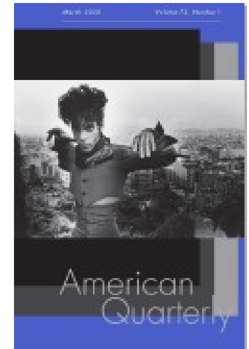
Black Women in Slavery and Freedom: Gendering the History of Racial Capitalism

Shauna J. Sweeney



American Quarterly, Volume 72, Number 1, March 2020, pp. 277-289 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2020.0014

For additional information about this article
https://muse.jhu.edu/article/752340

[This content has been declared free to read by the pubisher during the COVID-19 pandemic.]

Black Women in Slavery and Freedom: Gendering the History of Racial Capitalism

Shauna J. Sweeney

***Bound in Wedlock: Slave and Free Black Marriage in the Nineteenth Century*. By Tera W. Hunter. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017. 416 pages. $19.95 (paper).**

***Contested Bodies: Pregnancy, Childrearing, and Slavery in Jamaica*. By Sasha Turner. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017. 328 pages. $47.50 (cloth). $27.50 (paper).**

***Medical Bondage: Race, Gender, and the Origins of American Gynecology*. By Deirdre Cooper Owens. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017. xiv + 165 pages. $48.95 (cloth). $26.95 (paper). $48.95 (e-book).**

***No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity*. By Sarah Haley. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016. xv + 337 pages. $34.95 (cloth).**

In recent years, a curious debate has emerged over proposals to amend the national currencies of the United States, England, and Canada by featuring prominent black women. In 2015, President Barack Obama announced his intention to substitute Harriet Tubman for Andrew Jackson on the twenty-dollar bill. Treasury Secretary Jack Lew set a deadline of 2020 for circulating the revised Tubman notes, but these lofty plans stalled following Donald Trump's 2016 election. Steven Mnuchin told Congress that Tubman would not make her debut until at least 2028, if at all.[1] Trump's reluctance to print "politically correct" currency reflects broader white hostility to any displacement of white men from the pantheon of American founders.

British legislators recently advocated adding Mary Seacole to the fifty-pound note, following the Bank of England's decision to introduce a more secure polymer currency in 2020. Seacole was a Jamaican-born British nurse and entrepreneur who established the "British Hotel" for sick and wounded soldiers during

© 2020 The American Studies Association

the Crimean War. Seacole used, in part, herbal healing techniques borrowed from her mother, a free woman of color in Jamaica who was known as "The Doctoress." She topped a BBC survey of "Greatest Black Britons" in 2004, and a statue of her likeness was unveiled across from the Houses of Parliament in 2016. As for Seacole gracing any British currency, however, the Bank has yet to make a final determination.[2] Canada, by contrast, successfully introduced a new ten-dollar bill in 2018 featuring Viola Desmond, who was arrested and prosecuted for challenging racial segregation in 1940s Nova Scotia.[3] The acknowledgment of "Canada's Rosa Parks" was welcome in some circles, but it also served to mute criticism of antiblack racism north of the American border. Formal recognition of Desmond does little to ease contemporary segregation, police violence, and premature death for black Canadians.[4] This reminds us to be wary of political demands that traffic in the liberal notion that diversifying chauvinist histories of the nation-state somehow constitutes reparative justice or emancipation. Currency is ideological. As bills pass through our fingers in exchange for goods and services, they quietly communicate a Whiggish tale of Western progress that dishonors the memory of ancestors and does harm to black people now. Acknowledging black women's historical significance by putting their faces on financial paper that originates in their ancestors' commodification and exploitation is cruel irony. These representational gestures, by definition, cannot do justice to the complex, heroic, and tragic lives of black women negotiating the horrors of racial capitalism. Tubman was in but never of the West—she was a political stranger acutely aware of the fact that racialized force relations lurk behind the veneer of Western "civilization."

