

hooks

Sexism and the Black Female Slave Experience

In a retrospective examination of the black female slave experience, sexism looms as large as racism as an oppressive force in the lives of black women. Institutionalized sexism—that is, patriarchy—formed the base of the American social structure along with racial imperialism. Sexism was an integral part of the social and political order white colonizers brought with them from their European homelands, and it was to have a grave impact on the fate of enslaved black women. In its earliest stages, the slave trade focused primarily on the importation of laborers; the emphasis at that time was on the black male. The black female slave was not as valued as the black male slave. On the average, it cost more money to buy a male slave than a female slave. The scarcity of workers coupled with the relatively few numbers of black women in American colonies caused some white male planters to encourage, persuade, and coerce immigrant white females to engage in sexual relationships with black male slaves as a means of producing new workers. In Maryland, in the year 1664, the first anti-amalgamation law was passed; it was aimed at curtailing sexual relationships between white women and enslaved black men. One part

Ain't I a Woman

hooks

of the preamble of this document stated:

That whatsoever freeborn woman shall intermarry with any slave, from and after the last day of the present assembly, shall serve the masters of such slaves during the life of her husband; and that all the issue of such free born women, so married shall be slaves as their fathers were.

The most celebrated case of this time was that of Irish Nell, an indentured servant sold by Lord Baltimore to a southern planter who encouraged her to marry a black man named Butler. Lord Baltimore, on hearing of the fate of Irish Nell, was so appalled that white women were either by choice or coercion co-habiting sexually with black male slaves that he had the law repealed. The new law stated that the offspring of relationships between white women and black men would be free. As efforts on the part of outraged white men to curtail inter-racial relationships between black men and white women succeeded, the black female slave acquired a new status. Planters recognized the economic gain they could amass by breeding black slave women. The virulent attacks on slave importation also led to more emphasis on slave breeding. Unlike the offspring of relationships between black men and white women, the offspring of any black slave woman regardless of the race of her mate would be legally slaves, and therefore the property of the owner to whom the female slave belonged. As the market value of the black female slave increased, larger numbers were stolen or purchased by white slave traders.

White male observers of African culture in the 18th and 19th centuries were astounded and impressed by the African male's subjugation of the African female. They were not accustomed to a patriarchal social order that demanded not only that women accept an inferior status, but that they participate actively in the community labor force. Amanda Berry Smith, a 19th century black missionary, visited African communities and reported on the condition of African women:

The poor women of Africa, like those of India, have a hard time. As a rule, they have all the hard work to do. They have to cut and carry all the wood, carry all the water on their heads, and plant all the rice. The men and boys cut and burn

the bush, with the help of the women; but sowing the rice, and planting the cassava, the women have to do.

You will often see a great, big man walking ahead with nothing in his hand but a cutlass (as they always carry that or a spear), and a woman, his wife, coming on behind with a great big child on her back, and a load on her head.

No matter how tired she is, her lord would not think of bringing her a jar of water, to cook his supper with, or of beating the rice, no, she must do that.

The African woman schooled in the art of obedience to a higher authority by the tradition of her society was probably seen by the white male slaver as an ideal subject for slavery. As much of the work to be done in the American colonies was in the area of hoe-agriculture, it undoubtedly occurred to slavers that the African female, accustomed to performing arduous work in the fields while also performing a wide variety of tasks in the domestic household, would be very useful on the American plantation. While only a few African women were aboard the first ships bringing slaves to the new world, as the slave trade gathered momentum, females made up one-third of the human cargo aboard most ships. Because they could not effectively resist capture at the hands of thieves and kidnappers, African women became frequent targets for white male slavers. Slavers also used the capture of women important to the tribe, like the daughter of a king, as a means of luring African men into situations where they could be easily captured. Other African women were sold into slavery as punishment for breaking tribal laws. A woman found guilty of committing an act of adultery might be sold into bondage.

