

THE PRICE FOR
THEIR POUND
OF FLESH

The Value of the Enslaved,
from Womb to Grave,
in the Building of a Nation

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Beacon Press
Boston

CHAPTER 3

Adolescence, Young Adulthood, and Soul Values

AVERAGE APPRAISED VALUES:

FEMALES: \$517 [\$15,189 IN 2014]

MALES: \$610 [\$17,934 IN 2014]

AVERAGE SALE PRICES:

FEMALES: \$515 [\$15,131 IN 2014]

MALES: \$662 [\$19,447 IN 2014]

They abolished the external or African slave trade, in 1808, the effect of which gave an impetus to the infamous traffic of slave breeding and trading among themselves; and perhaps it was one of the main objects they had in view, the protection of their slave breeders and traders.

—Thomas Smallwood, 1851¹

As was the custom, all the negroes were brought out and placed in a line, so that the buyers could examine their good points at leisure . . . once negotiated with the trader, paid the price agreed upon, and started for home to present his wife with this flesh and blood commodity, which money could so easily procure in our vaunted land of freedom.

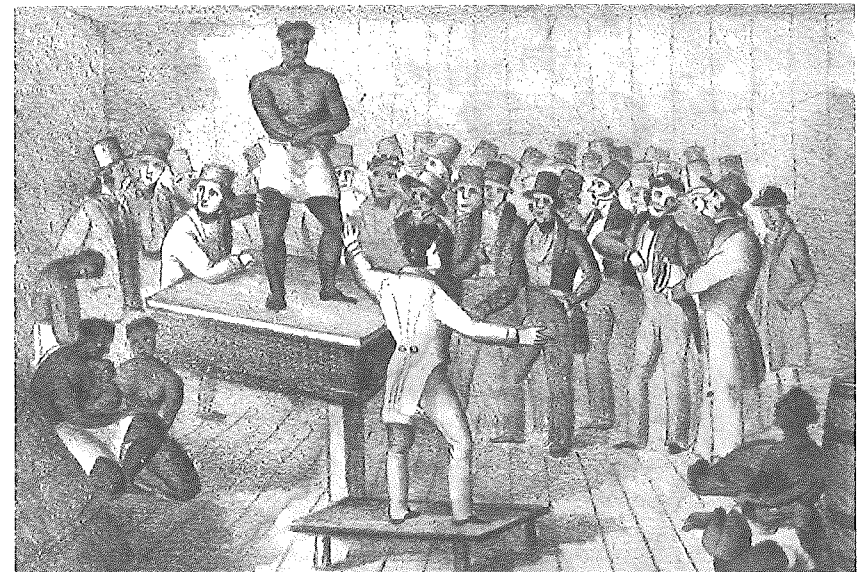
—Lucy A. Delaney, 1891²

On the eve of the Civil War, an abolitionist attending the auction of 149 human souls in New Orleans, Louisiana, was intrigued by the bid caller's excitement over a seventeen-year-old field hand named Joseph who was on the auction block. "Gentlemen," the bid caller exclaimed, "there is a young blood, and a capital one! He is a great boy, a hand for almost every thing. Besides, he is the best dancer in the whole lot, and he knows also how to pray—oh! so beautifully, you would believe he was made to be a minister! How much will you bid for him?" The opening bid for Joseph was a thousand dollars, but according to the enthusiastic auctioneer, Joseph

was worth more, considering his value over time. "One thousand dollars for a boy who will be worth in three years fully twenty-five hundred dollars cash down. Who is going to bid two thousand?" the caller asked his audience. As the price for Joseph increased to \$1,400, each interested party eagerly made eye contact with the bid caller. Standing on the podium with a wand in hand, he tried to increase Joseph's price by assuring the audience that \$1,400 was "too small an amount for" him. "Seventeen years only," he added, "a strong, healthy, fine-looking, intelligent boy. Fourteen hundred and fifty dollars! . . . One thousand, four hundred and fifty—going! going! going! and last—gone!"³ As the caller slapped his hand on the platform, just like that, in less than five minutes, Joseph was sold "to the highest bidder."



In the 1890s, Lucy Delaney described the enslaved experience on the auction block.



Prime male on the auction block with mothers and babies bearing witness.

We do not have direct testimony from Joseph about his response to this sale, in which he was sold with 148 others from the same Louisiana plantation. Joseph's enslaver, who provided religious instruction to his human chattel, decided to retire from planting in order to pursue a political career.⁴ In two days, he sold an enslaved population consisting of field hands (like Joseph), carpenters, bricklayers, blacksmiths, coopers, drivers, and household servants. How did Joseph (enslaved person #2) *feel* about being the second person on the auction block that day? Did Joseph's experience differ at age seventeen, as he approached his "prime" working years, from the experiences of others who were younger or older than him? Had Joseph's adolescence and teen years prepared him for this moment? Was he conditioned to handle and/or witness auctions from previous exposure? Where were his parents? Did he have any siblings, given that there is no mention of his relatives? Yet witnesses said the enslaved stood "upon a platform, similar to a funeral pile erected for martyrs" holding on to their last embrace.⁵ Joseph stepped on the block alone as the auctioneer described him with a host of complimentary adjectives. What was his mind-set? Did these descriptions comfort him, uplift him, or add to the trauma of being sold? Joseph and Isam (slave #21) were noted for their ability to preach, and they likely approached the block in silent prayer. Ultimately, their fate is unknown.

We have much to learn about the value of human property during each stage of life, not only the moment of sale. This chapter examines the experiences and valuation of the enslaved during the important years of puberty and young adulthood, from ages eleven to twenty-two. These years marked significant changes in the lives of girls and boys. Girls became women after the onset of their menstrual cycles—a defining moment of their maturation. As harbingers of additional sources of labor, fertile enslaved women commanded high prices in the market, and their enslavers appraised them accordingly. Young men also brought forth more laborers as breeders, and these years were equally important as they, too, matured. The men could be used for sexual reproduction even in their elder years. The institution of slavery, defined and extended by law through a woman's uterus and beyond, continued as long as enslaved women gave birth to healthy children. Women provided the vessel and seed, men provided the

fertilizer, and between the two, additional enslaved laborers were born. But as with everything else in the lives of enslaved people, reproduction was fraught. Whatever value they held for themselves now worked in opposition to the devaluation they experienced through sexual interference and exploitation. As a result, many dreaded puberty.

ADOLESCENCE AND YOUNG ADULT AWARENESS OF ENSLAVEMENT AND SOUL VALUES

The pubescent years were terrifying. Not only were their bodies changing, but this was also a time when enslaved children experienced the separation they had feared all their lives. Daughters and sons were taken from their parents as the external value of their bodies increased. Market scenes from their childhood now made sense and haunted them for the rest of their lives. At this stage in their maturation, they knew full well that others claimed ownership of them and sexual assault came at any age.

However, their parents (if present), as well as other kin, reminded them of a value that enslavers and traders could not commodify—the spiritual value of their immortal selves. *Soul values*—my term for such valuation—often escaped calculation and developed during these years. Enriched through an inner spiritual centering that facilitated survival, soul values were reinforced by loved ones. Sometimes this internal value appeared as a spirit, a voice, a vision, a premonition, a sermon, an ancestor, (a) God. It came in public and private settings and was occasionally described as a personal message from a higher being, a heaviness in the core of their bodies. "My soul began singing," one enslaved person recalled, "and I was told that I was one of the elected children."⁶ This telling, this uplifting, this singing of a "fearful trill, of things unknown, but longed for still" made the enslaved feel free during captivity.⁷ Freedom of the soul matured in puberty.

