Slave Women in the New World
Morrissey, Marietta

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NOTES

Chapter One. A Theoretical Overview


2. There has been violence against women wherever they are held as the property of men (Martin 1983). As later discussion reveals, male slave "ownership" of female slaves was usurped in slavery and perhaps reasserted where, as in the U.S. South, slave families achieved some independence from masters. Although not a constant theme in seventeenth- through nineteenth-century commentary, bondmen's abuse of slave women is occasionally noted or suggested. See, for example, Moreau de Saint Méry (1958, vol. 1, p. 57) and Mrs. Carmichael (1834, vol. 1, p. 266).

3. In the U.S. South, male slaves controlled provision grounds and distributed earnings in a patriarchal way associated historically with agrarian societies. "Garden patches were assigned to the husbands and the money earned from sale of crops from these patches was held in his name" (Fogel and Engerman 1974, p. 142).

4. "In the Jamaican slave kinship network, the maternal bond was the key element, for a grown son tended to live with his mother until her death or stayed as close as possible in the house next door" (Dunn 1977, p. 48).

5. "Mothers were of fundamental importance in child rearing—in Africa as well as in the slave quarters—and the control of the kitchen and the involvement of women in the informal market networks developed by West Indian slaves reinforced the mothers' role in the slave households. But fathers remained much more important than is suggested" (Craton 1982, p. 49).

6. The significant exception is the Spanish West Indies, where eighteenth- and nineteenth-century prices of females were about one-third those of males.

7. Hindess and Hirst (1975) criticize Genovese's emphasis on the internal contradictions of U.S. slavery and argue that political pressures from western farmers brought about its end.

8. Mintz's (1974, 1978) stress on the growing of provisions as integral to the success of some Caribbean slave systems has influenced my thinking on slave-based plantation economies in the New World and women's place in them. The implications for women slaves are significant, as production of provisions, especially on private plots, offers a context and an explanation for women's economic strength. This point is made, of course, in much academic literature on households in the world economy, distinguishing as it does women's fundamental roles in production from the apparently mundane tasks of sustaining a household. Mintz (1978) also points out inherent contradictions between the slaves' nutritional self-sufficiency in much of the region and the slaveholders' need for slaves' labor time to be spent in commodity production.

9. Other important explanations grounded in the dynamics of capitalist growth rather than the intrinsic failures of slavery include emphasis on the acceptable alternatives to slavery available in technology and contract labor (Moreno Friginals 1978; Rodney 1981).

10. "From the standpoint of the grower, the greatest defect of slavery lies in the fact that it quickly exhausts soil. The labor supply of low social status, docile and cheap,
can be maintained only by systematic degradation and by deliberate attempts to suppress its intelligence. Rotation of crops and scientific farming are therefore alien to slave societies” (Williams 1966, p. 7).

11. Such a synthesis has been discouraged by the political and ideological importance of stressing the unique and fixed status of slaves. The unfortunate result is a deep insensitivity to women’s experiences, expressed in the claim that status and implicitly race were always more significant at the legal and symbolic levels than was gender.

12. This view is not far from one claiming that “primitive communist” societies use women as a unit of trade; only here it is suggested that men’s traditional right to subordinate exchange has been usurped by slave owners. The result is equality of male and female slaves. Leacock’s comments are relevant: “Only when the genders in primitive communist societies are understood as economically independent exchanges of goods and services, can the full force of capitalist relations in subverting the labor of women, and therefore transforming the entire structure of relationships in such societies, be appreciated” (Leacock 1983, p. 280).

Chapter Two. Women in New World Slavery

1. The Brazilian case is not considered here. Its structural differences from the U.S. South and the Caribbean and internal complexity merit extensive commentary. Suffice it to say here that Brazil is frequently grouped with the Caribbean and Latin America in contrasts between the U.S. South and other slave societies in the Americas. Comparison to Spanish colonies, with large settler populations, has a long tradition (Genovese 1965; Tannenbaum 1946; Sio 1965). Recent research asserts the integrity of Brazilian slavery and its relationship to the cultivation of sugar and other forms of production by slaves (see Klein 1986 for a general review).

2. Slave women’s position in U.S. and Caribbean urban settings was probably more similar than that of fieldworkers. Cities generally offered slave women more autonomy and independence than residence on plantations (Jones 1986; Mathurin 1974).

3. Fox-Genovese and Genovese (1983, p. 59) state that slavery, with its economies of scale, offered “financial advantages” but could not “lay the foundation for sustained growth and qualitative development.”

4. Genovese (1979, p. xv) qualifies his terminology: “Never an independent mode of production or form of government, slavery in the Americas constituted a social formation and a particular set of social relations of production within a declining seigneurial (‘feudal’) and a rising capitalist mode of production, under the governance of the attendant political relations of property and authority.” See Dupuy (1985) for further discussion of the suitability of the “slave mode of production” to the Caribbean, particularly the French West Indies.

5. In 1860 slaves accounted for 47 percent of Louisiana’s population, 45 percent of Alabama’s, 44 percent of Georgia’s, 31 percent of Virginia’s, 25 percent of Tennessee’s, and 20 percent of Kentucky’s (Genovese 1979, p. 15).

6. There remains extensive debate on the profitability of slavery, the role of planting classes, and other political forces, including the abolition movement, in the demise of slavery in the U.S. South. Wallerstein (1976) makes the important and finally irrefutable point in discussing these debates: that, whatever the first cause, there was an inexorable movement away from slavery in the mid-eighteenth century that underscores the unsuitability of this form of labor organization to the world’s emergent twentieth-century political economies and their ideological superstructures.
7. Dunn (1972, pp. 16-17) argues that the militancy of the Spanish and indigenous Caribbean peoples discouraged the British from settling larger islands and from cultivating crops that could make the fortunes they had hoped to find in the wild Caribbean. They became instead “modest tobacco and cotton farmers” in the early seventeenth century on the smaller and apparently less desirable Barbados and on St. Christopher, Nevis, Antigua and Montserrat, and the Lesser Antilles.

