbers to men because their labor did not take them off the plantation as often.[56]

Enslaved women had as much incentive to run away as did men, perhaps even more. Certainly, women were bound more tightly than men to plantations. The focus on plantations, however, obscures those women whose labor brought them throughout the countryside and into cities, facilitating their ability to run away. Many enslaved women did have skilled positions that granted them opportunities to travel. On large plantations, some women worked neither in the fields nor in plantation homes, but rather in the areas between the two. Women held positions as "poultry minders, dairy women, gardeners, nurses or midwives. Although these positions did not carry the same prestige as men's skilled positions, they granted women a degree of independence and mobility."[57] Midwifery skills took them throughout the countryside as they traveled to treat women on other plantations.[58] An example is fifty-year-old Sally who was well respected among the Black and White communities as a "doctress." Sally gained confidence from her healing skills and mobility, in addition to the fact that she could read "tolerably well." She left her owner on four occasions, traveling through the countryside, passing "by the name of Free Sally" and was able to support herself by employing her healing skills.[59] According to her enslaver, "some white persons have employed her by sending their own negroes to her."[60]

Many plantation women, under the task labor system, traveled to urban markets on Sundays to sell eggs, poultry, and crops produced in the internal slave economy during the free time the system permitted. As in Africa and the Caribbean, the important role played by Black women in the Charleston and Savannah markets "enabled the creation of networks between rural and urban enslaved women and encouraged a Black female forum on current events."[61] In addition to money and goods,

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women returned to plantations with "information about the outside world gleaned from conversations with urban residents, black and white, free and enslaved, as well as travelers and black sailors who brought news from the larger Atlantic world. The knowledge, mobility, acquaintances, and confidence gained through their experiences in the market facilitated women's resistance."[62] For instance, a "tall, fine looking brown girl," Sarah Washington laughed and talked "very loud[ly]," and was "inclined to be impudent."[63] Her enslaver noted that, prior to her escape, she had been "in the habit of going to Summerville to buy vegetables, which she sold in the streets of Charleston."[64]

Gender shaped both the work women were assigned and also the punishment used to enforce their labor, and gender did not exempt enslaved women from harsh punishment. To the contrary, slaveholders and overseers often punished enslaved women even more severely than they did men due to gendered assumptions of slave resistance and the woman's place.[65] Formerly enslaved James recalled, "The women are always beat worse than the men. The more they whip the men, the more likely they are to run away into the swamp, but the women don't run away so much."[66] However, Ruth did run away. Some advertisements contained explicit instructions for the type of punishment a White citizen should mete out for any slave caught without a pass. Enslaver Rebeccah Marsey stated, "whoever picks up Ruth, give her fifty good lashes."[67]

Deborah Gray White maintains that "the violence done to Black women might well de-center lynching as the primary site and preeminent expression of white (sexual) anxiety on the black body."[68] "Through the physical abuse and sexual assault of black women, [enslavers] and overseers asserted their authority over (and simultaneously expressed their fear of) both enslaved women and their male relatives. By beating enslaved women in front of their male relatives or forcing men to beat women, slaveholders undermined both women's roles as wives and mothers worthy of patriarchal protection and men's roles as husbands and fathers who have the right to defend their women."[69] The enslaved woman's body thus became the site of "interracial masculine conflict."[70]

In his examination of enslaved men's deemasculinization, Thomas Foster argues that enslavers regularly denied enslaved men autonomy in

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decisions regarding courtship and intimacy, which rendered them powerless to protect their wives from abuse.[71] However, in discussions on the abuse of enslaved women, it is essential to consider the woman’s perspective. Enslaved women were abused physically, sexually, and psychologically, as enslavers “attacked their roles as women, denied them male protection, and often forced their male counterparts to be agents in their abuse. Sexual violence also informed enslaved women’s resistance as they struggled against assaults on their bodies, womanhood, and psyches.”[72]