Attempts to uncritically incorporate black women into the nation-state from which their descendants remain formally and informally excluded—to recommodify those who were once literally commodities—is an unfortunate paradox lost on black currency boosters. They also amount to a narrow, selective engagement with black history or what we might call erasure by way of liberal inclusion. The earliest Afro-diasporic histories, of course, were not to be found in books. Stories of survival, kinship, and perseverance, as well as strategic silences, were passed down through generations in the form of oral traditions. Some intellectuals developed a range of archival practices that constitute the cornerstone of contemporary black scholarship. During the twentieth century, a select group of black men and women entered the ranks of professional historians.[5] Denied entry into segregated archives and marginalized by white historians, these scholars pioneered the field of African American history. And yet, the specific history of black women remained somewhat opaque until women themselves—political activists and early feminists—insisted on

centering the unique experiences of enslaved and free women. Black feminist history represents a counterpoint to neoliberal "inclusivity" and a methodological imperative under racial capitalism.[6]

Important new work on the gendered history of slavery and freedom elucidates the ways in which black women "made history" while resisting the temptation to fold them into historical narratives that reinforce nation-state mythologies. Rather, Sasha Turner, Deidre Cooper Owens, Tera W. Hunter, and Sarah Haley ask us to consider black women as protagonists in the development of modern "freedom," gynecology, marriage, and punishment. This story is one of subjection as much as it is one of negotiation and survival. Drawing on rich archives from across the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Caribbean, these authors excavate the gendered aspects of racial modernity.[7] Each book centers black women or, in the case of Tera Hunter, the gendered institution of marriage, taking up a diverse range of topics that encompass various geographic locations and time periods. Collectively they remind us that it is impossible to write histories of black women that focus solely on violence, abjection, and defeat or on survival, triumph, and transcendence. The antinomy of black life, abjection and hope, informed survival practices and fantasies about life beyond the torment.

These four monographs also do important methodological work. The recent "archival turn" has led scholars of slavery to interrogate the nature and possibility of recovery.[8] Archives, after all, are nothing if not sites of power; their silences tell us as much or more about the past as the documents they preserve.[9] The violence of slavery is enshrined in the very places from which we seek to retrieve its history. To narrate black experiences of bondage, drawing uncritically on a fragmented documentary record, risks reproducing historical erasures within contemporary recovery projects. These powerful insights, however, ought not to translate into a hopelessness about the possibilities for black history. Indeed, the most sophisticated critics of the archive suggest no such thing. Rather, they urge us to think ethically about sources and to be creative in how we narrate the lives of history's dispossessed. To frame the problem of the archive as one that precludes black history rather than as a call for methodological innovation dovetails neatly with racist, neoliberal logics that eliminate the polyvocal voices of black women, past and present. These scholars exemplify a politically engaged, Afro-diasporic historiographical tradition that explicitly links bound black pasts to future emancipations through creative, critical engagements with the archive. They illuminate new aspects of black life during slavery and freedom without catering to a liberal historiographical binary of inclusion/erasure.

In *Contested Bodies: Pregnancy, Childrearing, and Slavery in Jamaica*, Turner demonstrates the centrality of gender and reproduction to the project of abolition in the British Empire. Building on Jennifer L. Morgan's excavation of the gendered foundations of racial slavery in the Atlantic world, Turner shifts our attention to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Jamaica, where enslaved women's reproductive capacities took center stage in imperial debates over the amelioration of slavery. Bearing black children continued to augment the capital of slave owners until the abolition of slavery in 1834, but the principle of *partus sequitur ventrem*, which ensured that an enslaved woman's children were the property of her master, also pervaded the abolitionist fantasy of enslaved women "conceiving freedom."[10] Drawing on a wide range of archival sources, including parliamentary papers, trial records, newspapers, colonial correspondence, and pamphlets, Turner chronicles how prominent antislavery figures like William Wilberforce "linked abolition and colonial reform to the reproductive lives of enslaved women (4)." As early as the 1780s, abolitionists reconfigured enslaved women as bearers of liberal freedom.