8. Half of householders owned slaves in tidewater counties of coastal Virginia and Maryland of the 1750s, indicating a concentration of slaves and that most slaves were on small plantations (Kulikoff 1986, pp. 6, 332).

9. Blacks in the Chesapeake area probably maintained their populations in the 1720s or 1730s (Kulikoff 1986, p. 5), in contrast to the West Indies where larger estate size, the rigorous sugar planting regimen, and related demographic and physiological factors impeded the reproduction of slave populations, often until after emancipation.

10. Fogel and Engerman’s (1974, p. 29) breakdown is: United States, 36 percent; Brazil, 31 percent; British Caribbean, 15 percent; Spanish America, 11 percent; French Caribbean, 4 percent; Dutch, Danish, and Swedish islands, 2 percent. This period did not constitute a peak in slaveholding in the British, the French, or most other islands in the Caribbean, although it did in the United States, Cuba, and Dutch-held Surinam.

11. There are three island groups in the Caribbean. The Greater Antilles are the largest islands and run in a line southeast from the tip of Florida. They include Jamaica, Cuba, Hispaniola (now Haiti and the Dominican Republic), and Puerto Rico. The Lesser Antilles are made up of many small islands and are located in an arc east and south of the Greater Antilles. The most notable and frequently discussed in slave studies are the Leewards (St. Christopher [also called St. Kitts], Nevis, Montserrat, Antigua); the Windwards (Dominica, Grenada, St. Vincent, St. Lucia); Trinidad, Barbados, Guadeloupe, and Martinique; and the Virgin Islands (particularly St. Croix, St. John, and St. Thomas). The Bahamas are the third island group, located significantly northeast of the other islands. Bermuda, north of the West Indies and directly east of South Carolina in the Sargasso Sea, is of interest as an example of the use of slaves by European settlers in maritime work. Guyana and Dutch Surinam, also of importance in the study of Caribbean slavery, are countries on the northeast coast of South America. The development of slave-based sugar production there and colonization by European powers with other regional interests have led to their inclusion in many studies of the Caribbean.

12. Dunn (1972, p. 188) notes that Barbados’s “sugar fetched a higher price per acre or laborer, paid lower English import duties, and suffered less from a glutted home market” than did its principal U.S. mainland competitor, Chesapeake tobacco.

13. Dirks (1987, p. 12) argues that plantation agriculture is made unique by the repetitive tasks demanded of the work force and the close watch needed over workers. Small-scale cash crop farming belies this and many other generalizations about the plantation.

14. African slave women were often subfecund, like their West Indian counterparts. Voluntary fertility control apparently played a large role in this condition, but the general health and welfare of the slaves—presumably influenced by their workload—may well have had an impact (Meillassoux 1983).

15. Fogel and Engerman (1974, p. 141) maintain that in the cotton culture of the U.S. South slave women did relatively little field labor and rarely worked in the plow gangs (see also Jones 1982). Others offer evidence of the varied nature of women’s work in cotton cultivation and its frequent significance (White 1985).
16. Dunn (1977, p. 54), for example, finds that women “did much of the heavy labor at Mount Airy” in early nineteenth-century Virginia, “but more of them worked in craft or domestic jobs, and nearly half were excused from employment.” On the comparable Mesopotamia sugar estate in Jamaica, “female slaves did much more of the basic labor” than at Mount Airy.

**CHAPTER THREE. GENDER RATIOS AND CARIBBEAN SLAVERY**

1. Although these data are not necessarily indicative of a majority of women, a majority of men is equally unlikely.

2. The reasons for the preponderance of local births among U.S. slaves have not been clearly distinguished or agreed on, although commentary is extensive. The close of the slave trade was important, but there are other pertinent factors: masters’ encouragement of slave marriage and reproduction (Fogel and Engerman 1974); smaller units of production, also fostering the formation of nuclear families (Fogel and Engerman 1974; Jones 1982); less time between births, perhaps occasioned by shorter periods of breast feeding (Klein and Engerman 1978); and comparatively less oppressive work for male and female slaves alike (Dunn 1977).

3. Jesuit and Bethlehemite friars were an exception to the Cuban rule, importing women and forcing them to marry slave men. The Jesuits followed the same practice in Martinique and were well known for the high birth rates on their estates (Peytraud 1973, p. 208). Spain expelled the Jesuit order from Cuba in 1767, in part because of their experiments in the humane treatment of slaves (Marrero 1983, p. 7).

4. Deerr (1949–1950, p. 277) reports resulting gender ratios of 1.46 males to 1 female in Guadeloupe in 1730 and 1.39 males to 1 female in Saint Domingue in 1754. The latter figure differs substantially from Debien’s (1974, p. 366) estimate of the female slave population in Saint Domingue in the eighteenth century, at only 5 percent, and Moreau de Saint Méry’s (1958, vol. 1, p. 57) eighteenth-century claim that as many female slaves were found in Saint Domingue as males.

5. Other societies were similarly dominated by youthful slaves. Since the 1600s most new slaves to the French West Indies were between 24 and 30 years old (Debien 1974, p. 366). The same “bulge in the middle age range” was found in the British West Indies (Craton 1974, p. 199).

6. In the early 1800s Pinckard (1970, vol. 3, p. 354) observed the public sale of slaves from a Dutch vessel in Demerara, with women valued at from 700 to 800 guilders, and men from 700 to 900 guilders. Demerara was developing as a sugar-producing society and slave women were still substantially outnumbered by males in the 1816–1818 registration period, with 1.3 males for every female (Roberts 1977, p. 154).

7. Records from the ship of Captain Lawrence Spain, arriving at Christianbourg castle on December 15, 1726, indicate that 50 males left Africa, valued at 48 rigsdalers each, and 25 females, each also priced at 48 rigsdalers. They were sold at an equal price in St. Thomas (Westergaard 1917, p. 130).

8. Yet Knight (1970), Genovese (1965), and Moreno Fraginals (1978) have all stressed the national bourgeois character of Cuban planters in contrast to the mercantile orientation of other West Indian slaveholders. This interpretation implies more regard for cost savings, particularly in the interest of reproduction of the labor force, than Cuban slaveholders exhibited in their decided preference for male slaves.