Overseers and slave drivers viewed sexual access to enslaved women’s bodies as one of the privileges of their authority as the division of the labor force into sex-segregated gangs left women alone in the fields.[73] Semi-nudity of enslaved female field hands added to their vulnerability. One former slave recalled, “Our clothes were rags, and we were all half naked, and the females were not sufficiently clothed to satisfy common decency.”[74] The nature of enslaved women’s work placed them in situations where they had to bend over to tend crops and often needed to lift their skirts when working in muddy or flooded fields.[75] The exposure of enslaved women made them more susceptible to sexual assault, which often led to violent altercations when women attempted to resist. John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger have argued that “young men were more willing than women to challenge the overseer’s authority.”[76] Women, however, did fight back, “resisting not simply physical punishment but also sexual or sexualized assault.”[77] Recalling the story of a physical altercation between her grandmother Sylvia Heard and the overseer, Celestia Avery stated:

> Grandmother Sylvia was told to take her clothes off when she reached the end of a row. She was to be whipped because she had not completed the required amount of hoeing for the day. Grandmother continued hoeing until she came to a fence; as the overseer reached out to grab her she snatched a fence railing and broke it across his arms.[78]

By running away, enslaved women took ownership of their bodies and resisted sexual assault and White men’s claims to unlimited access. Enslavers who sexually abused enslaved women became irate when they ran away. Enslaver John Champney believed that fugitives who hid on the

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outskirts of Doctor Striving's plantation in South Carolina were "providing a sanctuary for a runaway named Diane," whom Champney wanted back "dead or alive."[79] Jennifer Fleischner has argued that sexual exploitation was a "soul-murdering physical and psychological assault against the slave's identity" and that "the concept of 'family,' however configured, was a crucial counterforce to the soul-murdering abuse and deprivation under slavery."[80] Enslaved mothers instilled their daughters with a positive view of Black womanhood that negated the racialized and gendered notions of the slavocracy.[81] Leslie Schwalm contends that women "were the primary figures … in imparting to children the skills with which they, their kin, and their community might survive (and resist) lifelong enslavement."[82]

Motherhood inspired women to escape as many women ran away in an effort to maintain ties to their children or escaped in response to the death or sale of a child.[83]

Although childbearing and childcare responsibilities bound women more tightly to plantations than men and was a factor in a woman's choice to run away, enslaved women with children did flee, particularly during the American Revolution. According to Deborah Gray White, most male runaways were aged sixteen to thirty-five, the years when most women were pregnant, nursing, or caring for at least one small child. Although this may have hindered women from escaping, in some instances, the gender ideals within the "black community also informed women's decision to flee, as motherhood was central to enslaved women's definition of womanhood and abandoning a child was socially unacceptable."[84] Consequently, there were numerous cases where fugitive women fled with their children.

NORTHERN LABORS

The experiences of enslaved women in Northern cities and rural spaces differed considerably from Southern plantation slavery. The majority of Northern enslaved women lived in small households with their enslavers. Roughly fifteen thousand Black women lived in the North on the eve of the American Revolution, the majority of whom were enslaved. At this time, there were fifty thousand Blacks living in the North, comprising 4.5 percent of the total population. "The dividing line between slavery and freedom was more flexible and malleable in the North than on

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Southern plantations. As a result, more Northern Black women moved out of bondage and into freedom."[85] In New England, enslaved women sought their freedom through legal manumission, as well as flight. They were viewed both as persons before the law and as property. "Being defined as persons before the law provided more opportunities for enslaved women to become free through the courts than anywhere else in the British North America colonies."[86] Women in bondage understood their enslavement as dispossession and being robbed of their families since they were threatened by sale or feared sale would come. In New England's port cities, Black women's ability to reproduce was more often seen as a liability than an asset for enslavers since most New England slaveholders owned only one or two slaves, who lived in the attics of their enslavers' homes.[87]