White male slavers did not regard the African female as a threat, so often aboard slave ships black women were stored without being shackled while black men were chained to one another. The slavers believed their own safety to be threatened by enslaved African men, but they had no such fear of the African female. The placing of African men in chains was to prevent possible uprisings. As white slavers feared resistance and retaliation at the hands of African men, they placed as much distance between themselves and black male slaves as was possible on board. It was only in relationship to the black

female slave that the white slaver could exercise freely absolute power, for he could brutalize and exploit her without fear of harmful retaliation. Black female slaves moving freely about the decks were a ready target for any white male who might choose to physically abuse and torment them. Initially every slave on board the ship was branded with a hot iron. A cat-o'-nine-tails was used by the slavers to lash those Africans that cried out in pain or resisted the torture. Women were lashed severely for crying. They were stripped of their clothing and beaten on all parts of their body. Ruth and Jacob Weldon, an African couple who experienced the horrors of the slave passage, saw "mothers with babes at their breasts basely branded and scarred, till it would seem as if the very heavens might smite the infernal tormentors with the doom they so richly merited." After the branding all slaves were stripped of any clothing. The nakedness of the African female served as a constant reminder of her sexual vulnerability. Rape was a common method of torture slavers used to subdue recalcitrant black women. The threat of rape or other physical brutalization inspired terror in the psyches of displaced African females. Robert Shufeldt, an observer of the slave trade, documented the prevalence of rape on slave ships. He asserts, "In those days many a negress was landed upon our shored already impregnated by someone of the demonic crew that brought her over."

Many African women were pregnant prior to their capture or purchase. They were forced to endure pregnancy without any care given to their diet, without any exercise, and without any assistance during the labor. In their own communities African women had been accustomed to much pampering and care during pregnancy, so the barbaric nature of childbearing on the slave ship was both physically harmful and psychologically demoralizing. Annals of history record that the American slave ship Pongas carried 250 women, many of them pregnant, who were squeezed into a compartment of 16 by 18 feet. The women who survived the initial stages of pregnancy gave birth aboard ship with their bodies exposed to either the scorching sun or the freezing cold. The numbers of black women who died during childbirth or the number of stillborn children will never

be known. Black women with children on board the slave ships were ridiculed, mocked, and treated contemptuously by the slaver crew. Often the slavers brutalized children to watch the anguish of their mothers. In their personal account of life aboard a slave ship, the Weldons recounted an incident in which a child of nine months was flogged continuously for refusing to eat. When beating failed to force the child to eat, the captain ordered that the child be placed feet first into a pot of boiling water. After trying other torturous methods with no success, the captain dropped the child and caused its death. Not deriving enough satisfaction from this sadistic act, he then commanded the mother to throw the body of the child overboard. The mother refused but was beaten until she submitted.

The traumatic experiences of African women and men aboard slave ships were only the initial stages of an indoctrination process that would transform the African free human being into a slave. An important part of the slaver's job was to effectively transform the African personality aboard the ships so that it would be marketable as a "docile" slave in the American colonies. The prideful, arrogant, and independent spirit of the African people had to be broken so that they would conform to the white colonizer's notion of proper slave demeanor. Crucial in the preparation of African people for the slave market was the destruction of human dignity, the removal of names and status, the dispersement of groups so that there would exist no common language, and the removal of any overt sign of an African heritage. The methods the slaver used to de-humanize African women and men were various tortures and punishments. A slave might be severely beaten for singing a sad song. When he deemed it necessary, the slaver would slaughter a slave so as to inspire terror in the enslaved onlookers. These methods of terrorization succeeded in forcing African people to repress their awareness of themselves as free people and to adopt the slave identity imposed upon them. Slavers recorded in their log-books that they were sadistically cruel to Africans aboard the slave ships as a way of "breaking them in" or "taming" them. African females received the brunt of this mass brutalization and terrorization not only because they could be victimized via their sexuality but also because they

were more likely to work intimately with the white family than the black male. Since the slaver regarded the black woman as a marketable cook, wet nurse, housekeeper, it was crucial that she be so thoroughly terrorized that she would submit passively to the will of white master, mistress, and their children. In order to make his product saleable, the slaver had to ensure that no recalcitrant black female servant would poison a family, kill children, set fire to the house, or resist in any way. The only insurance he could provide was based on his ability to tame the slave. Undoubtedly, the slave ship experience had a tremendous psychological impact on the psyches of black women and men. So horrific was the passage from Africa to America that only those women and men who could maintain a will to live despite their oppressive conditions survived. White people who observed the African slaves as they departed from the ships on American shores noted that they seemed to be happy and joyful. They thought that the happiness of the African slaves was due to their pleasure at having arrived in a Christian land. But the slaves were only expressing relief. They believed no fate that awaited them in the American colonies could be as horrific as the slave ship experience.