9. DuTertre (1958, vol. 2, p. 462) describes three kinds of Africans who were sold to international slave traders: (1) war prisoners, (2) criminals condemned to death, and (3) thieves condemned to banishment. Labat (1930, vol. 2, p. 36) adds to these groups
the slaves of princes, along with stolen people. See also Gaston-Martin (1948, pp. 59–60) and Jesse (1961, p. 139).

10. "The proportion of female slaves in Cuba was always very low, usually estimated at one-third the number of males. A certain resistance existed in Cuba against having female slaves on the plantations, since they were thought a source of distraction; nor were slave marriages generally thought desirable" (Corwin 1967, p. 15).

11. Church records reveal that the ratio of slave marriages to population in Cuba was nearly the same as that for whites in the early 1800s (Klein 1967, pp. 96–97).

12. The slaves could not be prohibited from forming unions, often recognized by slaveholders, if not by law. Such unions were always vulnerable to separations through the sale of a partner. The fragile nature of slaves' conjugal unions supports Patterson's argument that slaves were bondless in the symbolic order and undermines the significance of Klein's (1967, p. 38) contention that the Spanish West Indian planters' recognition of the slaves' "legal personality" offered rights to "personal security, property, marriage . . . parenthood."

13. Klein (1983) offers evidence that refutes other explanations of why males were preferred to female slaves, for example, that females were more costly and difficult to ship or experienced higher mortality in passage. See also Robertson and Klein (1983), Meillassoux (1975, 1983) and Terbour-Penn (1986) for discussions of women's significance in African slavery.

14. After the revolution gender ratios in British areas of Saint Domingue changed dramatically as a result of flight from plantations and the termination of slave imports. Using data from 1796 and 1797, drawn from 200 plantations housing more than 15,500 slaves, Geggus (1982, p. 292) found that men slightly outnumbered women on coffee estates, with 103 males for every 100 females. On sugar estates the ratio was 93 males for every 100 females.

Chapter Four. Household Economies

1. Ligon (1657) claimed that slaves' houses in Barbados were never more than 5 feet square. Descriptions of slaves' dwellings are remarkably similar for the region. On St. Croix, for example, houses were of "withes, daub and wattle style. Upright poles were laced with branches and a daub thrown on made from clay or cow dung base" (Lewisohn 1970, p. 118; see also Flint 1834, p. 247; Carmichael 1834, vol. 1, pp. 124–130; Fouchard 1981, p. 51; Diaz Soler 1974, p. 163; Tomich 1976, p. 224).

2. House building remains the prelude to family formation in some areas of the Caribbean today (Dirks and Kerns 1976).

3. Moreton (1793, pp. 150–151) repeats a slave song in which a man laments his life without the domestic help of a wife.

4. DuTertre (1958, vol. 2, p. 475) reported that young French West Indian slave children wore no clothing. Children were naked in St. Vincent in the 1830s (Carmichael 1834, vol. 2, p. 10). A traveler to the Danish Virgin Islands in 1758 found most field slaves unclothed (Hall 1975, p. 180). In urban Antigua in the late 1700s, Janet Schaw observed women with "nothing on their bodies" (1939, p. 87). Atwood (1791, p. 260) noted that slaves had clothes on the English estates of Dominica, unlike the French. Stedman (1971, p. 370) found black women slaves naked above the waist but mulatto slave women clothed. See also Leslie (1740, p. 36), Pinckard (1970, vol. 1, pp. 229, 258–259), and Schoelcher (1948, p. 34).

5. Infant mortality increased, as women could not nurse their children sufficiently (Ortiz 1975, p. 260).

7. The Code Noir and Penal Code forbade free Saturdays in place of rations, but both were ignored by planters (Tomich 1976, p. 206). Slaveholders in the Danish Virgin Islands also traded days for rations, despite legal prohibitions enacted in 1755 (N. Hall 1977, p. 176).

8. Slaves rarely produced estate crops for sale. Mintz (1983, p. 234) describes this phenomenon in British Guiana: "Though its very sparse settlement prevented the growth of a flourishing internal market system comparable to that of Jamaica or Saint-Domingue, the slaves did grow some substantial part of their own food, and were able to sell off their surpluses. (Of rather special significance was the practice of cultivating rice on unused lands near the plantation, and selling the crop.)"

9. On St. John slaves' grounds frequently bordered estates, forming slave settlements. These small communities were a source of support for slaves in the production of subsistence goods, in child care, in food provision, and in the fomenting of resistance (Olwig 1985).

10. Scott (1985) questions the emphasis of Moreno Friginals (1977) and others on the establishment of barracones in nineteenth-century Cuba and the eradication of coconos, or provision grounds. She maintains that single-sex barracks were found in Havana and Matanzas only. Provision grounds remained common, she argues, citing a nineteenth-century observer's noting of storage areas for slaves' harvests on estates with barracks housing.

11. Sturge and Harvey (1838, p. 47) were told that estate cultivation of food required five months yearly, making it more dear than importation.

12. Beckford (1790, pp. 138-139) describes the division of labor that emerged as slaves restored an estate damaged by a hurricane. The field gang worked together to rebuild houses. Women planted the estate provision grounds, and with their children gathered produce while the men built fences.

13. Slaves left provision grounds to friends and kin whenever masters would comply.

14. Court records reveal that on St. John women tended pigs, fished from shore, and may occasionally have controlled boats that bondmen used to fish (Olwig 1985, pp. 49-50).

15. In asserting the significance of the growing of provisions to later Caribbean peasant economies, Mintz (1983, p. 227) argues that even in the midst of the revolution Saint Domingue's slaves established private areas for food cultivation and robust markets. The revolutionary leadership struggled to return former slaves to restored estates and sugar cultivation.

Chapter Five. Plantation Work

1. Some domestic positions allowed the worker little supervision. Mrs. Carmichael (1834, vol. 2, p. 20) and her friends among Trinidad's planting families found domestics in town harder to rule than "country negroes."

