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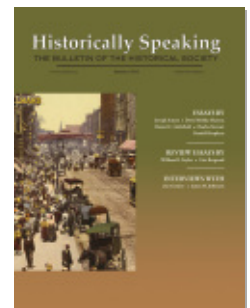
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REFLECTIONS ON THE HISTORY BEHIND THE POETRY OF NATASHA TRETHEWEY

Daniel C. Littlefield

Rita Dove, Pulitzer-Prize winner and former Poet Laureate of the United States as well as of the Commonwealth of Virginia, introduced the nation's newest Poet Laureate Natasha Trethewey's first published volume of poetry by quoting James Baldwin: "People are trapped in history and history is trapped in them."¹ In considering Natasha Trethewey's work, focusing mainly on her Pulitzer-Prize winning volume *Native Guard*, I will ruminate on the history behind some of the poems, or rather the history the poems suggest rather than the personal story they might tell. I am particularly struck by four themes in this volume. There is the theme of violence, most particularly of domestic violence that recalls a personal tragedy and has ramifications that extend far beyond the South, the locus of her poetry, and even beyond the nation. But there is also the violence engendered by war and racism, by dispossession and deprivation, and although these ills also extend far beyond the South and even beyond the nation, I want to contemplate them mainly in the region James Cobb has called "the most southern place on earth." He was referring to the Mississippi Delta, or more particularly to the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta, "the common flood plain of the Yazoo and Mississippi rivers." It is an area that David Cohn described as culturally extending from "the lobby of the Peabody hotel in Memphis" to "Catfish Row in Vicksburg."² But I will follow the Mississippi River to the Gulf Coast and include Louisiana, as Trethewey does in her work, and as many people do who live and work in this section of the country.

There is the theme of miscegenation (and a poem with that title). Trethewey's own parents, she says in interviews, broke two local laws: leaving Mississippi to marry interracially and returning after they had done so. But marriage and miscegenation are not coterminous, and we might explore the meaning of the law and of the practice.

The third theme is the history of slavery and of black soldiers who fought to end it while enduring discrimination from white soldiers for whom that was not a necessary goal. People in the Midwest chanted a ditty that ended "and we're not for the nigger and we are for the war."³ These people identified strongly with Lincoln's promise that if he could save the Union without freeing any slave he would do so. Many, therefore, in the North as well as the South, objected to the social revolution to which the war might seem to be pointing, especially as foretold by the sight of black

men with guns who knew how to use them. More than once white Union soldiers preferred to assault black comrades-in-arms rather than support their



Laureate Natasha Trethewey reading her poem "Elegy for My Father" on PBS Newshour, September 21, 2012.

claims to manhood.⁴ If black soldiers sought to prove their mettle, white soldiers tried mightily to deny it. This attitude helps to explain why, in what George Frederickson styled a *herrenvolk* democracy where most white people did not believe in racial equality, the project of Reconstruction, particularly what W.E.B. Dubois called "Black Reconstruction," never really had a chance.⁵

There is the theme of love of country, in this case of the South, or of a particular location in the South, and of the desire to cling to it despite all the pain and suffering and all the attempts at dispossession. This is the sentiment behind the first lines in Trethewey's poem "Native Guard," which gives title to her prize-winning collection: "Truth be told, I do not want to forget / anything of my former life: the landscape's song of bondage—dirge in the river's throat / where it churns into the Gulf, wind in trees / choked with vines."⁶ It is a sentiment expressed more clearly in the words of an ex-slave in lowcountry South Carolina. "I was bo'n on dis place fo freedom. My mammy and daddy wuked the rice fields. De'se buried here. The first thing I 'member are those rice bank. I grow'd up in dem from dat high. The strength of dese arms and dese legs and of dis ol back is in your rice bank. And the rest of dis body wants to be wit' the strength of de arms and de legs and de back dat is already buried in your rice bank."⁷ The various themes intertwine, are often mutually reinforcing, and are not easy to separate.