The Northern economy was also more diversified than the Southern plantation-centered economy. In some of the most agriculturally productive rural areas of Connecticut, Long Island, the lower Hudson River valley, and southern Pennsylvania, Black people made up as much as half of the workforce in the decades after 1750. Certain industries, such as ironworking in Pennsylvania or tanning in New York, relied heavily on slave labor and enslaved people worked in the carrying trade and around shipyards in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. In the Northern colonies, enslaved women grew a variety of crops including wheat, while others worked in the dairy and cattle industries, raised other livestock, and worked as craftswomen.[88] The vast majority of enslaved women labored as domestics in their enslavers' homes. This entailed spinning yarn and other thread, soap and candle making, gardening, childcare, food preparation and cooking, and making and mending clothes. Owing to an increased reliance on slave labor, enslaved women monopolized places in the kitchens and pantries of Northern farms. In rural Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey enslaved women worked in the fields part-time.[89] Black women had to contend with constant surveillance, the drudgery of unrelenting domestic labor, disruptions to family life, and barriers to education.[90]

Like their Southern counterparts, enslaved women in Northern colonies resisted bondage and slaveholders' efforts to control their mobility in what Stephanie Camp refers to as "geographies of containment."[91]

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Containment was a core part of slavery and enslavers sought to control the movement of bondwomen. Following the New York slave conspiracy of 1712 in which the main arsonists were allegedly women, legislators in New York enacted a law for "preventing, Suppressing, and punishing the Conspiracy and Insurrection of Negroes and other Slaves." This law sought to discourage the importation of Africans by placing an excessive tax on imports and permitted any punishment for the offense of arson to include burning, hanging by a chain, and being broke on the wheel.[92] Northern enslaved women also resisted bondage by attempting to run away. In 1758, a Westchester County, New York slave named Bridget conspired with six others to run away but was caught and punished. Similarly, Lucretia who spoke "broken Dutch and English" and was "great with Child" ran away in New York City on May 1, 1763.[93] According to her enslaver, she was entrusted to sell various goods in the city and, like other enslaved women who had mobility, took advantage of the opportunity to escape bondage. Northern enslaved women also fought to maintain their families, to live in communities of their choosing, and to share culture across generations.[94]

The Northern free Black population declined in the first half of the eighteenth century as a result of efforts to limit manumissions. The free Black female population that existed in the North was the result of either being born free, manumission, or self-purchase. Prior to 1780, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and the New England colonies curbed manumission by requiring slaveholders to post heavy bonds for the good conduct of former slaves and to support those who might rely on public charity. "During the sixty-five years between 1698 and 1763, only ninety slaves were manumitted in Philadelphia; the number in New York was even smaller. Aged and sickly, many of these women and men were released by [enslavers] who had effectively emancipated themselves from the support of laborers deemed nonproductive."[95] As the free Black population declined, its prosperity waned and White northerners began equating bondage with Blackness. Northern lawmakers reinforced that presumption by circumscribing the freedom of free Blacks. "In various northern colonies, free Blacks were barred from voting, attending the militia, sitting on juries, testifying in court, and holding property."[96] In several places, "free Blacks were required by law to carry

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special passes to travel, trade, and keep a gun or a dog."[97] They were judged in special courts, along with slaves, and could be punished like slaves for certain offenses. The punishment meted out to free Blacks often drove them back into bondage. In Pennsylvania, a law enslaved those free Blacks found to be without regular employment, and who "loiter[ed] and mispen[t]" their time.[98]

Creating a community of Black women was more difficult in the New England colonies due to the uneven ratio of men to women. Most slaves lived in seafaring cities, which had a largely male enslaved population throughout the eighteenth century. In the New England countryside, enslaved women lived isolated lives dwelling miles from another Black person. According to Michael Gomez, a Black community can take shape even without a shared work life or common residence as long as "Black folk could get from one farm to the next on a regular basis and within a reasonable time."[99] According to historians Catherine Adams and Elizabeth Pleck, "even by this standard, a community of Black women did not exist in rural New England since they encountered other Black people on an irregular basis."[100]