2. Dunn (1977, pp. 56-57) cites logs from the Newton estate on Barbados to indicate that job tasks were more mixed than titles indicate. It is possible, then, that women did more different kinds of work than the historical record seems to suggest.
3. An association of slave women with healing and knowledge of physiology may explain the assignment of a woman to the role of executioner in Bermuda in 1652 (Packwood 1975, p. 11).

4. A Cuban slave could be freed at baptism for $25.00. Women sought a ‘‘respectable male’’ for godfather, one who might free the child (Tannenbaum 1946, p. 57; see also Campbell 1976, p. 248).

5. The actual proportion of freed men and women in total populations of the British West Indies was comparatively small: about 2.9 percent in Jamaica in 1800 and 2.6 percent in Barbados in 1801 (Cohen and Greene 1972, p. 4). The proportion of free persons of African descent per 100 slaves was 0.8 in St. Kitts, 1.9 in Nevis, 2.6 in Montserrat, 2.7 in St. Vincent, 3.2 in Jamaica, 3.5 in Barbados, 3.6 in Antigua, 4.0 in Grenada, 5.0 in Tobago, 12.8 in Dominica, and 16.6 in Trinidad (Hart 1980, p. 135).

6. Elderly and ‘‘superannuated’’ slaves were often freed throughout the Caribbean, frequently to save the cost of maintaining unproductive slaves (Hoetink 1972, p. 67; Bowser 1972, p. 22).

7. Manumissions, often dependent on access to income, particularly for males, were more highly associated with urbanism for males than for females in the British West Indies (Higman 1984, p. 382).

8. ‘‘In nearly all slaveholding societies female slaves were manumitted at a higher rate than males, whatever their overall manumission rate, primarily because of their frequent sexual relations with the master or with other free males’’ (Patterson 1982, p. 263).

9. The same was true in Dutch Surinam. ‘‘The numerical superiority of colored over Negro free people, and the fact that there were nearly twice as many women as men in this group, clearly indicates that the composition of the category ‘free people’ was predominantly determined by masters’ preference for manumitting their colored mistresses and their offspring. The colored men among the manumitted had mostly been house or artisan slaves, and the latter had some opportunity to earn income of their own with which to try to buy their freedom’’ (Hoetink 1972, pp. 62-63).

10. Klein (1986, p. 224) summarizes the impact of these changes in the French and British West Indies: ‘‘By the 1780’s, the three major islands of Saint Domingue, Martinique, and Guadeloupe had only 30,000 free colored population among them, compared with over 575,000 slaves and 52,000 whites. The British West Indies were no better, with only 13,000 free colored for all the islands, compared with 53,000 whites and 467,000 slaves.’’ This trend reversed, of course, in the early nineteenth century, with the French Revolution and British West Indies amelioration measures.

11. Craton’s (1974, p. 209) synthesis of the records of six Jamaican plantations lists five gangs of diminishing strength, all at least 50 percent female: the great or first gang, the second gang, the third gang (the gross or weeding gang), the vagabond gang, and the pen Negroes.

12. Girls aged 15 to 18 years were more highly valued at l’Anse-à-l’Ane than boys of the same age in the 1750s. Among adults, male field workers were priced at a higher rate than females, by about 300 livres, with the prices of both dropping after age 40 (Debien 1960, pp. 37, 42). We can infer that young women’s childbearing capacity and increased role in export commodity production were acknowledged by planters in these pricing and labor use patterns.

13. Throughout the region women’s work in coffee cultivation more nearly resembled that of men than did their work in sugar cultivation (Knight 1970, p. 67; Diaz Solar 1974, p. 156), much as in the United States.

14. Individual plantations conformed to varying degrees to the Cuban sugar harvest routine. Bremer (1853, vol. 2, p. 312) wrote that at Ariadne estate shifts changed every
seven hours and that the mill was turned off two nights weekly. At the large St. Amelia Inhegno slaves were freed from labor one night a week and a few Sunday mornings.

15. Martinique and Guadeloupe adopted technology in the 1800s that increased their processing capacity. Steam-powered mills were largely replaced by hydraulic ones, increasing the demand for raw cane and either the number of field hands or labor productivity. Plows were not used in Martinique and Guadeloupe, demanding more field labor power than in many competing sugar producers (Schnakenbour 1980, p. 175; Tomich 1976, p. 106).

CHAPTER SIX. WOMEN AND THE SLAVE FAMILY

1. James (1963, p. 16) notes an apparent cruelty among slaves, particularly toward kin. Slaves in Saint Domingue poisoned one another "to keep the number of slaves small and prevent their masters embarking on larger schemes which would increase work."

2. Monk Lewis has charmed modern readers with his iconoclastic observations about Jamaican slavery. He often saw in Europeans' moral outrage at slaves' behavior a denial of their own ethical transgressions. He notes, for example, that the slaves were guilty of the same "fashionable peccadillos" as their masters. "Negroes . . . are not without some of the luxuries of civilised life; old men of sixty keeping mistresses and young ones seducing their friends' wives" (M. Lewis 1834, pp. 220-230).

3. Patterson further contends that males mated exogamously; estates traced descent through women (Patterson 1976, p. 59).

4. "For the Negro child, in particular, the plantation offered no really satisfactory father-image other than the master. . . . the very etiquette of plantation life removed even the honorific attributes of fatherhood from the Negro male, who was addressed as 'boy'—until, when the vigorous years of his prime were past, he was allowed to assume the title of 'uncle'" (Elkins 1976, p. 130).

5. In urban Trinidad, on holdings of more than 20 slaves, families of any type were relatively rare (Higman 1978, p. 168).

6. Women in these units were less fertile than those in conjugal ones (Debien 1960, p. 48).

7. Patterson (1976, p. 50) acknowledges that stable unions existed among Caribbean slaves, resulting in "statistical regularity in mating and familial patterns." He argues finally, however, that normlessness prevailed.