"Violence," the radical black activist H. Rap

Brown once proclaimed, "is as American as cherry pie."⁸ Scholars of disparate persuasions have agreed, especially those who study Native America. In many ways the country was born in violence and in that respect the South is not unique. It came to be characterized, however, by a distinctive labor system that required violence to maintain it, and violence remained a regional attribute after it diminished elsewhere. It was a function of slavery and of the desire to maintain white supremacy. However it was softened, slavery depended upon force. "Now I speak what I know," Kenneth Stampp quotes an Arkansas planter, "when I say it is like 'casting pearls before swine' to try to *persuade* a negro to work. He must be *made* to work, and should always be given to understand that if he fails to perform his duty he will be punished for it."⁹ George Washington agreed. The putative father of the nation was in many ways an enlightened slaveowner, a phrase that from our perspective might

sound like a contradictory expression but not within the context of his times. Although scholars pay much attention to the pronouncements of Thomas Jefferson on slavery and freedom and sympathize with his stated desire to liberate his slaves, he made no serious attempt to do so. He freed only a few who were related to him by blood. Nor did he refrain from trying to recapture those who ran away. Washington was perhaps the only highly-placed leader of the Revolutionary generation who owned a significant number of slaves and made provision to free them, even if not until after his death or the death of his wife. During his lifetime, he refused after a certain moment to sell them, although economically that would have been the best course.¹⁰ But he, too, depended upon coercion. He discovered at one point during a busy presidency that his sewing women were each making six shirts a week, which was fewer than expected. He issued directives in no uncertain terms: "Mrs Washington says their usual task was to make nine with Shoulder straps and good sewing:—tell them therefore from me, that what *has* been done *shall* be done by fair or foul means; and they had better make a choice of the first, for their own reputation, & for the sake of peace and quietness."¹¹ "It is a pity," a North Carolina planter commented, "that agreeable to the nature of things Slavery and Tyranny must go together and that there is no such thing as having an obedient and useful Slave, without the painful exercise of undue and tyrannical authority." A North Carolina woman expressed a logical conclusion to that assumption when

she declared her determination, in reference to her domestics, “to make them stand in fear.”¹² Robert F.W. Allston, one of the largest slaveholders in the United States, was a member of the small fraternity of fourteen who owned more than 500 slaves and might have been considered to be immune to public opinion, at least as concerned his personal interests. Nevertheless, he acceded to the consensus and allowed one of his slaves to be lashed though he thought him guiltless of the accusation. Allston declared himself “unwilling to interpose to arrest the punishment which my neighbours thought should be inflicted on” the bondsman. It was, after all, no skin off Allston’s back, and he described the whipping as particularly brutal. In the process, he showed himself to be a good citizen and a respectable member of the community. He showed the slave that violence was omnipresent and unpredictable.¹³

But the violence engendered between master and slave could not be contained within that relationship. The patriarchal image and will to command that planters assumed toward their bondsmen carried over into their personal lives. Landon Carter, for example, one of the largest planters in colonial Virginia, demanded obedience from everyone in his household, including his wife, son, daughter-in-law, and grandson. Accordingly, when one morning his grandson ignored a command to come to breakfast, Carter “reached for his whip and ‘gave’ the child ‘one cut over the left arm,’ and ‘the other over the banister by him.’ The outraged mother, [his daughter-in-law] ‘then rose like a bedlamite,’ and ‘up came her Knight Errant’ [his son]; there were ‘some heavy God damnings,’ but the son, the old man took pains to note, ‘prudently did not touch me. Otherwise my whip handle should have settled him if I could.’”¹⁴ Violence practiced outside the home easily penetrated it. Moreover, in terms of slavery there was no easy distinction between the two; domestics as well as field hands had to be punished; and habits of punishment bred habits of punishment. Consequently, when Landon Carter sought to chastise his grandson he had recourse to the whip.

Slaves could not usually react in violence against their masters, although they did so perhaps more often than is commonly assumed. Instead, they expressed their frustration within their own communities, enacted it perhaps upon their own families or upon the animals in their midst. Against the backdrop of slavery, it is easy to understand the violence that accompanied Reconstruction, that heralded Redemption, and that was crucial to the regime of white supremacy. Anne Moody describes the routine killings that punctuated her upbringing in Mississippi as white people tried to keep black people down. But the system of forceful economic and social exploitation that whites maintained spawned so much rage and violence among blacks that they often turned against other blacks rather than outward against whites. Moody’s cousin was only eight years old when

Moody’s mother asked him to babysit the four-year-old Anne and Anne’s six-month-old sister while the parents worked the cotton fields. “We rarely saw Mama and Daddy,” Anne said, “because they were in the field every day except Sunday. They would get up early in the morning and leave the house just before daybreak. It was six o’clock in the evening when they returned, just after dark.” The eight-year-old boy, himself in need of supervision, loved to roam the