Traditionally, scholars have emphasized the impact of slavery on the black male consciousness, arguing that black men, more so than black women, were the "real" victims of slavery. Sexist historians and sociologists have provided the American public with a perspective on slavery in which the most cruel and de-humanizing impact of slavery on the lives of black people was that black men were stripped of their masculinity, which they then argue resulted in the dissolution and overall disruption of any black familial structure. Scholars have argued further that by not allowing black men to assume their traditional patriarchal status, white men effectively emasculated them, reducing them to an effeminate state. Implicit in this assertion is the assumption that the worst that can happen to a man is that he be made to assume the social status of a woman. To suggest that black men were de-humanized solely as a result of not being able to be patriarchs implies that the subjugation of black women was essential to the black male's

development of a positive self-concept, an idea that only served to support a sexist social order. Enslaved black men were stripped of the patriarchal status that had characterized their social situation in Africa but they were not stripped of their masculinity. Despite all popular arguments that claim black men were figuratively castrated, throughout the history of slavery in America black men were allowed to maintain some semblance of their societally defined masculine role. In colonial times as in contemporary times, masculinity denoted possessing the attributes of strength, virility, vigor, and physical prowess. It was precisely the "masculinity" of the African male that the white slaver sought to exploit. Young, strong, healthy African males were his prime target. For it was by the sale of virile African men "would-be workers" that the white slave trader expected to receive maximum profit return on his investment. That white people recognized the "masculinity" of the black male is evident by the tasks assigned the majority of black male slaves. No annals of history record that masses of black slave men were forced to execute roles traditionally performed exclusively by women. Evidence to the contrary exists, documenting the fact that there were many tasks enslaved African men would not perform because they regarded them as "female" work. If white women and men had really been obsessed by the idea of destroying black masculinity, they could have physically castrated all black men aboard slave ships or they could easily have forced black men to assume "feminine" attire or perform so-called "feminine" tasks. White slaveholders were ambivalent in regards to their treatment of the black male, for while they exploited his masculinity, they institutionalized measures to keep that masculinity in check. Individual black men were castrated by their owners or by mobs but the purpose of such acts was usually to set an example for other male slaves so that they would not resist white authority. Even if enslaved black men had been able to maintain completely their patriarchal status in relationship to enslaved black women, it would not have made the reality of slave life any less tolerable, any less brutal, or any less de-humanizing.

Oppression of black men during slavery has been described as a de-masculinization for the same reason that vir-

tually no scholarly attention has been given to the oppression of black women during slavery. Underlying both tendencies is the sexist assumption that the experiences of men are more important than those of women and that what matters most among the experiences of men is their ability to assert themselves patriarchally. Scholars have been reluctant to discuss the oppression of black women during slavery because of an unwillingness to seriously examine the impact of sexist and racist oppression on their social status. Unfortunately this lack of interest and concern leads them to deliberately minimize the black female slave experience. Although it in no way diminishes the suffering and oppressions of enslaved black men, it is obvious that the two forces, sexism and racism, intensified and magnified the sufferings and oppressions of black women. The area that most clearly reveals the differentiation between the status of male slaves and female slaves is the work area. The black male slave was primarily exploited as a laborer in the fields; the black female was exploited as a laborer in the fields, a worker in the domestic household, a breeder, and as an object of white male sexual assault.

While black men were not forced to assume a role colonial American society regarded as "feminine," black women were forced to assume a "masculine" role. Black women labored in the fields alongside black men, but few if any black men labored as domestics alongside black women in the white household (with the possible exception of butlers, whose status was still higher than that of a maid). Thus, it would be much more accurate for scholars to examine the dynamics of sexist and racist oppression during slavery in light of the masculinization of the black female and not the de-masculinization of the black male. In colonial American society, privileged white women rarely worked in the fields. Occasionally, white female indentured servants were forced to work in the fields as punishment for misdeeds, but this was not a common practice. In the eyes of colonial white Americans, only debased and degraded members of the female sex labored in the fields. And any white woman forced by circumstances to work in the fields was regarded as unworthy of the title "woman." Although

enslaved African women had labored in the fields in African communities, there these tasks were seen as an extension of a woman's feminine role. Transplanted African women soon realized that they were seen as "surrogate" men by white male slavers.