8. "Therefore, in assessing the nature of slave family and its place in the continuum we emphasize not the ways that slavery destroyed or distorted family, but the ways in which the slaves' own forms of family triumphed over adversity. In this light, we evaluate slavery not by the manner in which it controlled and shaped slaves' destinies, but by the degree to which it allowed slaves to make family lives of their own" (Craton 1979, p. 35).

9. This pattern was especially strong on large holdings, distant from Nassau. Close to the city land units were often too small for conjugal families to form, and female-headed households predominated (Craton 1979, p. 11).

10. Indeed, Higman (1978, pp. 165-167) found fewer nuclear families in Trinidad than in Jamaica, which he attributes to Trinidad's larger number of Africans (with high mortality) and more urbanized population. Gautier (1985, p. 89) reports a disproportionate number of marriages and co-resident unions among skilled workers on Bisdary estate in Guadeloupe in 1759. The 32 artisans and workers made up 36 percent of slaves living alone, 48 percent of those in concubinage, and 68.7 percent of
married slaves. The share of slave marriages is, however, particularly high on this estate, which was once owned by Jesuit priests who encouraged it.

11. Polyandrous unions might seem likely given demographic preconditions, but the material foundations of such unions were absent because of the relatively low social status of women slaves.

12. African polygynous systems generally were found in areas where women farmed and thus enjoyed a fair degree of independence from men (Goody 1976, p. 32).

13. Boserup (1970) traces three patterns of gender division of labor among African peasants: female farming, male farming, and mixed systems. In the first, men assist only by felling trees, a pattern occasionally referred to in the literature on West Indian slavery. Women generally have the larger role in farming in the mixed systems as well. Boserup (1970, p. 22) concludes: "The available quantitative information about work input by sex seems to indicate that even today village [emphasis mine] production in Africa south of the Sahara continues to be predominantly female farming." The introduction of the plow to raise agricultural productivity increased males' labor commitment and lessened females'.

14. In Higman's (1978) analysis of families among African slaves registered in early nineteenth-century Trinidad, the greatest number of polygynous units was found on the largest plantation. This finding suggests that, with many women available and with the greater opportunities for resource maximization sometimes offered by larger estates, African men sought multiple spouses. Higman also found more polygyny and nuclear families among the Igbo than in other polygynous African groups. Higman attributes this pattern to the large number of Igbos in Trinidad and their low gender ratio.

15. With data from the Human Relations Area Files, Goody (1976) discerned a strong correlation among societies with complex agriculture, diverging inheritance, and monogamy.


17. Citing Bettelheim's (1943) analysis of concentration camp behavior, Elkins argues that no inmates attained true autonomy; all formed personalities in reaction to their situations. Bettelheim's ideal of informed action is itself a reactive stance, suggests Elkins (1976, p. 135), one possible only for those who assumed an alternate role, in Bettelheim's case, that of the detached, scientific observer.

18. Elkins also notes that a range of behavior was possible for slaves, citing Goffman's and others' typologies for individual responses to oppressive institutions. He argues, however, that a modal personality type is a legitimate sociological construct and can be expected to emerge from a structural setting. For U.S. slaves that type, Elkins contends, is the docile and dependent "Sambo."

Chapter Seven. Fertility

1. Even among U.S. slaves, childlessness (wrongly labeled "sterility" by Klein and Engerman 1978) was high. Still the U.S. slave birth rate was unusually high, but births in the British West Indies were similar to European rates at the time (Fogel and Engerman 1979, p. 568).

2. Abénon (1973, p. 315) notes further that child mortality was actually higher in eighteenth-century France than in the Caribbean. Fogel and Engerman (1974, pp. 123–124) make a related point about U.S. slave infant mortality in contrast to white
infant mortality. About 183 per 1,000 slave infants aged 1 year and younger died in 1850, compared to the only slightly lower rate of 177 per 1,000 infant deaths among white southerners.

3. Caribbean slaves were also virtually immune to some diseases.

4. Geggus (1978, p. 26) notes that this strain of yaws was associated with venereal disease.

5. Rice eating was a recognized cause of beriberi in Southeast Asia and in Cuba. Pellagra is often associated with a diet heavy in corn consumption.

6. Dirks (1987, pp. 86–87) cites eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sources to argue that hookworm was common among British West Indian slaves. He also claims that women ate “fine clays” more frequently than men and that dropsy in women was often accompanied by amenorrhea, or cessation of menstruation.

7. Fearing tetanus, Jamaican slaves believed that newborns were not of this world for nine days. Some West Africans shared a belief that life begins after nine days (Brathwaite 1971, p. 213; Patterson 1969).


9. These diseases caused 11 percent of deaths among white children to 9 years of age (Kiple and Kiple 1977, p. 290).

10. There is some debate among students of the Caribbean about the relative contributions of low fertility and high mortality in accounting for natural decreases. Eblen (1975) compared U.S. and Cuban fertility rates and concluded that, given similar age and gender distributions, Cuban fertility would have equaled that of U.S. slaves. Kiple (1984) agrees, contending that in the British West Indies infant mortality was the key source of natural decrease. Roberts (1957) and Higman (1984, p. 314) argue instead that neither mortality nor fertility alone consistently accounts for population change in British colonies.


12. On three Jamaican properties, from 1817 to 1822, colored fertility was greater than that of blacks, almost five times greater among females aged 15 to 19 (Higman 1976a, p. 154). Craton (1978, p. 340) notes that at Jamaica’s Worthy Park, fertility declines were associated with a decline in miscegenation, more likely to mean colored women, not black women, with white men.


14. “Fertility and longevity depend less on the slaves’ origins than on the plantations’ prosperity” (Siguret 1968, p. 225). Dunn (1987, p. 815) notes that African women lived longer than Creoles on Mesopotamia but that the latter experienced higher fertility. “The Africans tolerated the labor regimen on Mesopotamia well but did not breed, whereas the local slaves did breed but showed less tolerance for the labor system.”