Soul values, which came from deep within a person's heart, were often felt in childhood, yet not fully articulated until the early teens. Recreating the social and economic circumstances under which enslaved people suffered allows us to make educated conclusions regarding enslaved adolescents' internalized soul values. Unlike appraisal and sale values, these yearnings came from within; outsiders did not bargain for them. Such values shaped and defined enslaved people's characters. "From the time I was

a little boy," Edward Walker related, "it always ground my feelings to know that I had to work for another man." These feelings were "not encouraged by my parents or the other slaves." Instead, they "came from within me and grew with the years." As he aged, Walker had the fortunate opportunity to learn to read and write and developed "a big taste for arithmetic." He "could add up numbers like a flash, could multiply and divide quickly, and correctly, and was good at fractions." These skills, his inherent yearning, and his belief in an incalculable soul value led to Walker's successful escape years later.⁸ Enslaved people often expressed their soul values by running away.

The internal and spiritual lives of the enslaved varied. Some believed in a Christian or Muslim God, others relied on West African, Caribbean, and Brazilian religious philosophies such as Vodun, Santeria, and Candomblé.⁹ Some enslaved people appeared to have no faith or did not comment on it. Historian Albert Raboteau reminds us that enslaved people's religion was an "invisible institution," which can be traced through enslaved testimony and behavior. For some, the idea of an afterlife was an extremely important part of their belief system. They held on to the notion that there was a place beyond the here and now where they would be redeemed and released from captivity. Some enslaved people dreamed that place was Africa, while others referred to it as heaven. In coastal Georgia, the large population of African-born enslaved people dreamed of flying home to Africa and anxiously waited for that to come to pass.¹⁰

In addition to an increasing spiritual awareness, puberty also represented the years "adolescents reached sexual maturity and [became] capable of reproduction."¹¹ The onset of menses for girls and the deepening voices of young boys served as physical manifestations of their transition into adulthood, as both sexes became physically stronger and more capable of heavy labor. Puberty also brought forth the importance of their increased commodification. These years generated outsiders' interest in their bodies, especially the interest of medical professionals and enslavers who actively sought ways to maximize their profits. For some, puberty simply meant more challenging health issues, and just as at other stages of life, enslaved people confronted death during these years. Some young women died giving birth; others within a few days or months of giving birth.

Young men, on the other hand, experienced complications such as shame or lack of arousal resulting from being forced to have sex on demand. As a result, they were physically assaulted by enslavers and spent much of their early teens and twenties on the auction block. Sometimes they took the stand with their parents, and on other occasions, their parents tried to purchase them.

One witness shared the following story of a young child and his father being auctioned: "I saw a beautiful boy of twelve years of age, put on the auction-block, and on one side of him stood an old gray-headed negro—it was plain he was his father—and he kept his eyes on the boy, and the boy kept his eyes upon the old gray-headed man, and the tears rolled in silence down the cheeks of each."¹² Imagine the gaze between the father and son. This was not the look of buyers and sellers inspecting property. It was a lingering stare that both knew might be their last. A paternal gaze with a son's eyes locked on his father's—a reverse gaze. The value between this father and son, immersed in tears and silence, was priceless. At twelve years old, this young boy knew it might be the last time he saw his father. They had likely lived together for all of the young boy's life and this would be the first time they were separated.

As with children under ten first learning about their captivity, for adolescents and young adults, separation and sale was a defining moment. This rare testimony describing a father and son on the auction block shows that paternal lineage was valuable to this duo and others. We know nothing about his mother or whether he had siblings, but we know the two held hands as they stood there together with an uncertain future on the horizon.

Some enslaved children remember their fathers fighting to keep their families together by raising funds to purchase them. Although it was extremely difficult for enslaved people to purchase themselves, Solomon Bayley, enslaved in Delaware and Virginia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, spent much of his adult life purchasing yet, ironically, burying members of his family. He bought his family members with a clear understanding of American and British currency, both in circulation at the time. As a skilled tradesman, Bayley received small amounts of money for some of the labor he performed. After saving enough to purchase his wife,

Thamar, Bayley wanted to raise funds to purchase his only son, Spence. He knew that his son's enslaver had died and all of his property was to be sold. Bayley remembered when the two were first separated; Spence was only nine months old and too young to fully comprehend the transaction. Bayley, on the other hand, went into "a fit of distress" when his son was "sent away" from him.

Years later, in 1813, he learned that Spence was going to be sold again, and his friends and neighbors (both black and white) encouraged him to try to purchase the boy. When he arrived at the courthouse, Bayley heard the "crier" (auctioneer) shout "a likely young negro fellow for sale," and *he*, the father, laid the first bid. "I bid two hundred dollars," said Bayley, knowing full well that was only "half what he was appraised" for when his enslaver died. Bayley understood the difference in values and knew that an appraised value was not the same as a sale price. He waited anxiously to see if anyone else bid on his son. To his disappointment, a man bid \$333 and one-third, "which was thirty-three dollars and a third more than" Bayley had. Discouraged by the thought of losing his son again, Bayley bid a second time. "A shilling," he interjected, and the trader responded with a bid of \$20 more, increasing the price to \$354. Sadly, Bayley "thought I must give him up, and let him go," but he decided to bid once more. In total desperation, he bid "a cent" and the "crier" rejected that bid, asking him to raise it to a shilling. The penny was the last of his money. Bayley's situation looked grim when the trader once again outbid him. As the price continued to rise, Bayley "cried, and turned off, and went and leaned against the court house." He exhausted all his cash and now pondered the loss of his son all over again. Luckily for him, through faith and prayer, bystanders (referred to as "three great men") came to his aid and gave him extra money to help purchase his son for \$360 *and* a shilling. One of the men was a Methodist minister. Bayley signed the bond along with securities from the three men, who agreed to cover his costs so that he and Spence could be together.¹³

Imagine this scene from Spence's perspective. How might he have experienced this trade? What was it like to watch his father bid on him? Was he proud? Did he even remember his father? Did it matter? Here was someone who valued him in a different way. His father's actions show a man trying to live in freedom with those dear to him. Participating in

an auction for his own child signals that some enslaved people faced their commodification in the very space in which they and their families were objectified. Spence witnessed his father actively trying to purchase him so their family could live in a place where people valued him beyond his market price. His father came prepared to buy him and play by the rules of an institution that defined his family as property. The institution of slavery did not always account for soul values. Such values disrupted appraisal and sale transactions daily. Spence witnessed his father's expression of love side by side with the cold calculation of market values necessary to purchase him. He also saw his father give up, cry, and almost accept defeat, that is, until three men stepped in and contributed funds to complete the sale. By age twelve, Spence knew that he had multiple values and interests on his body and his soul. Unfortunately, like his sisters, he too died "prematurely."¹⁴

Fathers were not alone in trying to purchase their families. Mothers, such as Charity Bowery, did the same. Bowery lived with her young daughter and twelve-year-old son Richard. She worried about Richard because she knew as he matured it would be "hard work for him to bring his mind to be a slave." Approaching the age of realization and a sense of their place in the world, Bowery brought all of her money to Mistress McKinley, hoping to purchase her son. But, according to Bowery, McKinley would not let her "have my boy." One day, after Bowery had been away, she returned to find her daughter crying in front of McKinley, who was counting a wad of money. At first, Bowery thought McKinley had hit her daughter, but when she asked the child what was wrong, her daughter "pointed to mistress's lap and said 'Broder's money! Broder's money!'" Richard was gone, and his sister understood that the only remaining part of him was the money in the lap of her mistress. Perhaps she could not fully process where Richard had gone or why he had left, but certainly she recognized that her brother's absence meant cash for McKinley. Bowery immediately understood that McKinley had sold her son. McKinley then looked Bowery in the face and said, "Yes, Charity; and I got a great price for him!"¹⁵

As young men and women grew up, they learned to distinguish between the multiple values placed on and within their bodies. Bowery's young daughter knew that money represented her "Broder" and that he was sold

for "a great price" that day. She was probably beginning to understand what boys and girls Richard's age learned—their external market and appraisal values took them away from loved ones. Had Richard grasped the idea of an internal soul value? We do not know. There is evidence, however, that from a young age, some enslaved youth recognized that nobody could purchase their soul. It was the only place where they were truly free. For many, this freedom came at the moment of death, when the spirit left the body. Until they reached spiritual freedom, they still had to contend with external commodification.