On any plantation with a substantial number of female slaves, black women performed the same tasks as black men; they plowed, planted, and harvested crops. On some plantations black women worked longer hours in the fields than black men. Even though it was a widespread belief among white plantation owners that black women were often better workers than their male counterparts, only a male slave could rise to the position of driver or overseer. Given their African heritage, it was easy for enslaved black women to adapt to farm labor in the colonies. Not only was the displaced African man unaccustomed to various types of farm labor, he often saw many tasks as "feminine" and resented having to perform them. In the states where cotton was the main staple to market, harvesting of crops depended heavily on the labor of black females. Although both black women and men labored to pick the ripe cotton, it was believed that the more delicately tapered fingers of the black female made it easier for her to gather the cotton from the pod. White overseers expected black female workers to work as well if not better than their male counterparts. If a black female worker failed to accomplish the amount of work expected of her, she was punished. White men may have discriminated against black women slaves in choosing to allow only males to be drivers or overseers, but they did not discriminate in the area of punishment. Female slaves were beaten as harshly as male slaves. Observers of the slave experience claim that it was common on a plantation to see a black female stripped naked, tied to a stake, and whipped with a hard saw or club.

On large plantations not all black women labored in the fields. They worked as nurses, cooks, seamstresses, washerwomen, and as maids. The popular notion that black slaves working in the white household were automatically the recipients of preferential treatment is not always substantiated by the personal accounts of slaves. House slaves were less subjected to

9/10
which was
class? dehuman
? human?

the physical hardships that beset field workers, but they were more likely to suffer endless cruelty and torture because they were constantly in the presence of demanding mistresses and masters. Black females working in close contact with white mistresses were frequently abused for petty offenses. Mungo White, an ex-slave from Alabama, recalled the conditions under which his mother worked:

Her task was too hard for any one person. She had to serve as maid to Mr. White's daughter, cook for all de hands, spin and card four cuts of thread a day, and den wash. Dere was one hundred and forty-four threads to de cut. If she didn't get all dis done she got fifty lashes dat night.

House slaves complained repeatedly about the stress and strain of being constantly under the surveillance of white owners.

Racist exploitation of black women as workers either in the fields or domestic household was not as de-humanizing and demoralizing as the sexual exploitation. The sexism of colonial white male patriarchs spared black male slaves the humiliation of homosexual rape and other forms of sexual assault. While institutionalized sexism was a social system that protected black male sexuality, it (socially) legitimized sexual exploitation of black females. The female slave lived in constant awareness of her sexual vulnerability and in perpetual fear that any male, white or black, might single her out to assault and victimize. Linda Brent in the narrative of her slave experience expressed her awareness of the black female's plight:

Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and suffering, and mortifications peculiarly their own.

Those sufferings peculiar to black women were directly related to their sexuality and involved rape and other forms of sexual assault. Black female slaves were usually sexually assaulted when they were between the ages of thirteen and sixteen. One female slave autobiographer declared:

The slave girl is reared in an atmosphere of licentiousness and fear. The lash and the foul talk of her masters and his sons are her teachers. When she is fourteen or fifteen, her

owner or his sons, or the overseer, or perhaps all of them, begin to bribe her with presents. If these failed to accomplish their purpose, she is whipped or starved into submission to their will.

Black female slave narratives that provide information concerning the sexual education of girls suggest that they knew little about their bodies, where babies came from, or about sexual intercourse. Few slave parents warned their daughters about the possibility of rape or helped them to prepare for such situations. The slave parents' unwillingness to openly concern themselves with the reality of sexual exploitation reflects the general colonial American attitude regarding sexuality.

Sexual exploitation of young slave girls usually occurred after they left the hut or cabin of their parents to work in the white domestic household. It was a common practice for a young slave girl to be forced to sleep in the same bedroom with a master and mistress, a situation which provided a convenient setting for sexual assault. Linda Brent recorded in her autobiography a detailed account of her white master's obsessive desire to assert his power over her by constantly threatening rape. When Linda first entered the service of her owner Dr. Flint, she was thirteen years old. He did not rape her but began to constantly torment and persecute her by verbally announcing his intentions to take her sexually. At the onset of their encounter he informed her that if she would not willingly submit, he would use force. Describing herself at fifteen, Linda wrote:

I was compelled to live under the same roof with him—where I saw a man forty years my senior daily violating the most sacred commandment of nature. He told me I was his property; that I must be subjected to his will in all things...