15. Olwig (1985, pp. 34, 54–55) cites evidence from Danish colonial records that slave women complained that “the planters made it difficult for them to bear and rear
children and lead a secure family life.' Some also found it difficult to have their babies, nurse them, and to care for provision grounds. See also Dirks’s (1987, p. 201) critical comments about the “modern speculation” that slave abortions were politically motivated.

16. Blassingame’s comments (1972, p. 81) on similar planter attitudes in the United States remind us that the need to maintain order sometimes superseded ideological and material motives in the treatment and management of slaves. “It is obvious that most slaveholders did not care about sexual customs of their slaves as long as there was no fighting and bickering.” Slave owners encouraged monogamy as a way to discipline slaves yet punished them by forbidding visits to other plantations to see spouses (Blassingame 1972, pp. 82, 88).

17. In Trinidad suckling infants were fed arrowroot or flour, oatmeal, and pap every two days and castor oil every three or four days (Carmichael 1834, vol. 2, p. 189). French West Indian slave babies were fed nothing but breast milk for the first five to six months in the seventeenth century (DuTertre 1958, vol. 2, p. 473). This may have changed as the pressure on women to work and separate from newborns increased (Gautier 1985).

18. Babies were weaned to less protein but more carbohydrates (Kiple and Kiple 1977, p. 288).

19. Lunn et al. (1984) found that increasing food supplements to pregnant and then nursing mothers in Gambia resulted in reductions in plasma PLR (pituitary hormone concentration) and earlier resumption of ovulation. A comparison of supplementation during pregnancy and nursing with none shows that the birth rate increased 37 percent.

20. Sheridan (personal communication) responded that slaves in the British West Indies easily concealed health practices from European doctors who, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, came to estates no more than twice a month. Cared for by African nurses and midwives, slave women could end unwanted pregnancies and recover from reproductive diseases and injuries and from the loss of newborns without the knowledge or interference of whites. Planters’ frequent antinatalism also shielded these dimensions of slaves’ private lives until the early nineteenth century, when European abolitionist pressure brought scrutiny to slaves’ health and medical treatment.

21. The incidence of infanticide by slaves was overstated by white southerners, and many deaths of slave infants are now understood to have had other causes, including perhaps Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDs) (White 1985, pp. 87–89).

**Chapter Eight. Fecundity**

1. From 10 percent to 25 percent of pregnancies end in "recognised spontaneous abortion before 28 weeks," whereas 2 percent of pregnancies end in "perinatal deaths after 28 weeks’ gestation" (Miller et al. 1980, p. 555).

2. It is also possible, as Lady Nugent thought, that colored women actually aborted pregnancies rather than suffer miscarriages, perhaps to keep their youthful appearances and attract white males. Europeans often freed their offspring or at least allowed them to remain in domestic work. But there were no guarantees of favored treatment for a woman or her child, and outside of those in long-established unions, colored women may generally have feared loss of status and banishment to fieldwork with pregnancy. Nevertheless colored women frequently had higher fertility than black women because of better health or by intent.
3. Estimates of both gonorrhea and syphilis among U.S. slaves are derived from army induction records showing that 35 percent of black recruits from ages 31 to 35 had syphilis. McFalls and McFalls (1984, p. 470) suggest that these figures overstate black males’ syphilis rate. Assuming a ratio of 1.4 infected males to 1 female, about 21 percent of black females had syphilis in the 1940s.

4. Keller et al. (1984, p. 181) offer slightly different estimates of the impact of gonorrhea on fertility. In 15–50 percent of cases, they indicate, gonorrhea spreads to the uterus and fallopian tubes, impairing fertility.

5. Blacks were more susceptible to tuberculosis than whites, and black children were more prone to whooping cough than white children. Tuberculosis spreads in densely populated areas. Hence urbanized populations generally have greater immunity to the disease than nonurbanized groups such as African slaves.

6. Handler and Corruccini’s (1983) analysis of dental fragments from slaves at the Newton estate on Barbados suggests that children experienced malnutrition not prenatally but after weaning, at age 3 or 4. The prenatal nutritional environment does not bear directly on conception but does suggest that infant loss resulting from inadequate nutrition was rare.

7. A peasant family of 5, where all but the youngest child works, is said to require 2,000 calories per capita daily (Kleinman 1980, p. 124).

8. Kiple (1984, p. 58) claims that Ibo women were among the Africans “most subject to ‘obstructions of the menstrua’ or amenorrhea, a phenomenon often linked to malnutrition.”

9. Frequency of intercourse is related to conception in this way. If we assume other conditions, in particular, that both partners have optimal health and fertility, then intercourse three times weekly results in conception in less than six months 51 percent of the time; twice weekly intercourse leads to pregnancy in less than six months 46 percent of the time; once weekly, 32 percent; less than once, 17 percent (Keller et al. 1984, p. 5). Lack of conjugal residence or stable union, illness, and work commitments all reduced opportunities for intercourse and hence rapid conception.

10. Male subfecundity accounts for one-third to one-half of infertility among couples. Male age has a dramatic impact on fertility, with conception occurring among 75 percent of couples in 6 months when the male is under 25 years of age; in 23 percent of couples in 6 months when the male is over age 40. These data do not take into account reduced frequency of intercourse among older men or the age of the woman (Keller et al. 1984, p. 4).

11. Sturge and Harvey’s (1838, p. 5) testimony about a Bridgetown prison official’s cruelty to a pregnant woman, discussed in Chapter Nine, casts doubt on the universality of changed attitudes toward pregnancy and childbirth.

12. As Higman (1984, p. 355) suggests, British West Indian amelioration policies had a more discernible positive effect on fertility than on mortality. Where infant mortality fell, the effect is probably reflected in the higher fertility. Infant deaths were often unrecorded by planters (Roberts 1977, p. 147).

13. Gautier (1985, p. 129) refers to noncompliance in Guadeloupe, where the local Conseil found government-imposed amelioration rules disregarded by many planters.

14. Gender ratios favored women, although only slightly, in Montserrat as early as 1729 (Sheridan 1973, pp. 172–175). Gender ratios were equal in much of Barbados by the last quarter of the eighteenth century. But, as Craton (1978) points out, a preponderance of females can indicate their aging as well as high levels of male mortality from overwork, neither of which contributes to fertility.