British abolitionists believed that protecting enslaved mothers from severe corporal punishment and deadly labor conditions would encourage procreation in colonies like Jamaica. They promoted ameliorative policies to legislators and slave owners alike, emphasizing that "natural increase" rather than the slave trade would best ensure a labor force capable of sustaining Jamaica's sugar economy. Following the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, abolitionists and slave owners each grew increasingly obsessed with black reproduction. No longer simply vessels for financial speculation, women's bodies became discursive grounds for rethinking the imperial political economy. Having given birth to children that were not legally theirs during slavery, abolitionists argued, black women could easily be encouraged to produce future wage laborers whose exploitation would symbolize modern colonial governance. In part, humanitarian pro-natalism reflected the ways in which abolitionists like James Ramsay and William Wilberforce infantilized black mothers as well as their children. Enslaved women suffered horribly, but, in classic Victorian fashion, British philanthropists believed that they lacked sufficient intellectual capacity to discern what was best for themselves and their families. Both slave owners and abolitionists, it seems, assumed that enslaved women would play no part in determining what was best for their own bodies. Turner eschews simple portrayals of "good abolitionists" and "bad slave owners" in order to analyze the ways in which antislavery activists, too, opted in to the speculative fictions of Atlantic capitalism rooted in the commodification of black women.

Enslaved women, meanwhile, asserted new "rights" to motherhood that drew on the legal language of protection. Since abolitionists and legislators staked the success of amelioration on enslaved women's reproductive capacities, enslaved mothers increasingly grounded their political opposition to slavery in the terms of motherhood. One of the great ironies of amelioration, however, was that enslaved women's bodies, habits, and relationships came under even greater scrutiny as a result of humanitarian intervention. Amelioration institutionalized new biopolitical security regimes that policed black behavior and reproduction while leaving the sovereign power of slave owners relatively untouched. Broad metropolitan consensus around "natural increase" intensified the surveillance of black women's reproductive lives, foreshadowing the ways in which "freedom" and Jamaica's post-emancipation free labor economy also came to pivot on black childbearing capacities in the minds of metropolitan observers. British fascination with the reproductive health of enslaved women overlapped with and mobilized new medical discourses about pregnancy, birth, and "cleanliness" that circulated the Atlantic world during the nineteenth century. These too, it turns out, were forged in slavery.

As Britain was abolishing colonial slavery, Native American removal and the domestic slave trade facilitated the consolidation of cotton capitalism in the lower US South. Here, too, reproduction was central, but for different reasons. In an expanding slave society, black women's wombs remained sites of financial speculation. Cooper Owens helps illuminate a new dimension to this story by excavating the captive origins of modern gynecology. In *Medical Bondage: Race, Gender, and the Origins of American Gynecology*, Cooper Owens shows how white doctors in the antebellum period exploited the bodies and minds of enslaved women to develop a new field of medical knowledge. Black women often had little choice but to subject themselves to painful examinations and experimentation. On the other hand, these encounters represented a rare opportunity for black women to receive care when all other avenues had been exhausted. White doctors, for their part, eagerly studied, manipulated, documented, and described black women and their reproductive health. The field of experimental medicine benefited tremendously from the presence of a sizable population of captive subjects in the US South.