White male slaveowners usually tried to bribe black women as preparation for sexual overtures so as to place them in the role of prostitute. As long as the white slaveowner "paid" for the sexual services of his black female slave, he felt absolved of responsibility for such acts. Given the harsh conditions of slave life, any suggestion that enslaved black women had a choice as to their sexual partner is ludicrous. Since the white male could rape the black female who did not willingly respond to his

demands, passive submission on the part of the enslaved black women cannot be seen as complicity. Those women who did not willingly respond to the sexual overture of masters and overseers were brutalized and punished. Any show of resistance on the part of enslaved females increased the determination of white owners eager to demonstrate their power. In an account of her slave experience, Ann, a young mulatto woman, documents the struggle for power enacted by white masters, overseers, whippers, and the female slave. In her case it was the paid whipper who planned to rape her. He demanded that she remove all her clothing prior to the whipping. When Ann realized that he intended to rape her, she struggled. Her resistance angered him and he responded, "Girl, you've got to yield to me. I'll have you now; if it's only to show you that I can... You've got to be mine. I'll give you a fine calico dress and a pretty pair of ear-bobs!" Ann tells readers:

This was too much for further endurance. What! Must I give up the angel sealed honor of my life in traffic for trinkets. Where is the woman that would not have hotly resented such an insult. I turned upon him like a hungry lioness, and just as his wanton hand was about to be laid upon me, I dexterously aimed, and hurled the bottle against his left temple. With a low cry of pain he fell to the floor, and the blood oozed freely from the wound.

The paid whipper did not die from Ann's attack, so she was only punished by a prison sentence and daily floggings. Had he died she would have been tried for murder and sentenced to death.

Nineteenth century white female humanist Lydia Marie Child accurately summed up the social status of black women during slavery with the statement:

The negro woman is unprotected either by law or public opinion. She is the property of her master, and her daughters are his property. They are allowed to have no conscientious scruples, no sense of shame, no regard for the feelings of husband, or parent: they must be entirely subservient to the will of their owner on pain of being whipped as near unto death as will comport with his interest or quite to death if it suits his pleasure.

White male slaveowners wanted enslaved black women to passively accept sexual exploitation as the right and privilege of those in power. The black female slave who willingly submitted to a master's sexual advance and who received presents or payments was rewarded for her acceptance of the existing social order. Those black women who resisted sexual exploitation directly challenged the system; their refusal to submit passively to rape was a denouncement of the slaveowner's right to their persons. They were brutally punished. The political aim of this categorical rape of black women by white males was to obtain absolute allegiance and obedience to the white imperialistic order. Black activist Angela Davis has convincingly argued that the rape of black female slaves was not, as other scholars have suggested, a case of white men satisfying their sexual lust, but was in fact an institutionalized method of terrorism which had as its goal the demoralization and dehumanization of black women. Davis contends:

In confronting the black woman as adversary in a sexual contest, the master would be subjecting her to the most elemental form of terrorism distinctly suited for the female: rape. Given the already terroristic texture of plantation life, it would be as potential victim of rape that the slave woman would be most unguarded. Further, she might be most conveniently manipulated if the master contrived a random system of sorts, forcing her to pay with her body for foods, diminished severity of treatment, the safety of her children, etc.

In 1839, the book *American Slavery: As It Is* was published anonymously by white abolitionists who believed they could destroy the pro-slavery arguments by exposing in print the horrors of slave life. They relied on the accounts of white people who had observed slavery firsthand or had gained information from slaveholders and their friends. The work was compiled and collated primarily by Angelina and Sarah Grimke, two outspoken abolitionists. Because their brother had fathered children by a black female slave, they were particularly concerned about the sexual exploitation of black female slaves. For many other white female abolitionists the sole motivating force behind their anti-slavery efforts was the desire to bring an end

to sexual contact between white men and black female slaves. They were not concerned about the plight of enslaved black women, but about saving the souls of white men whom they believed had sinned against God by their acts of moral depravity. Many pro-slavery white women ultimately denounced slavery because of their outrage at the sexual barbarity of white men. They felt personally shamed and humiliated by what they termed white male adultery (which was in actuality rape). Commenting on her mistress' attitude toward the sexual exploitation of black women, Linda Brent wrote:

I was soon convinced that her emotions arose from anger and wounded pride. She felt that her marriage vows were desecrated, her dignity insulted; but she had no compassion for the poor victim of her husband's perfidy. She pitied herself as a martyr; but she was incapable of feeling for the condition of shame and misery in which her unfortunate, helpless slaves were placed.