The northern system of slavery placed enslaved women in menial and servile tasks considered women's work. In elite households, a mistress assigned an enslaved woman or girl the task of polishing silver or furniture. In some instances, wives of great men of wealth had an enslaved lady's maid who aided them with "their clothes, hair, drew their baths, and mended clothes. Some [enslavers] preferred to have a servant girl shave them rather than going to the barber."[101] Enslaved women who lived in town might be sent to the store to pick up a skein of thread or a yard of ribbon.[102] However, most mistresses used enslaved women "not as their personal attendant but as a domestic menial sweeping, emptying chamber pots, carrying water, washing the dishes, brewing, taking care of children, cooking and baking, spinning, carding, knitting and sewing."[103]

Slavery in the Northern colonies has been viewed as benign; however, despite not having the rigidity of Southern plantations, Black women, men, and children were cruelly treated by enslavers. The account of slaves "who were branded by their enslavers, had their ears nailed, fled, committed suicide, suffered the dissolution of their families, or were sold" refutes the myth of the "kind master."[104] Enslavers behaved in

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a way that belied their benevolent views of themselves. They lashed out at bondwomen when "they were angry, filled with rage, or had convenient access to a horsewhip."[105] In the Massachusetts Bay colony, two women, Maria and Phillis, were found guilty of killing their enslavers in 1681 and in 1755, respectively. As punishment, their corpses were set aflame to convey the message that the killing of a master would not be tolerated in the colony.[106] In the case of Phillis, there were two accomplices, Mark, an enslaved man, and another woman, who was punished by banishment to the West Indies. Mark was hung, his body covered in tar, and "suspended on chains at Charlestown Common." Mark directed his *Last & Dying Words* to Black women, stating "my Fellow Servants, especially the Women, take warning from me, and shun those Vices which have prov'd my ruin."[107]

Northern judges, like their southern counterparts, used a racial double standard with respect to murder and other offenses. Bondmen and bondwomen who took the life of a slaveholder were treated as though they had killed nobility while enslavers who killed their slaves were not punished. There were laws that made the murder of a slave a capital crime; however, according to Catherine Adams and Elizabeth Pleck, no enslaver was ever put to death for killing a slave.[108] In 1767, the enslaver of Jenny in Newport, Rhode Island "flogged her so badly that she was crippled and had trouble walking. Her owner was never brought to trial and it was Jenny who was hauled to court for the death of her infant, a crime she could have committed as revenge for prior ill-treatment."[109] In 1761, a nine-year-old enslaved girl in New London, Connecticut was punished with a two-foot-long horsewhip. She lived for four days before dying. A court failed to exact any punishment on the enslaver because it believed that her death was unintentional.[110]

Despite living in "societies with slaves," communities in which slavery represented a marginal part of life, enslaved women in the Northern colonies were not content with their enslavement. Although many were probably better fed and clothed than enslaved women in the South, they were far from being happy and content with their status. While New England, for example, had a much smaller slave population than Virginia, its newspapers reported almost twice as many runaways between the 1730s and 1750s. Between 1700 and 1789, over eight hundred runaway

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slave advertisements appeared in New England newspapers; 7 percent were fugitive women and girls.[111]

GENDERED RESISTANCE

Throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, enslaved Black men performed much of the physical labor slavery demanded. This was the case throughout the Northern and Southern colonies. The sex ratio in Virginia for imported males and females was two to one. In Surry County, Virginia, the ratio was 145 men to 100 women and in St. George Parish, South Carolina, it was 129 to 100. The uneven sex ratio made colonial slavery different for Black men and women. According to Deborah Gray White, "it was much harder for a man to find a wife than for a woman to find a husband."[112] Moreover, a significant number of men could expect to die without ever having a spouse. Those who did manage to marry often wed women living on other plantations. On colonial plantations, both married and unmarried men lived together in small groups.[113] These conditions served to foster strategies of resistance among men.