VALUATION OF ENSLAVED ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS IN LIFE

No age was more important for the valuation of black bodies than these years (ages eleven to twenty-two), and the years of midlife and adulthood (ages twenty-three to thirty-nine), which will be covered in the next chapter. These were the prime fiscal and reproductive years of an enslaved person's life. Ages eleven to twenty-two represented a period of maturation and knowledge. We know from the writings of Walter Johnson, Wilma King, and others that enslaved youth learned they were both people and property. Johnson writes, "They were taught to see themselves as commodities." They viewed their own bodies through "two different lenses," which he describes as "the chattel principle," taking language from the formerly enslaved.¹⁶ King underscores this point in terms of this age group, noting that "the majority of the slaves sold in the Upper South were teenagers and young adults."¹⁷ I begin with a person's soul value to understand how enslaved youth and young adults worked against commodification. They clearly had another set of values for themselves in addition to the models that scholars suggest.¹⁸

"As soon as I came to the age of maturity and could think for myself," Thomas Likers explained, "I came to the conclusion that God never meant me for a slave, & that I should be a fool if I didn't take my liberty if I got the chance."¹⁹ He and many others did so by making their way to Canada where they lived as free people. African American abolitionist William Still and Boston abolitionist Benjamin Drew collected the stories of individuals who successfully thwarted the institution of slavery and made

their way north in the nineteenth century. Through these narratives, we learn how enslaved people valued themselves and how these internal values drove them to liberation.²⁰ Enslaved people rejected their status in many ways, including hiding out, feigning ignorance, destroying crops, murdering enslavers and overseers, suing for freedom, learning to read and write, and running away. In certain instances of that push for freedom and self-liberation, clear expressions of their soul values appear.

During youth, enslaved young women and men learned more about the internal value of their lives and did all they could to escape. At fifteen, George Johnson liberated himself because he always "felt" himself a free person "and wanted to be a freeman." Since the US government "didn't give me the liberty I wished, I concluded I would go where I could possess the same liberty as any other man."²¹ Upon their arrival in free places, formerly enslaved young women and men worked for themselves, acquired land, and spent time with their families. The abolitionists Still and Drew shared the story of John Hill, who left slavery in Virginia because he "didn't like the condition of things there." He did not "like to be trod upon."²² His ideas about liberty came from his family, including values taught to him by his parents, grandparents, and uncles. Through letters written to Still, we learn of his "remarkable intelligence," despite the fact that he had no formal training.

He proudly admits that "the whole family of us bought ourselves." Hill "came away" from slavery when he was eighteen years old. His uncles paid for theirs twice before being granted freedom. They "paid \$1,500 apiece for themselves," Hill recalled. After his uncles purchased themselves, they purchased Hill and his mother. Witnessing this made a significant impression on him, particularly because he recognized the dishonesty of their enslavers. When they all settled in Canada, they leaned on values taught to them by Hill's grandfather, learned a trade, and created a firm that offered "pretty good wages." Hill took pride in paying his laborers good wages, something he was denied during slavery. Still remained impressed with Hill because it was clear "how much liberty was valued, how the taste of Freedom moved the pen of the slave; how the thought of fellow bondmen, under the heel of the slaveholder, aroused the spirit of indignation and wrath" in the letters he wrote to the abolitionist in Pennsylvania. These letters display Hill's

intellect as he evokes phrases from Patrick Henry: "I had started from my Den that morning for 'liberty or for Death.'" He also bares his soul in longing for his wife to join him and enjoy the place where they would have the rights of human beings, not chattel. Impressed, Still published a series of Hill's letters because he wanted the larger, "ignorant" public to learn about the class of "brave intelligent fugitives" that Hill represented.²³

George Johnson and Thomas Likers, self-liberated enslaved men (mentioned above) who were not as fortunate as Hill, experienced the hardships of public and private sales. Sellers prepared the enslaved for display, determined the condition of their health, and sometimes rated them on a five-point scale of 0 to 1 in increments of 0.25. Prime or full hands had a rating of 1 or A1 Prime, which represented a projection of the amount of work a person could perform in a given day. Prime "hands," typically between the ages of fifteen and thirty, were the strongest laborers on farms and plantations. Age was not the only factor in providing this rating. Other enslaved people had their rates set at three-fourth hand, one-half hand, or, for those unable to work or contribute to the plantation economy, zero.²⁴

This rating system resembles US Department of Agriculture (USDA) meat grades, in which beef undergoes a "composite evaluation" to determine quality. For example, USDA Prime, the highest-quality meat, is typically younger, has better muscle quality, and is "firm, fine-textured, bright, cherry-red colored [and] lean." But as an animal matures, these characteristics are less refined and the "muscle color become[s] darker and muscle texture becomes coarser"; thus, the animal is downgraded to "Select" or "Choice." When agriculturists grade meat, they often do not know the age of the animal, so "the physiological age" takes precedence over the "chronological age"; they can determine the former through "bone characteristics, ossification of cartilage, color, and texture" of the meat. The link between meat grading and enslaved people might seem absurd, but the language used by today's USDA to rate meat uncomfortably mirrors the categories for rating enslaved bodies in the nineteenth century.²⁵ Abraham Lincoln established the USDA in 1860 when the meatpacking industry developed in conjunction with the growth of the railroad industry. In sale advertisements in nineteenth-century newspapers, these terms are peppered throughout the pages.²⁶

**EXTENSIVE SALE OF
CHOICE SLAVES**

Comprising Field Hands, Mechanics and House Servants,
AT THE ST. LOUIS HOTEL.

By C. E. GIRARDEY & CO.,
OFFICE, 37 MAGAZINE STREET.

ON SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22, 1859,
At the ST. LOUIS EXCHANGE, commencing immediately after the succession sales,
will be SOLD AT AUCTION, the following valuable Slaves to wit:

1. AUGUSTIN, black, creole, aged 17 years, very likely, No. 1 field hand.
2. HENRY, black, aged 21 years, very likely, No. 1 field hand.
3. FRANK, black, aged 32 years, and his wife.
4. CELIA, black, aged 30 years, both field hands.
5. BILL, black, aged 19 years, No. 1 field hand.
6. LOUISA, black, aged 16 years, good child's nurse and house servant, speaks French and English.
7. JUDY, black, 24 years, good cook, excellent washer and ironer, country raised.
7. JOE, black, 21 years, fair engineer, and practiced Saw-Mill man.
9. JANE, black, 18 years, Seamstress and House Servant.
10. MARIA, black, 15 years, Field Hand and House Servant.
11. PRESCILLA, black, 16 years, Field Hand and House Servant.
12. KIZZIE, do. 17 do. do. do.
13. DAN, do. 16 do. do. do.
14. BARRY, do. 16 do. do. do.
16. EMILY, do. 19 do. House Servant.
16. ISAAC, do. 26 do. Field Hand.
17. LOUISA, do. 9 do. Orphan.
18. BIRWELL, do. 15 do. Field Hand, Runaway.
19. HENRY, do. 21 do. do. do. } These two are sold subject to the certificates of Dr.
20. NED, do. 19 do. do. do. } E. H. Moore and the late Dr. Graham, pronouncing
21. JOHN, mulatto, aged 16 years, raised by T. J. Casey, Esq., an accomplished House and Dining Room Servant.
22. JANE, black, aged about 26 years, a first-rate Seamstress and good Washer and Ironer, and her son.
23. BEN, black, aged 3 years.
24. THURESA, black, aged 22 years, Creole, speaks French and English, good Cook, Washer and Ironer.
25. MATHUDA, dark griff, aged about 40 years, excellent child's Nurse, also good Cook and Ironer, has absent herself once, otherwise fully guaranteed.
26. EDWARD, black, aged about 28 years, Creole, general Laborer.
27. BAILY, black, aged about 35 years, a superior Woodman and general Laborer.
28. JOHN, dark griff, aged about 23 years, a first class Waiter and House Servant, Creole, speaks French and English.
29. RACHEL, black, aged 19 years, a superior House Servant, good Seamstress, and fair Cook, Washer and Ironer, and Hair Dresser, raised in the city. Her mensus are irregular, otherwise fully guaranteed.
30. BOB, black, aged 43 years, No. 1 Field Hand, and his wife
31. JANE, black, 36 do. do. do. do.
32. WINNEY, do. 14 do. do. do. do.
33. MARY, do. 12 do. do. do. do.
34. HENRY, do. 9 do. do. do. do.
35. BOB, do. 6 do. do. do. do.
36. ALEXANDER, black, aged 24 years, an accomplished Carriage Driver, House and Dining Room Servant.