Walker Evans, *Negro Church at Vicksburg, Mississippi*, 1936. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [reproduction number, LC-USF342-T01-008071-A].

woods and being deprived of that outlet while tethered to the younger children, showed his resentment by tormenting them. Anne received regular beatings, and only when he mistakenly set the cabin afire, a mishap he blamed on Anne, was he replaced. It was an early introduction to what was for many a sad fact of southern life, and it opens Moody’s book *Coming of Age in Mississippi*.¹⁵

When Moody’s stepmother Emma had her foot shot away by her sister’s husband, she blamed the social context: “It ain’t Wilbert’s fault,” she told a group of her relatives. “Him and Janie wouldn’t be fightin’ if Wilbert could get a good job and make enough money to take care of them children. If these damn white folks ain’t shootin’ niggers’ brains out they are starvin’ them to death. A nigger can’t make it no way he try in this fuckin’ place. Don’t y’all go blamin’ Wilbert for this. It wouldn’t bring my foot back or make it well. Neither would it help him feed his children.”¹⁶ One might wonder why the family stayed in Mississippi; but, of course, it was home. Many people left, but most did not. There was the tie of kin and culture. Occasionally there was fun. “Saturday night was nigger night all over Mississippi,” Anne Moody reminisced. “Most white folks did not bother to come to town and even the white cops looked lonely and stupid.”¹⁷ There is a saying that it’s great being a Negro in America on a Saturday night. The problem was being a Negro in America the other six days of the week. Moody remembered that some black men came to town Saturday night just to pick a fight with

another black man. “I had often thought that if some of that Saturday night energy was used constructively or even directed at the right objects, it would make a tremendous difference in the lives of Negroes in Mississippi.”¹⁸

These reflections may actually have little to do with the spousal abuse to which Trethewey alludes in “What is Evidence.”¹⁹ The way she explains these events in interviews suggests that the perpetrator was driven by personal demons that might have manifested themselves similarly in Boston, Massachusetts or Munich, Germany. And yet the way in which the story was ultimately acted out, in murderous gunfire in a parking lot, has a distinctly southern and American feel.

The beauty of the landscape, the vitality of the people, and the abiding danger are aptly captured in a scene from James Agee and Walter Evans’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. The book is subtitled *Three Tenant Families* and one expects it to be about poor white people in the cotton South—the hookworm South, the South of many myths and few legends. Certainly most of the pictures are of poor white people, though in a few cases it is hard to tell the complexion. But in the narration there is an almost inextricable mixture of black and white and it recalls to me a stanza from Trethewey’s poem “Flounder” from her first book,

Domestic Work:

reeling and tugging hard at the fish
that wriggled and tried to fight back
A flounder, she said, *and you can tell*
‘cause one of its sides is black.

The other side is white, she said.

It landed with a thump.

I stood there watching that fish flip-flop,
switch sides with every jump.²⁰

Agee and Evans came upon an African-American church they wanted to photograph and finding no one about they thought to break in.

While we were wondering whether to force a window a young negro couple came past up the road. Without appearing to look either longer or less long, or with more or less interest, than a white man might care for, and without altering their pace, they made a thorough observation of us, of the car, and of the tripod and camera. We spoke and nodded, gravely, as they passed, and glanced back once, not secretly, nor long, nor in amusement. They made us, in spite of our knowledge of our own meanings, ashamed and insecure in our wish to break into and possess their church, and after a minute or two, I decided to go after them.

As he follows them up the road, he observes them:

They were quite young, soberly buoyant of body, and strong, the man not quite thin, the girl not quite plump, and I remember their mild and sober faces, hers softly wide and sensitive to love and to pleasure, and his resourceful and intelligent without intellect and without guile, and their extreme dignity, which was as effortless, unvalued, and undefended in them as the assumption of superiority which suffuses a rich and social adolescent boy; and I was taking pleasure also in the competence and rhythm of their walking in the sun, which was incapable of being less than a muted dancing, and in the beauty in the sunlight of their clothes, which were strange upon them in the middle of the week.

As he sauntered after them, they looked back and continued on their way, but Agee sped up because he was sure that Evans would go ahead with the photography whether anyone gave him permission or not, and Agee wanted to be there when he did so.