Typical acts of resistance for both women and men included feigning illness, destroying crops, stores, or tools, and sometimes attacking or killing overseers. Running away was perhaps the most ubiquitous form of resistance for women and men, as newly arrived Africans and seasoned Caribbean slaves came from turbulent, fragmented societies where flight was common. In eighteenth-century Virginia newspapers, male runaways were described as truants who usually returned voluntarily. However, there were accounts of "outlaws" who refused to give themselves up, and fugitives "who visited relatives, went to town to pass as free, or tried to escape slavery completely, either by boarding ships and leaving the colony or banding together in cooperative efforts to establish villages or hide-outs on the frontier."[114] To discourage runaways, the Virginia House of Burgesses passed "An Act Concerning Servants and Slaves" in 1705. This act defined enslavement as limited to persons of African descent and encouraged Whites to "take up runaways" with bounties paid in tobacco to persons who captured runaway slaves.[115] Similar laws on slave movement were enacted in North Carolina in 1715, which were further strengthened in 1741 with a reward system incentivizing the

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return of fugitive absentees, outliers, and maroons. The laws also created public gaols.[116]

Slavery was the vilest form of captivity, whose roots strengthened during the eighteenth century. Slavery meant "cultural alienation, reduction to the status of property, the ever present threat of sale, denial of the fruits of one's labor, and subjugation to the force, power, and will of another human being."[117] It mandated the strictest control of the physical and social mobility of enslaved people as the accoutrements – shackles, chains, passes, and slave patrols – demonstrate. Enslaved people everywhere were forbidden by law and common practice to leave their enslaver's property without a pass and slave patrols ensured abidance to the law and to plantation rules. Short-term runaways caused the greatest consternation to authorities in Virginia, who made truancy a capital offense in 1748. Local authorities who captured outliers had the authority to "dismember" or "kill and destroy" them. Lawmakers modified this punishment on the eve of the American Revolution in response to egalitarian thinking and also due to the financial loss to enslavers, who demanded compensation. The modified law stated that death could occur if the truant engaged in mischief and compensation for the death of a slave would not be paid by the public.[118]

South Carolina passed its first "Act to prevent Runaways" in 1683 and adopted an "Act for the Better Ordering of Slaves," modeled on the Barbadian laws, in 1691. Article IX of the Act required the sheriff to organize a party of twenty men to "pursue, apprehend and take the said runaways, either alive or dead."[119] Escaping with the intent to leave the colony was punishable by death, as was running away for the fifth time. The death penalty could be substituted by cutting off the Achilles tendon. Fugitive men who were captured were to receive "forty lashes and face branding for the first offense and be castrated if they were over sixteen and repeat offenders."[120] Fugitive women would be whipped, branded, and have their ears cut off.[121] Following the 1739 Stono Rebellion lawmakers passed a new comprehensive code which among other things "listed the generous rewards whites and free Indians could receive if they caught a runaway who had been absent six months on the south side of the Savannah River. They would receive fifty pounds for

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a man; twenty-five for a woman and boys over twelve; and five pounds for children provided they were alive."[122]

South Carolina and Virginia set the pattern for the rest of the slave South, where principles of restraint and confinement wove a continuous thread through the variations of regional space. Enslaved women everywhere were forbidden from leaving their enslaver's property without written consent and knowledge of managers and overseers. Authorities dictated that passes must express their names, from and to what place they were traveling, and the time granted by their enslavers. Passes were enormously powerful as they "were animated by the power of enslavers and overseers. They spoke for slave managers and acted on their behalf, directing and overseeing the movement of enslaved people."[123] Enslavers put the principles of restraint into practice in everyday life, adding to them their own plantation rules in building "geographies of containment."[124]