The above are all fully guaranteed, with exceptions stated.

TERMS.—12 mos. Credit for approved City Acceptances, bearing 8 per cent. interest—or cash if the purchaser prefers.

Sale before E. BARNETT and W. J. CASTELL, S. F., at the expense of the Purchasers.
N. B.—Slaves will not be delivered under any circumstances until terms are fully complied with.

Broadside announcing the sale of "Choice Slaves" along with detail of Rachel, #29, who has irregular "mensus [sic]." She is discussed on page 76.

Even at this heightened stage of external commodification, young adults held on to their internal values. A. T. Jones, who understood his fiscal value, did not have the means to purchase himself; however, he offered to pay \$350 for his liberty, "which was a proportion to what others" had paid for him. When his enslaver did not honor the sale and terms

negotiated, he wrote a pass for himself and had "no trouble getting to Canada."²⁷ He had tried to participate in the market process on enslavers' terms, but when it did not work out, he ultimately valued his soul more and chose self-liberation as opposed to self-purchase.

Bid callers or "criers" shouted out the values of enslaved people as "prime," "first-rate," or "A1," but enslaved people had different understandings of these terms. From freedom in Canada, Benjamin Miller explained what "first-rate" meant to the enslaved. Before his escape, his North Carolina enslaver had trusted him to travel to and from the market, run errands, or do favors. Sometimes his enslaver even gave him small amounts of money, but "I was still a slave," he explained. On one occasion, Miller said, he "bought myself for \$450." Neighbors told his enslaver "he was a fool to sell me for \$450, when he might have got \$800." When his enslaver raised the price to \$500, Miller was unwilling to pay it. Instead, he fled without paying and made his way to Canada. Reflecting on this pivotal event, Miller discussed what it meant to be "first-rate." "I have done first rate here," he explained. "I will tell you what I call first-rate . . . I say first rate, from the fact that we have to row against wind and tide when we get here, and being brought up illiterate, I consider that if we live and keep our families well fed and clad, *we have done first-rate.*"²⁸ Considering his deprivations during slavery, his journey to freedom, and the obstacles he encountered, Miller believed his actions and survival were first rate. This more expansive evaluation went beyond the simple calculations enslavers used to determine the work rates found in plantation ledgers, newspaper advertisements, and broadsides. It reflected Miller's sense of doing well for himself. George Ross, another self-liberated person, described his experience using the term another way: "I have been treated first-rate since I have been in Canada. I can't complain at all."²⁹

In addition to the aforementioned rating system, another method to determine the monetary value of the enslaved was physicians' medical exams to evaluate whether individuals were "sound" or "unsound." Health, often measured by "soundness," played an integral role in the commodification of bodies. "Sound" simply meant healthy and able to work; "unsound" meant unhealthy, with a compromised work effort. Medical examiners aided enslavers, insurance companies, and traders to determine an enslaved person's

health—including bodily integrity and perceived mental stability—which had a direct relationship to his or her appraised and market values. In some cases, various body parts or whole persons had warranties to confirm the quality of their health. Their dual commodity value confirms that people were being treated as property, particularly when their bodies were commodified and their humanity objectified in legal cases such as "warranty suits," or after death, through coroner's inquests. Legal historian Ariela Gross describes this process, noting that "sometimes the body of a slave was read for signs of character . . . at other times . . . as a piece of property."³⁰

Healthy enslaved people were poked, prodded, and examined. At some sales, for privacy during a more physical exam, they were taken behind a curtain or into a "little room," but one wonders for whom this privacy was reserved. Northern abolitionist James Redpath said that, in these rooms, "the slaves were stripped naked, and carefully examined, as horses are—every part of their body, from their crown to their feet, was rigorously scrutinized by the gallant chivalry who intended to buy them."³¹

Redpath witnessed several slave auctions, including that of a young man in Petersburg, Virginia, whose "vest was removed and his breast and neck exposed." Next the enslaved man's "shoes and stockings" were "taken off and his legs beneath the knees examined." Even more vivid, "his other garment was then loosed, and his naked body from the upper part of the abdomen to the knees, was shamelessly exhibited to the view of the spectators." The auctioneer or "body-seller" as he was referred to, instructed the young man to "turn round," exposing his naked body from "the shoulders to the calves" to the crowd for inspection. To this, the auctioneer said, "You see, gentlemen, he's perfectly sound and a very finely formed n[—r]."³²

Those interested in enslaved bodies were also concerned with "unsoundness." Medical professionals discussed definitions and conditions that qualified as "unsound," since this assessment compromised sale. Enslaved people recognized that their health and capabilities were under scrutiny, and some decided to intervene. One girl on a Richmond, Virginia, auction block had a right hand deemed entirely useless or "'dead,' as she aptly called it." Before the sale, she had a physician remove one finger, but an auctioneer "stated that she herself chopped off the other finger—her forefinger—because it hurt her, and she thought that to cut it off would

cure it." When questioned about the finger, she said, "Now, you see it was a sort o' sore, and I thought it would be better to cut it off than be plagued with it."³³ Taking matters into their own hands was one way enslaved people responded to their oppression.

Some physicians wrote articles that classified all the conditions that qualified black bodies as unsound. Dr. Harris of the Savannah Medical College, for example, listed some of the common illnesses that would change the categorization of an enslaved body from sound to unsound, including strands of syphilis, varicose veins, aneurisms, bone disease, hernia, hemorrhoids, and rickets, if it disfigured women's reproductive organs.³⁴ The discussion of soundness and unsoundness was best articulated in specific values, particularly for enslaved women and their perceived capacity to reproduce.

Menstruation

Enslaved girls and young women were very private about their physical development. Older women taught them to protect themselves from abuse, because they understood the connection between their bodies and the institution of slavery.³⁵ Women and "their increase" populated and sustained slavery during the years after authorities banned the international trade in African captives. Given that the law sanctioned slavery through a woman's womb, it is no surprise that enslavers, traders, and medical doctors paid careful attention to gynecological health. The field of gynecology grew out of slavery and, in particular, enslaved women's bodies. There is a rich and well-documented history of US physicians, including the "father of gynecology," Dr. James Marion Simms, who conducted their research on enslaved women. Doctors in Europe and the Caribbean also examined black women's bodies.³⁶

The most well-known European case involved French naturalist Georges Cuvier's exploitation of Saartjie Baartman, a Khoikhoi born in the 1770s in South Africa. She became the subject of scientists', physicians', and the general public's curiosity because parts of her curvy body—breasts, buttocks, and labia—were viewed as exceptionally large. Cuvier exhibited her in Europe for five years under the epithet "Hottentot Venus." People paid to see, touch, and study her body as she stood on a

perpetual auction block, subject to the gaze of audiences worldwide. How did she grapple with the internal and external values placed on her? Did she remain composed? Treated with less decency than a mannequin, Baartman died in 1815. Her postmortem life and ghost value remained in circulation and on display until 2002. Cuvier made a plaster cast of her body and preserved her genitalia in a glass jar; both were displayed in Paris's Museum of Man until 1974. Nelson Mandela led an effort in 1994 to have her remains returned to South Africa, but the French government did not comply until 2002. Her remains were finally given a proper burial in South Africa in 2002.³⁷

Caribbean enslavers also expressed interest in black women's bodies, as well as their reproductive organs. Dr. John Robertson of Manchester, England, for example, sought to determine whether women of African descent entered puberty earlier than European women. His theory was that climate had an impact of the onset of puberty, and he believed that warmer climates triggered women's menstrual cycles. He also thought that "the union of the sexes at an early age" led to early childbearing and was a result of "warm latitudes, where there is a low state of civilization."