Though the surgeries and experiments on enslaved women took place within the relative privacy of the slave hospital or in homes, doctors like James Marion Sims, John Peter Mettauer, and Nathan Bozeman were eager to share their notes about patients and surgical outcomes. White Southern doctors pioneered modern gynecology (acknowledging neither their patients, nurses,

nor other assistants). Cooper Owens stresses that the technical sophistication of the surgeries was only a part of the work accomplished through the procedures. White doctors compiled a corpus of knowledge about the "innate" racial characteristics of black women that legitimated race science and biological racism. Cooper Owens's narrative traverses the birth of American gynecology and enslaved women's experiences of these coerced procedures, making visible the historical process by which medical knowledge emerged. Born in slavery, these practices migrated beyond the plantation to middle-class society. The discipline's disavowal of the slave South as hub of modern knowledge production was part of a broader nineteenth-century tradition of representing the South as archaic in contrast to a modern, industrializing North. Conventional histories of American gynecology continue to identify the opening of a women's hospital in New York in 1855 under the direction of Sims as the discipline's starting point. Cooper Owens shows that Sims honed his craft and built his reputation not in New York but on Alabama plantations during the 1840s and early 1850s (2).

As slaves with illnesses, black women negotiated the impossible options of needing to receive medical care while knowing that they would have little to no control over how and on what terms white male doctors accessed their bodies. Descriptions of these women's ailments that emphasized sexual promiscuity both confirmed and produced racist assumptions about black women's lasciviousness. A close reading of medical journals and doctors' notes reveals the racist presumptions about black women's sexual and moral comportment, as well as their physiognomies, that guided medical inquiry during the nineteenth century. These biological-racial descriptions, Cooper Owens suggests, made it into official medical journals that facilitated the professionalization of reproductive medicine in both the North and the South. An entire medical subfield, then, was forged out of the racist and sexist analysis of the black female body.

Black women's contributions to gynecology, however, went beyond their status as unfree test subjects and survivors of early gynecological procedures. They possessed a wealth of information about pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum healing, and child-rearing on to their kin and communities in ways not seen or appreciated by medical authorities. White doctors drew on black women's knowledge and benefited from their assistance during examinations. Their simultaneous dependence on black women as conduits for developing new scientific methods and their revulsion toward black women's bodies produced what Cooper Owens calls the "medical superbody" (7), one marked as fundamentally different from and inferior to white women's bodies. White

doctors documented black women's bodies and reproductive ailments, cataloging their maladies and symptoms and developing new therapies that were eventually sold to elite white women without any mention of their origin. In the antebellum South, as in the Jamaican case studied by Turner, black women's reproductive capacities were the terrain on which new kinds of knowledge were tested, debated, and reworked.

If reproduction was central to abolition in the Caribbean and the reconstitution of slavery in the US South, Hunter offers the institution of marriage as an additional lens through which to view the gendered history of slavery and freedom. In *Bound in Wedlock: Slave and Free Black Marriage in the Nineteenth Century*, the eminent historian of African American life draws on an array of legal decisions, legislation, freedom petitions, letters, pension claims, and court transcripts to unearth the previously unwritten history of black marriage during the long nineteenth century. During the antebellum period, marriage was a concession made by planters who thought themselves benevolent. The fact of the marriage did not preclude the sale of either spouse or their children, making the formal commitment precarious from the start. As slaves, marriage was always haunted by what Hunter calls "the third flesh," in which "marriage was not an inviolable union between two people but an institution defined and controlled by the superior relationship of master and slave" (6). Even once freed or living in free states, black marriages remained on unsure footing. If civil or religious officials agreed to marry freedpeople, the validity of these unions could be questioned and ultimately rejected in court.

The legal rationales governing enslaved and free black unions were often inchoate and varied from state to state. In response, African American couples strategically seized on the indeterminacy of local marriage laws to push for formal recognition that could insulate their families from violent forced separation and, depending on the context, might even secure their freedom. Indeed, enslaved people's legal petitions to remain in free states or on local plantations often invoked their marriages, forcing states and the federal government to clarify the legal definition of marriage and freedom for all people as well as the racial parameters of American citizenship. Hunter shows how black couples leveraged the official misunderstandings about their marriages to launch legal battles to preserve their unions and their freedoms.