At the sound of the twist of my shoe in the gravel, the young woman's whole body was jerked down tight as a fist into a crouch...the rear foot skidding in the loose stone so that she nearly fell, like a kicked cow scrambling out of a creek, eyes crazy, chin stretched tight, she sprang forward into the first motions of a running not human but that of a suddenly terrified wild animal. In the same instant the young man froze, the emblems of sense in his wild face wide open toward me, his right hand stiff toward the girl who, after a few strides, her consciousness overtaking her reflex, shambled to a stop and stood, not straight but sick, as if hung from a hook in the spine of the will not to fall for weakness... I came up to them . . . and stopped a yard short of where they, closely, not touching now, stood, and said, still shaking my head (*No; no; oh, Jesus, no, no, no!*) and looking into their eyes; at the man, who was not knowing what to do, and at the girl, whose eyes were lined with tears, and who was trying so hard to subdue the shaking in her breath, and whose heart I could feel, though not hear...and I trying in some fool way to keep it somehow relatively light, because I could not bear that they should receive from me any added reflection of the shattering of their grace and dignity, and of the nakedness and depth and meaning of their fear.²¹

This passage strikes me as a moving juxtaposition of the beauty and terror of the southern countryside, of the fragility of a peaceful stroll for a young black couple in a pastoral setting and of the transience

of their experience of love and joy. The sudden intrusion that upended their revelry perhaps foreshadowed their future in their native land. Their singular dignity and obvious attractiveness were enough by themselves to bring unwanted attention. If she were indeed, as Agee described her, “glossy-legged without stockings,” and if their pleasure in each other's company was so apparent to a stranger, they represented a target for those resolved to make young black people internalize self-effacement. The fact that this couple's charm and confidence were unconscious may have been its most objectionable feature. Fear

The closeness between blacks and whites under slavery helped to facilitate race mixture by providing white men easy access to enslaved women.

was most acute on the part of the woman, and for good reason. In a white supremacist society, white domination is often enacted sexually, one obvious meaning of Winthrop Jordan's *White Over Black*.²²

Which brings me to laws in Mississippi and elsewhere against miscegenation—laws meant to discourage and to regulate rather than to prevent race mixture. I imagine most historians of the American South will promptly recognize Mary Boykin Chesnut's piquant comment that “the mulattoes one sees in every family exactly resemble the white children—and every lady tells you who is the father of all the mulatto children in everybody's household, but those in her own she seems to think drop from the clouds, or pretends so to think.”²³ In many ways, from the slave's point of view, the pretense was better than the recognition. Recognition required some action and the action, more often than not, was against the slave. Accordingly, one Mrs. Roswell King, Jr. acknowledged the connection between her husband and the children of Judy and Scylla by removing the women from the infirmary after their confinement, having them flogged, and exiling them to the estate's penal colony, away, she presumably hoped, from her husband's grasp.²⁴ The closeness between blacks and whites under slavery helped to facilitate race mixture by providing white men easy access to enslaved women; and the custom of using black women as maids and housekeepers extended these opportunities into freedom. In southern Louisiana, the system of *plaçage* formalized relationships between white men and women of color and offered these women a measure of protection. But the laws were designed to maximize the prerogatives of white men. Mrs. Chesnut wrote that “our old men live all in one house with their wives and concubines,” but in Louisiana, at least, only in that case did the wife have claim for divorce; not that she was guaranteed even then to get it. In other words, neither adultery nor race mixture was a problem if done by the right people in the right way.

Louisiana was distinctive in that it was governed

by civil law, based on Roman precepts, rather than common law, as in other states. Louisiana's civil code, while frowning on “open and notorious” concubinage, also acknowledged and provided for it. Indeed, the expectation of concubinage and its possible social and economic ramifications formed part of the argument against rejecting all petitions for emancipation when Louisiana's legislature considered that action in 1854. Peter Tanner of Rapides Parish, according to Eugene Genovese, opposed the measure as destructive of family life:

Do you wish to retain a negress with whom he had lived in concubinage under the roof or in the neighborhood of the legitimate white wife? Will you by your action inflict upon a white lady such a monstrous wrong as this? . . . Sir, the woman and her bastard brood should be sent away. Her presence can only engender quarrels and turn the domestic hearth into a mortal hell.