To test his theories, he solicited statistics from people who attended and documented births. In June 1841, Robertson asked Moravian missionaries in Antigua and Jamaica for data on the age of first menarche among their "Negro populations." Slavery had been abolished in the British West Indies in 1833, but he longed to collect data, given the meticulous plantation and missionary records in both regions. Hoping to have between twenty and fifty cases, he wanted to know the "age of puberty in that race." A Mr. Elliott of Jamaica responded a few months later with a table that contained information on twenty-one "Negresses" ranging from eight to sixty years old. Most of the women between eight and eleven years old had "not yet" had their menses. But the age varied for those who had: "twelve cases in which the menses appeared, in one aged sixteen years, in three fifteen, in three fourteen, in three thirteen, and in two aged twelve years."

Other missionaries sent information to Robertson from church book registrations that listed whether girls had their menses at the time of baptism. "The idea of any (menstruating) younger than" twelve years, wrote a Mr. Zorn, "was ridiculed by nurses." Dr. Nicholson of Antigua reported

in December 1841 from his own recollections that “menstruation before the twelfth year” was not common among black or white women, despite knowing of a few “rare” cases. In his experience, most girls became women during their fourteenth or fifteenth year.³⁸ This evidence supports the idea that enslaved women in the United States likely experienced puberty in their early teen years; however, evidence from American physicians tells a slightly different story, and one that includes health complications.

Enslaved women in the United States had reproductive health issues and complained about this to their enslavers, medical professionals, women healers, and just about anyone who would listen. Frances Anne Kemble, whose husband owned property in Georgia, encountered several enslaved women with health complications related to the female body.³⁹ However, according to Dr. Robert C. Carroll of Jackson Street Hospital in Augusta, Georgia, black women frequently suffered from “menstrual derangement.” He was not alone in trying to determine the cause of such health challenges. Other Southern practitioners discussed these concerns in medical journals and with each another.⁴⁰ Many blamed “negro women” for their poor health, referring to it as “their proverbial carelessness” and their “reckless disregard” of their medical condition. Carroll’s reports were derived from rare cases when black women were observed daily in a hospital setting “under the eye of the physician.”

Mary, an enslaved “mulatto” woman, from Edgefield District, South Carolina, had irregular periods since age fourteen. The degree to which Carroll described her irregularity “both as to time and quantity” indicates the precise nature of her care. She gave birth to her first and only child at age eighteen, but the infant died three days later, marking the beginning of extended discomfort. Her condition does not appear to have been menstrual cramps, which some enslaved women cured by wearing a cotton string tied with nine knots around their waist, because her symptoms became more frequent and lasted for nearly a decade.⁴¹ For eight or nine years after giving birth, Mary became very ill every month around the time of her menses. Described at first as occasional “hysterical symptoms,” the frequency increased as Mary displayed “convulsive movements” daily, “generally about daylight,” before being admitted to the hospital. Her enslaver removed her from the plantation, took her to an urban area, and admitted

her to the hospital because she had “not been able to do work of any consequence for many months.”

Think about this rationale for a moment. Mary apparently went to the hospital after years of physical pain and months of being unable to provide reproductive or productive labor to her enslaver. Clearly her symptoms became more disruptive, as her enslaver was not able to extract work from her. That he traveled an unknown number of miles to a local city suggests that it was important to him that she received medical care. But given contemporary knowledge, Mary could possibly have been suffering from a severe case of postpartum depression, which at that time was not entirely known. She may have been upset by the death of her child, or this may have been one of many losses. There is also the possibility that she did not want her child to grow up enslaved and that his or her death was a relief. We cannot uncover her mental state; we know much more about her physical condition.

After a thorough medical exam, Mary lay lifeless, pale, and “somewhat emaciated,” with a “melancholy expression of countenance.” She had diarrhea, back pains, gastrointestinal pain, and “tenderness on pressure over the region of the womb, extending up” to her belly button. The physician performed a “digital exam” and placed a finger in her vagina, “causing her to shrink from the pressure.” Perhaps she pulled away because she did not want the doctor to examine her. She may have been uncomfortable with that level of scrutiny, as it may have been the first time a white male physician examined her. Most enslaved women were accustomed to black women healers tending to their health needs.⁴² Possibly, she had some serious health issues. The attending physician found that the walls of Mary’s “vagina are apparently healthy” and suspected she was feigning her illness. He therefore asked “another woman” to remain in the room to observe Mary’s attacks. The very next day, at daylight, Mary experienced another one of her convulsive episodes that put her in “a state of apparent unconsciousness and lethargy.” The physicians concluded that she was not faking and labeled her illness “hysterical catalepsy.”

From April 25 through June 8, 1859, Mary remained in the hospital and received treatment. Her lengthy stay speaks volumes about how her enslaver must have valued her. Medical fees, including medication,

testing, boarding, and other expenses, were not taken lightly by enslavers who sought to maximize the labor of their enslaved workforce. We know Mary's enslaver took her to the hospital because she had been unable to work. Perhaps Mary was worth the cost of this treatment because she was in her prime years. As time went on, Mary expressed that she was feeling better, while the doctors worked to restore her health. In addition to her "hysterical catalepsy," she had leucorrhoea, a white or yellowish discharge of mucus in the vagina that caused an infection. Folk remedies to treat this condition included "tea made of poached egg shells or green coffee."⁴³ At the hospital, she received "a tincture of guaiacum," or evergreen tea, common in the Caribbean.

After one month of treatment, Mary felt stronger and had gone weeks without any pain. In June, she shared that she did not "remember any period when she has been entirely free from pain." She had her first normal menstrual period with no "nervous symptoms"; her enslaver was in the city, so doctors discharged her. About nine months later, her enslaver reported to the physicians that Mary rested for three weeks after being discharged (as instructed) and "she requested to be allowed to go into the field with the other hands, and has continued at work and [was doing] well ever since."⁴⁴ We have no way of knowing whether Mary felt violated during her medical care, but she was clearly relieved to be feeling better. Although her enslaver reported that she wanted to return to work, we must be careful not to assume that she enjoyed enslavement. She may have wanted to go back because she missed her community of family and friends while confined in the hospital.

Other women with irregular menstrual cycles were advertised for sale with added descriptors about their health. Nineteen-year-old Rachel of Louisiana was put up for sale along with a group of thirty-six "choice slaves" (see page 69 for illustration). All were described as valuable, and they ranged from age three to forty-three. Physical characteristics such as color, age, and labor skills followed their names listed on the public notice, but Rachel stood out from the rest. She had a "black" complexion and was "a superior House Servant, good Seamstress and a fair Cook, Washer, Ironer, and Hair Dresser." She had been raised in New Orleans, which partially explains her labor skills. However, one sentence marked her as

different: "Her menses are irregular, otherwise fully guaranteed." Rachel's cycle was so important that the administrator of the sale made a special notation about it, perhaps for full disclosure or to avoid any future lawsuit. "The above are all fully guaranteed, with exceptions stated," and the conditions of the sale were reemphasized at the bottom of the broadside (poster).⁴⁵ Was Rachel sold that day? We do not know, but she was advertised with personal health information, facts that described her capacity (or not) to give birth—information made illegal today due to privacy laws. Rachel was not alone in having this private information made public.