The Grimke women sympathized with the plight of black females but Victorian social convention governing behavior did not allow them to graphically expose many of the cruel acts inflicted upon black slave women by white men. Proper decorum prevented them from speaking directly and honestly about the hidden evils of slavery. Angelina Grimke wrote:

We forbear to lift the veil of private life any higher. Let these few hints suffice to give you some idea of what is daily passing behind the curtain which has been so carefully drawn before the scenes of domestic life in slave holding America.

Had Angelina and Sarah Grimke lifted the veil of private life any higher they would have exposed not only slaveowners siring children by black women, but sadistic misogynist acts of cruelty and brutality that went far beyond seduction—to rape, to torture, and even to orgiastic murder and necrophilia.

Modern historians tend to make light of the sexual exploitation of black women during slavery. In his *Daughters of the Promised Land* Page Smith writes:

Most young Southern men doubtless had their initial sexual experience with a compliant slave girl. It was not

unnatural that many of them should continue to indulge themselves after their marriages. In addition there was undoubtedly the attraction of the perverse, of the taboo, the association of darkness with pleasant wickedness, the absence of any danger to the sexual exploiter however unwelcome his attentions may have been. Moreover, there was the tradition of Negro sensuality which may well have worked to make the white wife a more restrained sexual partner. Thus when the Southern male looked to slave women for his basic sexual satisfaction, he increasingly found them there. Since there seems to be in masculine sexuality a measure of aggressiveness and even sadism, passivity and defenselessness seem often to enhance the desirability of the sexual object which was what the Negro woman was for her white masters.

The reader is encouraged by Smith to regard the brutality of white men as merely a case of "boys will be boys." Like many other historians, he paints a picture of slavery in which white men had "normal" male sexual desires that they indulged with submissive slave girls. While he acknowledges the sadism that often prompted sexual exploitation of the black female slave, he minimizes it by implying that it was an extension of "normal" male sexual expression.

The brutal treatment of enslaved black women by white men exposed the depths of male hatred of woman and woman's body. Such treatment was a direct consequence of misogynist attitudes toward women that prevailed in colonial American society. In fundamentalist Christian teaching woman was portrayed as an evil sexual temptress, the bringer of sin into the world. Sexual lust originated with her and men were merely the victims of her wanton power. Socialization of white men to regard women as their moral downfall led to the development of anti-woman sentiment. White male religious teachers taught that woman was an inherently sinful creature of the flesh whose wickedness could only be purged by the intercession of a more powerful being. Appointing themselves as the personal agents of God, they became the judges and overseers of woman's virtue. They instigated laws to govern the sexual behavior of white women, to ensure that they would not be tempted to stray from the straight and narrow path. Severe

punishments were meted out to those women who overstepped the boundaries white men defined as woman's place. The Salem Witchcraft trials were an extreme expression of patriarchal society's persecution of women. They were a message to all women that unless they remained within passive, subordinate roles they would be punished, even put to death.

The numerous laws enacted to govern sexual behavior among early American whites have caused some scholars to conclude that the movement toward sexual repression in colonial society occurred as a reaction against the sexual permissiveness of the colonizers. Andrew Sinclair comments:

The terrible liberty of isolation and the wilderness made some of the first settlers discard their European moral restraints. Cases of bestiality, according to Cotton Mather, were not unknown.... As the first missionaries of the West were told, barbarism was the first danger to the pioneers, "They will think it no degradation to do before the woods and wild animals, what, in the presence of a cultivated social state they would blush to perpetrate." Until a stern public opinion could govern the ethics of a scattered and immigrant society, small governments tried to do what they could to keep up the standards of civilization.

White colonizers sought to suppress sexuality because of their deep fear of sexual feelings, their belief that such feelings were sinful, and their fear of eternal damnation. Colonial white men placed the responsibility for sexual lust onto women and consequently regarded them with the same suspicion and distrust they associated with sexuality in general. Such intense fear and distrust of women bred misogynistic feeling. In the *Troublesome Helpmate*, Katherine Rogers offers an explanation for the emergence of misogynic feeling:

Of the cultural causes of misogyny, rejection of or guilt about sex is the most obvious. It leads naturally to degradation of woman as the sexual object and projection onto her of the lust and desire to seduce which a man must repress in himself. At the same time that he denigrated woman's sexual function, the preoccupation with sex resulting from the attempt to repress desire is apt to make him see her exclusively as a sexual being, more lustful than man and not spiritual at all....