Sir, if an examination be made it will be found that such cases as this have led to numberless applications for divorces. We cannot by our act stifle or destroy the feelings of human nature.²⁵

Tanner did not argue against the advisability of taking black mistresses and having mulatto children. Nor did he bring up the obvious fact that the natural family could be *sold* away. As Genovese remarks, the quality of the relationship is assumed. Tanner only wants to be able to fulfill minimal obligations to both the natural and the legitimate family. Of course, the law permitted the white man to accept only those obligations he desired. The children of his *placée* could not legally claim him as father. Consequently, when Andrew Durnford, a free colored slaveholder and son of a prominent white businessman and his colored mistress, was brought to court after his father's death, he prevaricated when asked about their kinship. Cognizant of the law, he replied “I answer that I know nothing. The world said that there was a relationship between the late Thomas Durnford and myself. There may have been for all I know. It requires a wise man to know who is his father.”²⁶ It also requires a wise man to know how to avoid offending, and Durnford knew his audience.

The Mississippi Gulf Coast was in many ways culturally connected to southern Louisiana but its legal system operated differently. Situations recognized in law in Louisiana were not in Mississippi but frequently operated anyway; in both localities, communal attitudes provided the widest possible latitude for white men. When, particularly after the Civil War, this leeway was associated with the credo of white supremacy, it assumed political relevance as well as social justification. It is striking, for example, that when a white farmer raped a black teenager in Madison County, Mississippi, in the 1960s and black folk objected, the farmer grumbled “Them niggers even got the nerve to complain about getting rid of a little pussy since that damn organization [meaning CORE] moved in.” One of his friends added, “I used to could

pick up a nigger anytime; now they is all scared somebody might see them.”²⁷ This was the attitude that caused such fear in the young woman that James Agee encountered on a country road on a weekday morning. In fact, that particular 1960s rape may have occurred partly because of civil rights activity in the county. In the wake of the fall-out after that particular rape, several other rapes of black girls occurred almost certainly to make a point.

Indeed, politics aside, Anne Moody described a regular pattern of disregarding the law where white men and black women were concerned. She related meeting her stepmother’s family in these terms:

Our first stop was at Emma’s sister Ola’s house. Ola had ten children. Before Daddy stopped the car they were swarming around it like bees. When Daddy got out, they swung around his neck almost pulling him down to the ground. “Uncle Moody, we thought ya’ll wasn’t comin’. We was just about to go play,” a tall teak-colored teen-ager with light brown wavy hair hanging to her waist yelled as she clung to Daddy’s neck. Another teen-ager who looked just like her stood clinging to Emma’s arms. They were two of the most beautiful girls I had ever seen. They didn’t look Negroid, Caucasian or anything, they just looked pretty.²⁸

When she met her stepmother’s mother she said:

I was startled to see that she was even darker than I was. “Poppa,” as Emma called her father, was out in the woods in the back of the house. Because Emma looked like the product of mixed marriage and her mother turned out to be so dark, I wondered about Poppa. I knew of cases in Centreville where white men lived openly in common-law marriages with Negro women. Even though they were not allowed to marry because of state laws against mixed marriages, the children bore the name of the father. In another case I’d heard of, a Negro preacher had performed the marriage ceremony and the white man was listed as Negro on the marriage license.²⁹

Emma’s father, it turned out, did look like a white man; he was, Moody said, “as white as any white man I had ever seen.” She was too embarrassed to ask if he *was* white, that is to say, if he had any known African genes.

In this context, it is not as strange as it may seem that Natasha Trethewey’s parents moved back to Mississippi when they got married. They offered an open challenge, but her mother probably knew how far they could go. In her poem “Incident” Trethewey describes a cross-burning on her family’s lawn. But lines in the concluding verse say “When they were done, the men left quietly. No one came./ Nothing really happened.”³⁰ Well, yes and no. The act was clearly a warning but a warning about what? It could have been merely a caution: we’ve got our eyes on you; be care-

ful. We do not like what you’re doing; or, more particularly, we do not like the way you’re doing what you’re doing. This was, after all, a white man with a black woman. (Rather than, for example, a black man with a white woman.) In an interview Trethewey indicates that the cross could actually have been directed at an adjoining black church that had become politically active. The burning cross could have been directed at both the family and the church. Moody points out that after the rapes in Madison County, people began to talk openly about white men with black mistresses; which is to say they began to register some disapproval. Some of the men were high officials and engaged in fairly serious liaisons rather than casual connections. Things openly discussed may not have been as acceptable as things merely whispered about, especially during a period of social change.