In Natchez, Mississippi, in 1841, Bathsheba suffered from pregnancy complications. "After the most intense suffering," she "gave birth to an infant dead." Her enslaver had a physician examine her because "her suffering since then [the birth of the stillborn infant] has been great."⁴⁶ It is difficult to know whether Bathsheba tampered with her pregnancy or if her sadness was genuine, because some women did not want to bring children into the world.

Women described as "barren" were also discussed extensively and, in most cases, devalued for their perceived incapacity to give birth. However, given enslaved women's expressions of reproductive control, we cannot assume that all embraced motherhood. Some chose to terminate pregnancies, and others, like Margaret Garner, an enslaved mother of four children from Kentucky, participated in infanticide and took their children's lives.⁴⁷ Some enslaved women on a Tennessee plantation deliberately terminated their pregnancies, and physicians studied these cases to determine how they did so.⁴⁸

Jamaican physicians were shocked to learn of an enslaved woman who performed a Cesarean section on herself. She had experienced labor pains that were too much to bear, so apparently "she took a very sharp knife and made a deep incision, and extracted the child and placenta herself." Her incision was so deep that it cut into the buttock of her child. Enslavers called for a "negro house doctor" after the mother "cried out for help," and he sewed her up "the same way we sew up dead bodies." The baby died of tetanus on the fifth day. The mother survived and years later gave birth to a healthy child.⁴⁹ Was this woman trying to terminate her pregnancy or was she simply trying to relieve herself of severe labor pains? Regardless

of her motive, she asserted her right to care for her own body when others around her did not.

Rape and Forced Breeding

As external values took on new meaning during enslaved men's and women's teens and early twenties, these individuals came to understand another aspect of their worth—the price of their reproduction. Reflecting on her shift to adulthood, Harriet Jacobs described puberty as “a sad epoch in the life of a slave girl.”⁵⁰ For her and many others, it marked the beginning of a period when all men could sexually assault them. Bethany Veney recalled being forced to entertain her enslaver and his friends by “singing and dancing.” Later, she had to go to his room, where she performed more dancing and singing with “grotesque grimaces, gestures, and positions,” as he informed her what “he wanted of me.”⁵¹

But enslaved girls and women were not the only ones terrorized by sexual abuse; so, too, were boys and men. Historian Thomas Foster reminds us that “black manhood under slavery was also violated,” yet most of the literature focuses on the sexual assault of women and girls.⁵² Men recalled being treated like breeding animals. Their appraisers scrutinized their size, strength, and virility. John Cole, enslaved in Georgia, remembered that men were selected specifically for “raising up strong black bucks.” They were sometimes taken on a “circuit” to visit other plantations and impregnate the women. After all, he noted, “this was thrifty and saved any actual purchase of new stock.”⁵³ Laura Thornton, enslaved in Alabama, testified that enslavers “would work them to death and breed them too.” In some cases, she added, “old massa kept one for hisself.”⁵⁴

As with girls, the exploitation of boys started at a young age. They were objectified on the auction block and made to run and jump, often with little or no clothing to cover their genitals. In New Orleans, brothel houses specialized in young boys, markets advertised them, and enslavers wanted to purchase them. Enslavers were both male and female. Historian Stephanie Jones-Rogers suggests that slaveholding women administered and sanctioned exploitation as readily as their husbands.⁵⁵ Some enslaved males learned about exploitation from their fathers. “I heard my father say,” explained Oscar Felix Junell, “that in slavery time, they took the finest and

portlies' looking Negroes—the males—for breeding purposes.”⁵⁶ Adrienne D. Davis, a legal scholar, thus labels slavery as a “sexual economy” that began during these years, was reinforced predominately by elite white men, and made enslaved women and men productive and reproductive laborers.⁵⁷ Thus, enslaved women and men experienced exploitation at the hands of men and women of every rank and class, from the enslaved to the free.

The meaning and practice of nineteenth-century breeding differed from the eighteenth-century conceptions of the term outlined in chapter 1. Rape and forced breeding became common experiences for the enslaved, particularly after the transatlantic slave trade was abolished in 1808. The values of enslaved women's bodies, in particular, increased during the decades before and after the law passed, and breeding in this century became associated with animal husbandry.⁵⁸ Men too were valued for their ability to “make” babies, and their experiences with breeding depended on location. Frederick Douglass explained it best: “I am from a breeding state—where slaves are reared for the market as horses, sheep, and swine.”⁵⁹ Southern newspapers confirmed such notions; so too did instructions among enslavers, and speeches among politicians.⁶⁰ Traders advertised breeding practices in local newspapers. One North Carolina paper reported, “Since the discontinuance of the African slave trade, some parts of America have become great breeding districts, in which human cattle are raised for the Southern market.”⁶¹ Clearly, by the nineteenth century, some enslavers used forced reproduction, which often increased their enslaved populations. Some historians recognize these practices and describe them as the “fetishization” of black bodies.⁶² I have argued elsewhere that the exploitation of both sexes occurred when enslavers forced enslaved people to copulate against their will—which I labeled *third-party rape*.⁶³ We still have much more to learn about this history, and the thoughts, comments, and feelings of the enslaved on this subject are an important resource.

Many enslaved men recall being greased up and groomed for the auction block. One bystander in Louisiana referred to the preparations as “dressing up the slaves to be sold.” Some traders “kept a big, good-natured buck to lead the parade” of enslaved people ready for sale.⁶⁴ Whether in a yard, a private home, or a business, enslaved men were objectified on the auction block, just as their female counterparts were. Potential buyers

tugged on their skin, opened their mouths, pressed against their muscles, and asked them a series of questions.⁶⁵

Enslaved people testified about several forms of sexual coercion, but the stigma attached to nineteenth-century notions of breeding contribute to its scarcity in recent historical literature. We now identify broader categories of sexual abuse, including “physical penetrative assault, forced reproduction, sexual coercion and manipulation, and psychic abuse.”⁶⁶ This spectrum of abuse was part of the slavery story. Sylvia Watkins, an enslaved woman from Tennessee, recalled that “white men went with colored gals and women bold[ly].” Continuing, she said that the white “women went with colored men too.” In her estimation, the presence of single white women in some communities was a cover for them “goin’ with one of their [male] slaves.”⁶⁷ These “relationships” had a power dynamic that cannot be overlooked. With this in mind, it is no surprise that sexual abuse crossed racial and gender lines, even if we cannot always know the meaning behind such interactions.⁶⁸ But what happened to an enslaved man when he was forced to have sex with a woman he did not choose? How did he respond to the “sex on demand” nature of forced couplings? How did he become aroused enough to perform for his enslavers? What did he do when they wanted to watch? Likewise, how did women experience these shameful acts?

Sam and Louisa Everett of Virginia recalled orgies on their plantation where their enslaver “forced them to have sexual relations,” even though they had other partners. Their enslaver made Sam expose his genitals and asked Louisa, “Do you think you can stand this big [n—r]?” When she hid her face from his “nakedness,” her enslaver forced her to look at Sam. Next, “he told us that we must git busy and do it in his presence, and we had to do it.”⁶⁹ Henry Bibb, who successfully escaped slavery, summarized such practices: “Every slaveholder, who is the keeper of a number of slaves of both sexes, is also the keeper of a house or houses of ill-fame.” He viewed white men as “licentious” because they broke up “the bonds of affection” among enslaved families.⁷⁰

When Robert Newsome, a small Missouri farmer, purchased Celia, age fourteen, he had no idea the transaction would end in his death. The middle-aged Newsome began raping her on their way home from the market. This was probably Celia’s first sexual experience. Newsome repeatedly

raped Celia for five years, resulting in the birth of two children. Despite her efforts to protect herself from him, Celia was pregnant a third time. She also had a relationship with an enslaved man named George that complicated her continued exploitation. By the time she turned nineteen, Celia had had enough of Newsome’s abuse. In the summer of 1855, Newsome came to her cabin to have sex with her, but Celia refused, hitting him over the head twice with a large club and killing him. She understood the ramifications of her actions and was trying to “protect her principle,” borrowing language from legal scholar Adrienne D. Davis and historian Brenda E. Stevenson.⁷¹ She, and other enslaved men and women, understood that puberty meant their bodies would be valued for reproductive purposes. And, as young girls became women, they learned how to thwart abuse, whether it came from white or black men or white women. Celia likely felt justified in protecting herself from further exploitation because of her soul value, a value that Newsome could not commodify. He was interested in his own sexual gratification.