In South Carolina, recently imported African men were frequent runaways who often cooperated in their efforts to abscond. From the early 1750s, enslavers started advertising for the return of groups of men who shared ethnic identities. They included four "new Gambia men" who ran away in 1765; three Angolans, "all short fellows"; six other Angolans, purchased in the summer of 1771 and runaways by November, "so they cannot as yet speak English"; and four men from the "Fullah Country."[125] In some cases, those that fled were family members. Women fled with their husbands, as was the case of Satira and the unnamed wife of Prince, who fled together in December 1752. Satira's husband George had received many whippings as indicated by "marks of a whip on his back and belly."[126] Fugitive women and men found refuge in the "Black Settlements" that had formed forty miles south of Charleston and consisted of African fugitive slaves who specialized in raiding Georgia plantations across the Savannah River. Another center for escaped slaves was Thompson's Creek, located west of the Peedee River in South Carolina. Both settlements were well supplied with axes and other tools, pots, pails, and blankets.[127]

Slave rebellions and rumors of slave rebellions illuminate the networks that enslaved women created to secure their freedom. On December 7, 1774, four enslaved women conspired with "six negro fellows" to kill a master and an overseer. According to the *Georgia Gazette*, the group,

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who were enslaved by Captain Morris of St. Andrew Parish, killed the overseer, murdered the wife of Captain Morris, and severely wounded a carpenter and a boy who died the next day. The group then marched through the countryside and attacked neighboring plantations, seriously wounding the owners of two plantations and killing one of their sons. The authorities meted out severe retribution on the leaders of the revolt by burning them alive. The St. Andrew Parish Revolt increased White anxiety and demonstrated the tacit network of communication between enslaved women and men to plan and organize a successful revolt. In the aftermath of the revolt, residents of St. Andrews adopted a set of anti-slavery resolutions which pledged to manumit "our slaves in this colony for the most safe and equitable footing for the masters and themselves."[128]

Enslaved women and men were fully aware of the difficulty in organizing a successful revolt on a large scale and turned to other forms of resistance such as arson and poisoning. Charges of arson or poisoning brought slaves before courts, which consisted of local slave owners. On the eve of the American Revolution, an unnamed enslaved woman in Savannah, Georgia confessed to having attempted to poison her enslaver and his wife with arsenic. She was given a short trial and was condemned to be burned alive on the Savannah Common. Execution was the punishment for arson and poisoning and while most defendants were hanged, in some cases they were burned alive, and always in public to deter other slaves.[129]

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Enslaved people were more valuable than land throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Between 1770 and 1810, slaves as capital were worth 2–3.5 years of national income. By 1775, slave ships had carried 160,000 Africans to the Chesapeake colonies, 140,000 to the Carolinas and Georgia, and 30,000 to the Northern colonies. Twenty percent of the mainland colonies' 2.5 million inhabitants were enslaved by 1775.[130] Slave labor was essential to the North American colonies. Tobacco shipments from the Chesapeake funded trade throughout the colonies. Low country rice planters were the richest elites of the period, and commercial sectors of the Northern colonies depended heavily on carrying plantation products to Europe.

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New England slave traders, who maintained a thriving shipbuilding industry, were responsible for the hundreds of thousands of Africans brought to the colonies before 1800. Slave value was roughly double the national value of housing and, in the South, "slave capital largely supplanted and surpassed landed capital."[131] By 1830, aggregated slave property was valued at $577 million, which amounted to 15 percent of the national wealth.[132]

Black women were enslaved in diverse settings. They labored in rural and urban, coastal and inland environments in the North and South; and worked on small family farms and large plantations. The intersection of enslaved women's productive and reproductive capabilities, and the exploitation of both, shaped their experience of slavery and informed their resistance. As they were denied the privileges of womanhood reserved for White women, enslaved women labored in the fields like men, did grueling work as domestic servants, and performed other tasks that consumed their daily lives. Not only were they forced to engage in taxing physical labor, but enslavers asserted their power over women by attacking their bodies and womanhood as they endured brutal, sexually sadistic punishment, while living under the constant threat of sexual assault. Enslaved women also struggled to balance their roles as laborers while being denied the privileges of motherhood. Yet motherhood and gender-based labor assignments motivated many enslaved women to escape.[133] This fact distinguished women's resistance from that of men who absconded. At the beginning of hostilities with the British, enslaved women, in greater numbers than in previous years, self-emancipated by running away to gain their freedom. One such woman was Margaret Grant.

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