15. There are interesting exceptions to all of these trends. In the 1870s, at the height of Antigua’s prosperity, Schaw (1939, p. 88) saw slaves busy with their own grounds on
Sundays, hiring themselves out, and on Thursdays marketing their crops. She visited an estate whose proprietor, Colonel Martin, claimed not to have bought a slave for 12 years and that 52 slave women were pregnant. The quantity and quality of land available for provisions is suggested by Schaw's comment (p. 130) that "there is a great want of shade, as every acre is under sugar."

16. In the French West Indies the number of women increased near the end of the Colonial Period, but among adults males continued to outnumber females (Debien 1974, p. 42).

17. Debien's (1974, pp. 347-351) survey of plantation inventories from Saint Domingue reveals both high levels of infant and child death and low fertility. At la Sucrerie la Barre, 14 boys and 6 girls were listed in 1776, but only 7 boys and 4 girls survived to 1790. At Galbaud du Fort aux Sources, with an average of 120 slaves from 1741 to 1772, only 2 births were recorded per year; after 1772, with from 150 to 190 slaves, 1 or 2 births were recorded yearly. At la Cafıcıère Mauleurier aux Matheux, 42 deaths occurred from 1786 to 1791 and only 20 to 22 births.

18. Infant mortality was also higher in maternal than conjugal families at l'Anse-à-l'Ane.

19. Planters eventually came to depend on provision grounds to avoid collective food cultivation and the problems of food importation. Mrs. Carmichael (1834, vol. 2, p. 230) reports that by 1832 at her Laurel Hill estate few slaves had fewer than six acres of provision land producing two crops per year. Generally, however, it appears that Trinidad's slaves were not well nourished during the first three decades of the nineteenth century, regardless of whether they consumed rations or food grown on individual gardens and farms.

20. Lamur (1977, pp. 171-172) compares the population of Catharina Sophia with that of plantations with more than 30 slaves and with Surinam's free population. The birth rate was slightly lower for other plantations, but mortality was higher on Catharina Sophia, although age distributions varied. In general, Catharina Sophia's work force had more young adult women and more older males than large plantations in Surinam.

21. Land in tobacco doubled, from slightly more than 2,000 *cuerdas* in 1830 to 4,000 *cuerdas* in 1896 (Scarano 1984, p. 5).

22. Barbuda's population fell by 15 percent from 1774 to 1790. An estate manager blamed low fertility on a shortage of males and venereal disease. Age and gender ratios naturally improved, and venereal disease "[ran] its course," producing a dramatic change in fertility and mortality (Lowenthal and Clarke 1977, p. 517). The demographic profile was obviously integral to this change and the impact of venereal disease ambiguous.

23. African fertility was low at the time (Boserup 1970).

24. By the 1850s the crude birth rate at Worthy Park in Jamaica had doubled from that of the late days of slavery (Craton 1977, p. 287). Marriage became common in rural Jamaica, as peasants purchased land and withdrew from plantation work (Phillippo 1843).

25. Mcfalls and Mcfalls (1984, p. 467) note that childlessness moved in the opposite direction, increasing until the 1930s and then dropping until 1960.

26. Dirks and Kerns (1976) shed light on this hypothesis in their longitudinal research on marriage and mating patterns in a rural community in Tortola in the British Virgin Islands. Through six successive stages of economic change, the tendency to marry (usually accompanying relatively high fertility, but not necessarily) is positively related to availability of cash to males, who build houses preceding a legal union. "The plurality of conjugal forms in Rum Bay can be understood as a response
to an environment in which fully adult and sexually active individuals cannot count on
access to income-earning opportunities’’ (Dirks and Kerns 1976, p. 50).

Chapter Nine. Sex, Punishment, and Protest

1. The reference to Foucault’s work (1977, 1978) on sexuality and punishment
should not obscure or deny the material roots of these phenomena. Like other
structuralist writings, Foucault’s give power to ideological factors that this largely
materialist analysis subordinates. Bondwomen sought relationships with slave masters
primarily for concrete material reasons and only then because such ties were culturally
or symbolically valued. At the same time, brutal treatment of slaves—male and
female—was generally associated with the slaveholder’s perception of poor work
performance. The bizarre and sadistic treatment of slaves by their owners is the result,
finally if distantly, of the owners’ sovereign status in a highly productive but often
strained economy.

2. Moreau de Saint Méry (1958, p. 53) found Congolese women in Saint Domingue
especially free sexually, although he wondered if the generally decadent atmosphere
had not encouraged this tendency.

3. The ratio of white men to white women varied historically and regionally, even
within colonial areas. Twelve white men resided in Saint Domingue in the 1600s, for
example, for every white woman. By the eighteenth century in Saint Domingue,
among white Creoles the gender ratio was two men for every woman; among
Europeans, from four to five men for every woman. In eighteenth-century Martinique,
there were 120 white men for every 100 white women. The gender ratio of white men
and women approached equality in Guadeloupe in the mid-eighteenth century
(Gautier 1985, p. 33).

4. “The girls here [in Surinam] who voluntarily enter into these connections are
sometimes mulattoes, sometimes Indians, and often negroes. They all exalt in the
circumstances of living with a European, whom in general, they serve with the utmost
tenderness and fidelity, and tacitly reprove those numerous fair ones who break
through ties more sacred and solemn” (Stedman 1971, p. 17).

5. The Spanish slave codes “guaranteed slave women and children against violations
and abuse by masters” (Klein 1986, p. 191). The 1755 Reglement in the Danish West
Indies fined a master 2,000 pounds of sugar for the rape or sexual exploitation of a
slave (N. Hall 1977, p. 176). The Code Noir levied 2,000 livres of sugar against the
master or overseer who bore a child with a female slave (Tomich 1976, p. 217).

6. Frère Saint-Gilles observed in 1687 that slave women were pushed to “debauch­
ery” by a lack of food and clothing (Peytraud 1973, p. 199).