Next Celia covered up her actions. She dragged Newsome’s body to the fireplace and burned him right there in her cabin. By daylight, she spread ashes throughout the yard with the help of his grandson, who had no idea he was burying his grandfather. Celia buried the larger bone fragments. A few days later, when Newsome’s family could not find him, she confessed to the murder.

This story of an enslaved woman’s rape is a familiar one. In their narratives, several enslaved women discuss their sexual exploitation. Given that the law sanctioned slavery through a woman’s womb, black women faced widespread sexual abuse. For white enslavers, the more children their enslaved women bore, the more enslaved people they had in their labor force. Producing children was a cheap alternative to purchasing them at the market.

Some enslaved men spoke more readily about women’s abuse than their own. Thomas Smallwood shared that enslaved women’s “virtue is tampered with, trampled on, violated; and is entirely at the mercy and will of any and every debauchee who chooses to arm himself with the advantages he has over the poor coloured female.” As a result, black women had a difficult time protecting themselves, and even if they had black male partners

like Celia's George, their physical fidelity "is almost sure to be destroyed by some white man."⁷² Based on his parents' recollections, Willie McCullough of North Carolina described breeding: "Some of the slave women were looked upon by the slave owners as a stock raiser looks upon his brood sows, that is from the standpoint of production." He understood the fiscal connection and added, "If a slave woman had children fast she was considered very valuable because slaves were valuable property."⁷³

Some enslaved men and boys tried to defend their female relatives from sexual abuse. Bob, a Louisiana enslaved man tried to protect his sister Nancy from sexual abuse. One day when they were little, Nancy started to cry and told her brother that "I am very unhappy—I wish to die." Just as Bob asked her why, the overseer's son Peter came running across the yard with a whip in his hand, grabbed Nancy by the neck, and threw her on the grass. Bob jumped in between the two and yelled, "Peter don't hurt my sister. No! You shall not hurt my sister!" Peter struck Bob in the face with the whip and completely destroyed his eye.⁷⁴ Testimonies such as those of Thomas, Willie, and Bob are just a few stories about black women's sexual abuse told from the perspective of enslaved men. One father painfully noted that he was "TIRED on it" after seeing his daughter and other women being exploited.⁷⁵

Returning to the story of Celia, how different would her narrative be if we could hear from George, her lover? As the community developed a case against Celia, George and others were interviewed. He denied involvement with the crime, even though some could not imagine how Celia could have committed it on her own. While she awaited trial, Celia gave birth to a stillborn child. When the court proceedings began, medical doctors testified about whether "a human body could be so completely destroyed in a simple fireplace in a span of only six or so hours." This case occurred before the use of cremation to dispose of bodies in the United States. The first American crematorium did not open until 1876. One could argue that Celia's actions represented one of the first makeshift cremations in US history. As this book unfolds, Celia's act will take on multiple meanings, some perhaps connected to the history of medicine.

In Celia's testimony, we learn that "she did not intend to kill him when she struck him, but only wanted to hurt him." Despite this, and the fact

that she was guilty only of valuing herself enough to resist exploitation, Celia was "hanged by the neck until dead on the sixteenth day of November 1855."⁷⁶ Her children were given values and sold, but we do not know to whom or where. What happened to George also remains a mystery. We know that the state paid for her execution and valued her death over her life. We do not know if her body was ever laid to rest.

Some women were not as "successful" in ending their abuse. One woman, described as an "intelligent and conscientious" person, tried to refuse her enslaver's "criminal intercourse" on multiple occasions. Every time she did, he sent the overseer to flog her. After two severe whippings, she recognized that "her case was hopeless" and "gave herself up to be the victim of his brutal lusts."⁷⁷

Some women like Madeline, described as "a beautiful quadroon," age sixteen, fought sexual abuse on the same night they were sold. Madeline's new enslaver was considered "a confirmed desolute [*sic*] rascal." After the \$1,900 purchase, "her pitiful cries and groans of anguish, in the horrible night were heard for several houses from that of her inhuman new master." A Frenchman, Raimond Legrand, promised to purchase her and take her to France, but he did not have enough money to buy her. In response, Madeline, who valued herself more than the price tag on her body, tried to escape the next day. While being sought, she ran to the wharf and jumped in the river to her death. Her last words were, "Adieu, cher Raimond!"⁷⁸ Madeline preferred death to enslavement. She valued her soul enough to die.⁷⁹

Commodification Data for Enslaved Adolescents and Young Adults

The external values of those in their teens and early twenties (between ages eleven and twenty-two) increased slightly from those in childhood, unless they were deemed unfit. Examining a sample of 19,041 appraisals and sales from eight Southern states between 1771 and 1865, we learn that the average appraised values for young women and young men were \$517 and \$610, respectively. Clearly, they were becoming more valuable as they approached puberty. As girls developed the capacity to have healthy children, their market values incorporated the ability to produce "future increase." Traders sold a twelve-year-old girl at the Richmond, Virginia, market for \$550. She wore a "small checkered tartan frock, a white apron and white-colored

handkerchief." When she stepped on the platform, the bid caller looked at his audience of "thirty to forty white persons present" and commenced the sale by saying, "Here's a girl . . . warranted, sound and strong." A few minutes later she was sold.⁸⁰ Market prices for young women and men sold in public and in private settings were, respectively, \$515 and \$662.⁸¹

There is a slight difference in women's appraisal and sale values. Many young women, such as the twelve-year-old girl in Virginia, had likely not experienced their transition into womanhood, usually signaled by the onset of menstruation. Buyers wanted to know that they would be good child bearers and were willing to pay increasingly higher prices for them. Boys became young men during these years, and enslavers measured their strength and skills so they could incorporate them into a variety of different tasks. For some, that meant learning a trade; for others, it meant that their enslavers could hire them out for modest payments.

Still, others were not valued as whole people; instead, their worth was partitioned for the benefit of enslavers. Fourteen-year-old Rachel, for example, had three-fourths of her value or time sold, rather than her whole person. She experienced a sheriff's sale where "the purchaser was to have the services of [Rachel] three fourths of the time," meaning that someone still claimed one-fourth "of her appraised value."⁸² When the bidding began, Rachel began "to cry, and wiped her tears with the back of her hand." She made it a point to turn "her back to the people" who bid on a portion of her value. That enslaved people were divided while living should not come as a surprise to legal scholars. Consider the three-fifths clause of the US Constitution. First established in 1783, this rule counted enslaved people as three-fifths of a person when determining representation in congressional seats.⁸³ This parceling out was a financial vivisection of enslaved people, established first in our nation's constitution, and then maintained and continued by institutions invested in slavery.

Inspections and evaluations became even more obtrusive at this stage of life. Young men and women were fondled, poked, prodded, and made to walk, run, and jump; every open cavity was explored, from their mouths to their private parts. Some were stripped naked and, perhaps drawing upon biblical references, felt ashamed, as Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. The humiliation experienced was difficult to express and something

they preferred to forget. Lucy (age fourteen) endured the verbal taunting of her future enslaver as she approached the block in Louisiana. "Thou art mine, black little dove!" he claimed. An apologist who witnessed the scene described him as a "wolf" with a "lustful countenance." She stood there with a "sad, silent face," eyes cast down with tears falling onto the table below as he bid \$1,025 to complete the sale.