Misogyny can also develop as a result of the idealization with which men have glorified women as mistresses, wives, and mothers. This has led to a natural reaction, a desire to tear down what has been raised unduly high.

Colonial white men expressed their fear and hatred of womanhood by institutionalizing sexist discrimination and sexist oppression.

In the 19th century, the growing economic prosperity of white Americans caused them to stray from the stern religious teachings that had shaped the life of the first colonizers. With the shift away from fundamentalist Christian doctrine came a change in male perceptions of women. 19th century white women were no longer portrayed as sexual temptresses; they were extolled as the "nobler half of humanity" whose duty was to elevate men's sentiments and inspire their higher impulses. The new image of white womanhood was diametrically opposed to the old image. She was depicted as goddess rather than sinner; she was virtuous, pure, innocent, not sexual and worldly. By raising the white female to a goddess-like status, white men effectively removed the stigma Christianity had placed on them. White male idealization of white women as innocent and virtuous served as an act of exorcism, which had as its purpose transforming her image and ridding her of the curse of sexuality. The message of the idealization was this: as long as white women possessed sexual feeling they would be seen as degraded immoral creatures; remove those sexual feelings and they become beings worthy of love, consideration, and respect. Once the white female was mythologized as pure and virtuous, a symbolic Virgin Mary, white men could see her as exempt from negative sexist stereotypes of the female. The price she had to pay was the suppression of natural sexual impulses. Given the strains of endless pregnancies and the hardships of childbirth, it is understandable that 19th century white women felt no great attachment to their sexuality and gladly accepted the new, glorified de-sexualized identity white men imposed upon them. Most white women eagerly absorbed sexist ideology that claimed virtuous women had no sexual impulses. So convinced were they of the necessity to hide their sexuality that they were unwilling to undress to expose sick

body parts to male physicians. A French visitor to America observed, "American women divide their whole body in two parts; from the top to the waist is the stomach; from there to the foot is ankles." On this same subject Page Smith comments:

They were too modest to let a doctor touch their bodies and they could not even bring themselves, in some instances, to describe an ailment, like one young mother with an ulcerated breast who, too prudish to speak frankly to the doctor, described her condition as a pain in the stomach.

Forcing white women to deny their physical beings was as much an expression of male hatred of woman as was regarding them as sex objects. Idealization of white women did not change the basic contempt white men felt towards them. Visitors from foreign countries often noticed the veiled hostility of white men towards white women. One visitor commented:

American men accorded their women more deference, lavished more money on them, regarded them with more respect than was accorded the women of any country. But they did not particularly like them. They did not enjoy their company; they did not find them interesting in themselves. They valued them as wives and mothers, they sentimentalized over them; they congratulated themselves on their enlightened attitude toward them. But they did not (and they do not) particularly like them.

The shift away from the image of white woman as sinful and sexual to that of white woman as virtuous lady occurred at the same time as mass sexual exploitation of enslaved black women—just as the rigid sexual morality of Victorian England created a society in which the extolling of woman as mother and helpmeet occurred at the same time as the formation of a mass underworld of prostitution. As American white men idealized white womanhood, they sexually assaulted and brutalized black women. Racism was by no means the sole cause of many cruel and sadistic acts of violence perpetrated by white men against enslaved black women. The deep hatred of woman that had been embedded in the white colonizer's psyche by patriarchal ideology and anti-woman religious teachings both motivated and sanctioned white male brutality against black women. At the onset of their arrival in the American colonies,