Hunter's careful reading of correspondence and testimony from around the United States reveals that while the decision to marry was often personal, African Americans also understood it to be "at the foundation of liberation because it had been at the foundation of racial subordination" (7). Enslaved

people who sought to be married encountered numerous obstacles from slave owners, local magistrates, Southern courts, and white clergy. But this is not the whole story. At the heart of Hunter's book is another argument about the intertwined histories of slavery's property regime and the emergence of modern civil institutions like marriage, for black and white alike. The legal foundations of both slavery and marriage evolved significantly during the nineteenth century, amid a growing sectional conflict between North and South. In the Northern states, marriage was increasingly defined in opposition to the chattel principle: the former, unlike the latter, involved consent, love, and the absence of violence. Southerners, by contrast, defined slavery as a type of marriage. Indeed, Hunter's work extends Stephanie McCurry's analysis of the legal and ideological kinship between slavery and marriage in the antebellum South.[11] Union victory in the Civil War signaled the triumph not only of wage labor over slave labor but also Northern ideas about what constituted legitimate marriage arrangements. New federal policies sanctioned African American relationships that had previously been governed by slave owners or individual states. This "first civil right," however, proved less conducive to black autonomy than many freedpeople hoped. "Marriage rights invited new forms of racial subjugation" (15), as Southern state governments and white employers, who only several years earlier conspired to invalidate the legitimacy of African American marriages, now mobilized penal sanctions against those African Americans who did not marry. As in the British Caribbean, freedom invited new regimes of punitive surveillance aimed at maintaining white power after slavery. Legal recognition of black marriages remained precarious after the Civil War, but African American couples continued to seek formal recognition while strenuously resisting state intrusion into their lives.

Hunter's legal history is accompanied by a rich social history of the quotidian wishes, desires, and frustrations of black people "bound in wedlock." This genealogy of African American marriage is not a romantic portrayal of respectable couples or nuclear families. Hunter draws attention to those individuals and couples who purposefully avoided marriage or who were abandoned by their prospective partners and acknowledges the matrifocal unit as "the most enduring family form" (20). Racist myths about the pathological black family were first invoked by slaveholders to justify the domestic slave trade and have since been taken up by a slew of liberal social scientists including Daniel Patrick Moynihan. *Bound in Wedlock* is a decisive empirical rejection of this lingering ideology. Inaccurate and racist arguments that blame black mothers for poverty, mass incarceration, and gun violence mask what Hunter reveals:

America's tradition of lawfully policing and destroying black families by constantly shifting the terms on which they could be constituted. The battle to preserve family, whether legally recognized or not, was at the heart of black social life under slavery and freedom.

Hunter's analysis of how freedom introduced new forms of state surveillance of African American marriage resonates powerfully with Haley's *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity*. In the wake of emancipation, Haley argues, the proliferation of ideologies about black women's otherness—morally, sexually, and criminally—justified widespread state violence against freedwomen in the US South. An expanding carceral sphere, one that confined increasing numbers of emancipated women to convict-lease camps and prison farms, served to mark black women as fundamentally different from white women, who were, by contrast, figured as vulnerable, delicate, and worthy of protection.

Haley draws on personal papers, legislation, correspondence, and newspapers, to show in careful detail how Jim Crow gender ideologies about black women produced and ultimately justified the mobilization of racial violence. Carceral institutions were key sites for this violent forging of stable categories, as Haley points out, "not merely by distinguishing men from women, but by sedimenting invented taxonomies of female subjects with race as the vestibule of absolute difference, a fixed dividing line that constructs gender" (8). In convict camps and on chain gangs, as in the slave hospital of Sims described by Cooper Owens, the spectacularized violation of black women served to entrench them as outside femininity and womanhood.