There is heartbreak and sorrow in Natasha Trethewey’s poems but courage and resolution, too. There is also a light touch with deep subjects. It is interesting, for example, to compare her “White Lies” from the collection *Domestic Work*, which discourses upon issues of identity, with Langston Hughes’s poem “Cross,” a title that suggests both a process (race mixture) and a burden (the consequences of it).³¹ A serious consideration would require an extended treatment beyond the scope of this essay, and cursory comments will undoubtedly do an injustice to the poignancy of Hughes’s observations and the subtlety and wit of Trethewey’s. But the lure is irresistible. A historical sensibility can readily perceive that Hughes, writing in the 1920s, operated within the tradition of the tragic mulatto and also from the perspective of the willful and unthinking exploitation of black women. He intimates a *soupeçon* of self-hatred that sometimes accompanied the products of those relationships. Although the narrator repents the cursing of his “old white man” and “black old mother,” the ultimate tone is one of rootlessness. Trethewey’s clever and pointed narrative about coming of age, while operating at several levels, can be read as embracing race without denying biracialism. Both poets tell American stories but Trethewey’s is emblematic of American progress. Hers is not singular (except to the extent that every individual’s is) and reflects enduring African-American values, a long American and African-American regional experience, and the complexity of the American present. If her intriguing personal story may not be altogether exceptional, her talent most definitely is so, and her poetry suggests a strong connection to a southern place.

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¹ Rita Dove in her Introduction to Natasha Trethewey, *Domestic Work* (Graywolf Press, 2002), xi.

² James Cobb, *The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity* (Oxford University Press, 1992), vii.

³ The most succinct expression of Midwestern attitudes can be

found in V. Jacque Voegeli, *Free but Not Equal: The Midwest and the Negro during the Civil War* (University of Chicago Press, 1967).

⁴ Bruce Catton, *A Stillness at Appomattox* (Doubleday, 1957), 18, 21.

⁵ George M. Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (Harper & Row, 1971), 61, 64 and *passim*; William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay toward a History of the Part Black People Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1935).

⁶ Natasha Trethewey, *Native Guard* (Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 25.

⁷ Quoted in “The Strength of These Arms: Black Labor, White Rice.” A film copyrighted 1988 by NSPV/Alex West.

⁸ See, for example, Stephan and Abigail Thernstrom, *America in Black and White: One Nation, Indivisible* (Simon & Schuster, 1997), 167.

⁹ Kenneth Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South* [1956] (Vintage Books, 1989), 171.

¹⁰ See James T. Flexner, *George Washington: Anguish and Farewell, 1793-1799* (Little, Brown, 1972), 112-125; 432-448 and *passim*.

¹¹ Quoted in Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Oxford University Press, 1972), 22.

¹² Stampp, *Peculiar Institution*, 141, 146.

¹³ See my “New Introduction,” in J.H. Easterby, ed., *The South Carolina Rice Plantation as Revealed in the Papers of Robert F. W. Allston* (University of South Carolina Press, 2004), xxvii.

¹⁴ Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, 68.

¹⁵ Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (Doubleday, 1968), 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 226.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 316-17.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 317.

¹⁹ Trethewey, *Native Guard*, 11.

²⁰ Trethewey, *Domestic Work*, 35-36.

²¹ James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: Three Tenant Families* [1941] (Houghton Mifflin, 1960), 39-42.

²² Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (University of North Carolina Press, 1968).

²³ Mary Boykin Chesnut, *A Diary from Dixie*, ed. Ben Ames Williams (Houghton Mifflin, 1949), 21-22.

²⁴ Malcolm Bell, Jr., *Major Butler’s Legacy: Five Generations of a Slaveholding Family* (University of Georgia Press, 1987), 280-81.

²⁵ Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (Pantheon Books, 1974), 420.

²⁶ David O. Whitten, *Andrew Durnford: A Black Sugar Planter in Antebellum Louisiana* (Northwestern State University Press, 1981), 11.

²⁷ Moody, *Coming of Age*, 355.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 219.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 220.

³⁰ Trethewey, *Native Guard*, 41.

³¹ Trethewey, *Domestic Work*, 37. For Hughes, see Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel, eds., *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 58-59.