7. European male attitudes toward their children varied. Mrs. Carmichael (1834,
vol. 1, p. 91) claimed that a man who would not free his child was “justly detested.”
Lady Nugent (1907, p. 274) noted that her staff’s mixed children were obviously not
freed by the “thoughtless young men.” Black women involved with European men
were thought to use abortifacients in Antigua in the 1770s (Schaw 1939, pp. 112–113)
and in the French West Indies (Gautier 1985, p. 175).

Vincent were “tyrannical to slaves” and everyone else, so badly were they reared.

9. Clinton (1982, p. 188) refers to slave narratives to suggest that southern white
women punished slaves far less often than did slave masters or their agents. Violence
by mistresses against slaves was most common on small estates. Gautier (1985, p. 35)
suggests that in the French West Indies slave masters were motivated to abuse slaves
primarily to increase work productivity, whereas white women's domestic power, magnified by confinement in the home and their husbands' frequent absences, led to the physical harassment of slaves.

10. Patterson (1972, p. 286) comments, "Jamaican society was no place for the fair sex, and the evidence indicates that those white women who survived were hardly the fairest specimen of their race. In the absence of wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters, the Jamaican great house never became the sanctified fortress of southern 'gynocracy.'"

11. Devève (1977, p. 297) points out that the image of a gay and empty life of Caribbean slave-owning females is at odds with what is occasionally revealed in "detailed studies." Country estate houses were often simple wooden structures requiring care by the slaveholder and his family.

12. Clinton's comment (1982, p. 209) on this phenomenon in the U.S. South is acute: "Despite white women's exaggerated modesty, the body of an unclothed black gave the plantation mistress little offense. The relationship between the plantation mistress and slave was never personal; this dehumanized naked object could present no threat to a woman's propriety."

13. A common form of torture of women in twentieth-century fascist regimes is the physical and sexual abuse of their children and violence against unborn children. Males, by contrast, are threatened with sexual abuse of their wives and lovers (Bunster-Burotto 1986).

14. Mathurin (1975, p. 30) claims that by the late 1700s women outnumbered men in some Jamaican Maroon communities. In "Nanny Town" there were more women and children than men, according to a British soldier who was a prisoner there (Tuelon 1973, p. 22). Large populations of women have been noted in other Maroon communities. The Maroon band at Bahorruco in Saint Domingue, freed in 1785, had 71 males and 58 females, making up 30 couples and children, a widow, a man with children, 4 women with children, and 11 men and women alone (Gautier 1985, p. 232).

15. Edwards (1966, vol. 1, pp. 540-541) writes that in Jamaica the polygamous male Maroons treated daughters cruelly and offered them to male visitors.

16. Debien (1973, p. 126) suggests that women mostly ran away in pairs to nearby areas. In the United States male runaways outnumbered females, but more women than men were truants (White 1985, pp. 70-75).

17. There may be a pattern of women slaves, particularly domestics, who betrayed conspirators. Craton (1982) cites three such cases in the British West Indies. Although slave men also informed masters of likely rebellions, the intimate relations of slave women to some white men surely strained their loyalty to the slave community. See also Schoelcher (1842, p. 106).

18. Concubines and new wives in African slavery were reared for such a role, not meant to float between the status of chattel and mistress (Robertson and Klein 1983; Patterson 1982).

19. See Douglas (1966) for a lengthy discussion of how violation of female purity can bring danger to others. This ideology contrasts with the honor/shame dichotomy associated with Latin America and other societies, in which males gain from the honored position of some females and the shamed position of others (Martinez-Alier 1974). The attitudes of European men in the Caribbean appear to be close to the honor/shame complex, as Martinez-Alier argues for late nineteenth-century Cuba, with white women honored and slave women shamed. A problem with the application of this concept to slavery, however, is that it turns on women's choice to observe the code of honor or to reject it, which bondwomen lacked.
20. Mathurin (1974, p. 343) argues that by the end of slavery in Jamaica the black woman had come to symbolize slavery, its tensions, and its crises. Responsible for the bulk of agricultural work, receiving "neo-natality . . . indulgencies," she was reviled by white Creole society.

CHAPTER TEN. CONCLUSIONS

1. "Many theories of sexual inequality pose the wrong question. Instead of asking what variables account for variation in degree of sex inequality, they address the issues of 'How did the subordination of women to men come about?' or 'What accounts for female subordination to males?' The first question presupposes an era in history in which females were not subordinated to males; the second assumes that females have always been subordinated; and both utilize a simple dichotomy—subordination vs. non-subordination" (Chafetz 1984, p. 2). See Nicholson (1986, pp. 8–9) for a critique of cross-cultural studies of women's position that focuses on the resulting positivism and the dualism objected to by Chafetz.

2. Materialist writings are generally mute on this point, suggesting that further analysis of ideology may be helpful. The marginalization of population groups is a special problem of advanced industrial societies and has been addressed by Marxist feminists (Bonacich 1981).

3. See Attewell (1984) for a brief but penetrating critique of the "mode of production" approach and its failure to address specific historical cases. It has been more successfully applied to precapitalist modes of production in Africa, where the mix of lineage and trade-based slavery has been studied by Meillassoux (1975), Bloch (1980), Terray (1975), and others.

4. Scott (1985) links these points in arguing that Cuban slaves' rebellions shaped emancipation. This in itself suggests that the growing of provisions, petty trade, and kinship relations—all phenomena that enabled slaves to organize insurgency—were more common in nineteenth-century Cuba than current commentary, influenced heavily by the work of Moreno Fraginals (1977, 1978), allows.

5. This debate is significant in Marxist-feminist studies. Barrett (1980) argues that ideological structures finally explain the depth of gender stratification in advanced capitalism. Brenner and Ramas (1984) counter that biological factors predispose even industrial societies to women's economic subordination and social isolation. Omvedt (1986) and Delphy (1984) contend that patriarchy remains a legitimate material structure for explaining women's subordination in the contemporary West. Proponents of all these viewpoints call for more comparative historical research, which may alter the terms of debate rather than confirm a perspective.