In the postbellum South, narratives of black women's inferiority were routed through allegations about their poor child-rearing practices. Stories of "bad mothering" proliferated in Southern newspapers, helping to consolidate the image of the reckless and terrible black woman that, in turn, served to maintain rigid hierarchies of race and gender. Black children, Haley convincingly argues, only mattered to the state when they became reasons to punish black mothers (55–56). The co-construction of race and gender was evident in the differential punishments black and white mothers received for infanticide. Narratives of white women's delicacy or victimization not only helped procure lenient sentences for them but also helped create their binary opposite: the pathological black mother. The connections between derogatory depictions of black motherhood and enduring desires to mobilize black women's labor transcended the moment of emancipation and endured as one of the most significant afterlives of slavery.

Haley does not simply unearth these ideological processes—an important feat in itself—but goes on to show how black women practiced the art of refusal when and where they could. Haley highlights how black women documented their own suffering and encoded it in their letters, diaries, and songs. In doing so, imprisoned women "produced epistemologies that refused and destabilized Western juridical logics, individually and collectively upset carceral temporalities and spatiality, and reimagined spaces of dispossession in ways the fundamentally challenged Jim Crow modernity by making its gendered carceral logic visible" (200). In this way, Haley models a black feminist archival practice, one that successfully combines a careful reading of primary sources, creative engagement with black women's own words and work, and critical fabulation of what could have possibly been, hewing closely to what Toni Morrison identified as truth rather than fact.[12] Alongside their blues creations, black women committed acts of sabotage and stubborn acts of quiet defiance that collectively embody the preservation of ontological totality at the heart of what Cedric J. Robinson calls the Black Radical Tradition.[13]

The lives illuminated by these books promise to light our path through the terrible terrain of our present moment; these books are repositories of past struggles and roadmaps for future liberation. Black women—as workers, mothers, knowledge creators—were on the front lines of defense against modernity's assault on black, working-class life. Despite the generational violence they encountered, countless black women waged ontological warfare so as to preserve a space for human flourishing, one ripe with possibilities for a just future that yet remains on the political horizon.

Together, then, these authors do far more than teach us something new about gender, marriage, reproduction, punishment, and black politics during slavery and freedom. They historicize the sociological categories used by scholars to assess the past, demonstrating how black women directly and indirectly shaped the stabilization of normative categories. They also constitute an important piece of the labor history missing from new scholarly literatures on capitalism. Black women were indispensable to capital accumulation and to the very mechanisms of differentiation that constitute capitalism's condition of possibility. The histories of liberal freedom, marriage, motherhood, medicine, and the carceral state that unfold in these new books constitute a theory of "gendered racial capitalism" (Haley 8) that remains largely absent from the new histories of slavery and capitalism. If black women appear in this work, they come into view primarily as victims of sexualized torture or as commodified labor. Their epistemological and political lives rarely make an appearance. The chasm between historical scholarship in the black feminist

tradition and new histories of capitalism point to the ways in which even radical scholarship, that is, research aimed at denaturalizing capitalism and inequality, can still perpetuate the historical erasures of black women that underpin racial capitalism. Histories of capitalism that ignore or insufficiently engage with the ways in which race and gender—together and simultaneously—structured regimes of accumulation will always necessarily be incomplete. The answer, however, is not to incorporate black women into established frameworks but to ask a different set of questions, as these books do, about the place of black women and gender in the construction of the very categories that scholars use to assess politics, economics, science, and medicine.

Turner, Cooper Owens, Hunter, and Haley teach us a great deal about the history of black women in the Americas. Three of the four monographs, however, focus exclusively on the United States, and Turner's study of Jamaica is located squarely in the Anglo-Atlantic world. Given the incredible strides made in the history of the African diaspora beyond the United States, putting these works in conversation with a robust scholarship on the history of black women in Africa, Latin America, the French or Spanish Caribbean, Brazil, and Canada can only enrich our understanding of the gendered nature of slavery and freedom.[14] What methodological and political insights might be gleaned from bracketing the United States as a metonym for the black experience in order to tease out the continuities and discontinuities between various national histories of black women? Achieving truly internationalist black feminist methodology will surely prove difficult, and likely impossible for any one scholar to realize on their own, but it is certainly a goal worth pursuing if we want black women's history to be as global as black women.