black women and men faced a society that was eager to impose upon the displaced African the identity of "sexual savage." As white colonizers adopted a self-righteous sexual morality for themselves, they even more eagerly labeled black people sexual heathens. Since woman was designated as the originator of sexual sin, black women were naturally seen as the embodiment of female evil and sexual lust. They were labeled jezebels and sexual temptresses and accused of leading white men away from spiritual purity into sin. One white politician urged that blacks be sent back to Africa so that white men would not fornicate or commit adultery. His words were "remove this temptation from us." Although religious white women, white men, and black men argued that white men were morally responsible for sexual assaults on black women, they tended to accept the notion that men succumb to female sexual temptation. Because sexist religious doctrines had taught them that women were the seducers of men, they believed black women were not totally blameless. Frequently, they used the term "prostitution" to refer to the buying and selling of black women for sexually exploitative purposes. Since prostitutes are women and men who engage in sexual behavior for money or pay of some kind, it is a term inaccurately used when applied to enslaved black women who rarely received compensation for the use of their bodies as sexual latrines. Abolitionist women and men labeled black women "prostitutes" because they were trapped by the language of the Victorian ethos. In speaking of the mass sexual abuse of black women, noted black orator Frederick Douglass told an abolitionist audience in Rochester, New York in 1850 that "every slaveholder is the legalized keeper of a house of ill-fame." Yet his words did not begin to accurately describe the sexual exploitation of black women. Douglass informed his audience:

I hold myself ready to prove that more than a million of women, in the Southern States of this Union, are, by laws of the land, and through no fault of their own, consigned to a life of revolting prostitution; that by those laws, in many of the States, if a woman, in defense of her own innocence, shall lift her hand against the brutal aggressor, she may be lawfully put to death... It is also known that slave women,

who are nearly white, are sold in those markets, at prices which proclaim, trumpet-tongued, the accursed purposes by which they are to be devoted. Youth and elegance, beauty and innocence, are exposed for sale upon the auction block; while villainous monsters stand around, with pockets lined with gold, gazing with lustful eyes upon their prospective victims.

It was difficult for abolitionists to discuss the rape of black women for fear of offending audiences, so they concentrated on the theme of prostitution. But the use of the word prostitution to describe mass sexual exploitation of enslaved black women by white men not only deflected attention away from the prevalence of forced sexual assault, it lent further credibility to the myth that black females were inherently wanton and therefore responsible for rape.

Contemporary sexist scholars minimize the impact of sexual exploitation of black women on the black female psyche and argue that white men used the rape of black women to further emasculate black men. Black sociologist Robert Staples asserts:

The rape of the slave woman brought home to the slave man his inability to protect his woman. Once his masculinization was undermined in this respect, he would begin to experience profound doubts about his power even to break the chains of bondage.

Staples' argument is based on the assumption that enslaved black men felt responsible for all black women and were demoralized because of their inability to act as protectors—an assumption that has not been substantiated by historical evidence. An examination of many traditional African societies' attitudes toward women reveals that African men were not taught to see themselves as the protectors of all women. They were taught to assume responsibility for the particular women of their tribe or community. The socialization of African men to see themselves as the "owners" of all black women and to regard them as property they should protect occurred after the long years of slavery and as the result of bonding on the basis of color rather than shared tribal connection or language. Prior to their adoption of white American sexist attitudes toward

women, there was no reason for enslaved African men to feel responsible for all enslaved African women. Assuredly, the sexual assault of black women had an impact on the psyches of black male slaves. It is likely that the black male slave did not feel demoralized or de-humanized because "his" women were being raped, but that he did feel terrorized by the knowledge that white men who were willing to brutalize and victimize black women and girls (who represented no great threat to their authority), might easily have no qualms about totally annihilating black men. Most black male slaves stood quietly by as white masters sexually assaulted and brutalized black women and were not compelled to act as protectors. Their first instincts were toward self-preservation. In her slave narrative, Linda Brent tells readers that black male slaves as a group did not see themselves as the protectors of black slave women. She comments:

There are some who strive to protect wives and daughters from the insults of their master; but those who have such sentiments have advantages above the general mass of slaves... Some poor creatures have been so brutalized by the lash that they will sneak out of the house to give their masters free access to their wives and daughters.

Throughout the years of slavery, individual black men rallied to the defense of black women who were impovated by a sense of Their defense of these women was not motivated by a sense of themselves as the natural protectors of all black women.

Historian Eugene Genovese discusses the sexual exploitation of enslaved black females in *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, and contends:

Rape meant, by definition, rape of white women, for no such crime as rape of a black woman existed at law. Even when a black man sexually attacked a black woman, he could only be punished by his master; no way existed to bring him to trial or to convict him if so brought.

The rape of black women by black male slaves is further indication that, rather than assuming the role of protector, black men imitated the white male's behavior. Genovese concludes:

S to p