Black women's history is thriving, and these four works represent the field's gold standard. However, a nagging inverse correlation persists. As historians continue to uncover, with greater sophistication, the lives of black women in the past, working-class black women in the present continue to experience exploitation and new levels of degradation in terms of child and mother mortality rates, poverty, and incarceration. This contradiction brings into critical relief the fact that scholarship on its own without political action is insufficient. But politics, too, requires history, or the stories we tell each other about past struggles, victories, and defeats. The histories offered by Turner, Cooper Owens, Hunter, and Haley provide exactly the kind of insurgent stories, gleaned from what Kelly Lytle Hernandez calls the "rebel archive," that point toward human liberation amid our own dark times.[15] This seems the most important historical lesson to be drawn from these erudite studies and one that certainly does not fit on a dollar bill.

Notes

1. Alan Rappeport, "See a Design of the Harriet Tubman $20 Bill That Mnuchin Delayed," *New York Times*, June 14, 2019.
2. Josh Gabbatiss, "Call for Black Person to Feature for First Time on New Plastic £50 Note," October 13, 2018, *www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/new-50-pound-note-polymer-black-british-woman-currency-campaign-a8582466.html.*
3. Bank of Canada, "A Bank NOTE-able Canadian Woman: Viola Desmond, 1914–1965," accessed October 9, 2019, *www.bankofcanada.ca/banknotes/vertical10/banknoteable-woman/.*
4. Beverly Bain, Rinaldo Walcott, Idil Abdillahi, and Christina Sharpe, "Toronto's Emancipation Month: Why Black Canadians Need Not Celebrate," *NOW Toronto*, July 30, 2019. See also, Rinaldo Walcott and Idil Abdullahi, *BlackLife: Post-BLM and the Struggle for Black Freedom* (Winnipeg, ARP Books, 2019).
5. Carter G. Woodson, *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861* (New York: Putnam, 1915); W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1935); Eric Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944); Elsa V. Goveia, *A Study of the Historiography of the British West Indies to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1990).
6. Transnational Black Feminism, from 1970s onward, laid the political groundwork for the professionalization of Black Women's History. Examples of this now-vast bibliography include Claudia Jones, "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman" (1949); Barbara Smith, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," *Radical Teacher*, no. 7 (March 1978): 20–27; Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Random House, 1981); Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983); Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984); Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17 (1987): 64–81; bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End, 1989). The study of slavery featured prominently in early black feminist scholarship. See, e.g., Angela Y. Davis, "The Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," *Black Scholar: Journal of Black Studies and Research* 3 (December 1971): 2–14; Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: Norton, 1985); Hilary Beckles, *Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989).
7. On racial modernity, see Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
8. Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12.2 (2008): 1–14; Laura Helton, Justin Leroy, Max A. Mishler, Samantha Seeley, and Shauna Sweeney, eds., "The Question of Recovery: Slavery, Freedom, and the Archive," special issue, *Social Text* 33.4 (2015); Brian Connolly and Marisa J. Fuentes, "Introduction: From Archives of Slavery to Liberated Futures?," *History of the Present* 6.2 (2016): 105–16; Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).
9. Michel Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon, 1997).
10. Camillia Cowling, *Conceiving Freedom: Women of Color, Gender, and the Abolition of Slavery in Havana and Rio de Janeiro* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).
11. Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). On marriage in the age of emancipation, see Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Era of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
12. Morrison distinguishes between fact and truth in writing about slavery in "The Site of Memory," in *Inventing Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, ed. William Zinsser (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 83–102. For "critical fabulation," see Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 11.
13. Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

14. Examples of work that engages this kind of method include Cowling, *Conceiving Freedom*; Diana Paton and Pamela Scully, eds., *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Pernille Ipsen, *Daughters of the Trade: Atlantic Slavers and Interracial Marriage on the Gold Coast* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Condomblé* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).
15. Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771–1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).