A few minutes later, Rosa (age sixteen) stepped onto the same platform. Described as "a capital girl, well built, good natured and intelligent," she could not escape the molestation of the auctioneer as he touched her teeth and displayed them to an audience of several hundred men. Next he worked his way down her body to her "beating bosom," and the audience bid until her sale price reached \$1,250.

In 1836, Tracy Edson of Louisiana witnessed the sale of a "good looking girl about eighteen." Some of the other enslaved merchandise "did not appear to be affected by their situation," while others "seemed deeply to feel their situation." The young woman "covered her face with her hands and sobbed aloud." Curious, Edson asked her why she was crying, and the young woman said that "she was afraid she should be brought away from her relatives." The young woman sold for \$976, equivalent to \$25,600 in 2014 dollars.⁸⁴ Why did she command such a high price? It is likely that she was in her fertility prime. Such scenes were common at large auctions in the Deep South, where the market values maintained the highest averages.

Cane Brake Plantation Patterns of Valuation

Young women appraised on Cane Brake Plantation in Mississippi displayed modest fluctuations in values based on their age. For example, the appraisals of twelve- to fourteen-year-olds increased each year by about \$50 to \$75. Dr. Carson valued Anna Eliza (age twelve) at \$375 at the beginning of 1856 and increased her value to \$450 by the end of the year. A year later, in 1857, she went from \$450 to \$600. Other young women had similar value assessments; by age nineteen, many of their projected values did not increase. From eighteen to twenty years old, Rachel L.'s appraised value at the beginning and end of the year remained \$600. The values of men in this age range on this plantation increased by increments of \$50 to \$100. Male eleven-year-olds received values of around \$400, and

twenty-two-year-olds were valued at \$800 to \$900, with the exception of sixteen-year-old Thomas, who received a \$1,200 value in 1858. Dr. Carson clearly valued Thomas over the other men, indicating either his field labor capacity or his artistry skill.⁸⁵

VALUATION OF ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS IN DEATH

Enslavers used death as a mechanism of control. Although many tried to capitalize on market values upon the loss of life, others willingly killed their human chattel as a threat to the living. While such examples could be financially damaging to enslavers, they were psychologically instructive for enslaved people's soul values. Through funerals, postmortem autopsies, and insurance policies, enslavers manipulated the fiscal vitality of the institution, yet they were rarely able to commodify enslaved people's immortal souls.

Frank Bell, an enslaved man from Texas, witnessed and was forced to participate in the death or murder of his wife. He shared the following story: "When I's about seventeen I marries a gal while master on drunk spell. Master he run her off, and I slips off at night to see her, but he finds it out. He takes a big, long knife and cuts her head plumb off, and ties a great, heavy weight to her and makes *me* throw her in the river. Then he puts me in chains and every night he come give me a whippin', for long time."⁸⁶ Men like Bell were willing to risk their lives to see loved ones, but participating in their murder and its cover-up must have been devastating. What did he think when he witnessed the decapitation of his wife? More important, how did he feel about having to throw her head into the river? Unfortunately, we do not have testimony from Bell to learn how this experience sat with his soul. Studying enslaved concepts of death offers one way to see into experiences such as Bell's.

The loss of a parent became a vivid memory for those between the ages of eleven and twenty-two. They not only experienced death, but also witnessed it. "My ma died when I was about eleven years old," Janie recalled. She, like other women, suffered from overwork and died during pregnancy. "Old Marse was mean to her" and he whipped "her all the time." Even worse, Janie's mom worked in the fields "the very day she had a baby, and she borne

the baby right out in the cotton patch and died."⁸⁷ Other enslaved teens and young adults remembered their parent's funerals. Catherine Cornelius said she "can still recollect my ma's funeral" because "they gave her a nice one." She was pleased "Brother Aaron" preached the funeral. Her mother was laid to rest in "their own burin' grounds" with planted willow trees as grave markers in place of headstones. "All of the coffins was made on the place, and they was plain wooden boxes"; they were "nicely made." A funeral procession "carried off" the bodies, and all the enslaved were allowed to attend. Whites and blacks alike cried and paid their respects to her dear mother.⁸⁸

Some enslavers allowed similar elaborate services and showed respect for the dead, unlike Bell's owner who did not allow Bell's wife a proper burial. Willis Cofer of Georgia remembered very elaborate rituals to prepare the dead for burial. Someone washed the corpse with soap and hot water, then wrapped it in a "windin' sheet," and laid the body on a "coolin' board." Customized coffins to fit a person's body were common on Cofer's plantation, and men were laid to rest in "a suit of clothes," while women were buried "in de windin' sheets." The burial involved a short procession to a graveyard where the body was placed in the ground. Some more formal funerals had sermons, hymns, and a small service as late as two months *after* the body was laid to rest. The rationale for such a delay had to do with external values. Enslavers wanted to make sure the harvest period was complete and that enslaved people from neighboring plantations could attend.⁸⁹

Octavia George, enslaved in Louisiana, remembered that "funerals were very simple for slaves." Her plantation did not allow a full service. Bodies were just taken to the graveyard and buried. The enslaved could not even sing at the cemetery. Instead, her mistress told ghost stories "after funerals and they would nearly scare me to death." One story involving the decapitated body of a man was a particularly vivid memory for her.⁹⁰

On some occasions, the death of the enslaved involved an official postmortem examination. In these instances, the cause of death was the most important inquiry; the monetary value was the second. Legal historian Ariela Gross notes that postmortems occurred "to determine the monetary value of the slave's body at issue," and that "dissection after death was the final dishonor to a slave's body." In order to determine who made money off of the deceased, postmortems were "prerequisite[s] for any claimant's claim

over a dead slave."⁹¹ Evidence of postmortems is found in medical journals throughout the United States, Europe, and the Caribbean. Through these cases, we learn about the cause of death and the circumstances surrounding the valuation of dead bodies.⁹² A spectrum of commodification continued in postmortem spaces.

Life Insurance

People or companies who insured young adults knew these were years of great physical and earning potential, but they were also risky years due to the myriad of health complications that came with pregnancy and rigorous labor. Such realities were reflected in the insurance premiums and corresponding appraisal values of individuals between the ages of eleven and twenty-two. Representative of the value of black bodies at death, insurance premiums are much higher than annual appraisal values discussed above. An examination of the records of 1,050 policies from the Southern Mutual Life Insurance Company reveals that enslaved people in this age range were of great concern to enslavers. The SMLIC functioned "to make a provision for the survivors in case of death." For their "slave policies," insurance agents helped patrons who depended on enslaved laborers for support and income. In the company's view, "paying a fifth or sixth of their annual hire" was sufficient to "replace the servants who may die" during the term.⁹³ Thus, individuals and companies insured their enslaved people, hoping to protect their investment in the event of death.

Jessup & Hatch, a leather goods and horse equipment company in Augusta, Georgia, insured two high-priced enslaved men, Andrew, age twenty-one, valued at \$2,900, and Sam, age sixteen, valued at \$2,700. These two men had the highest value of all those in this sample and were probably skilled tanners who worked in the company store making harnesses and saddles.⁹⁴ The firm paid a premium of \$55 for Andrew's policy for the year (1864) with a 2.75 percent interest rate. Sam's policy had the same interest and term (one year,) but the premium was slightly higher at \$74.25.

Ann, a seventeen-year-old enslaved woman, represented the most financially valuable woman insured, by her enslaver John Murray, through the SMLIC. Valued at \$2,600, Murray paid \$71.50 for the year at a 2.75 percent rate. "Twiggs," gender unknown, was only eleven years old, priced

at \$2,300, with a one-year policy and a \$65.25 premium. Those a bit younger, such as twelve-year-old Lavinia and thirteen-year-old Laura were valued at \$1,800 with a premium of \$40.25 at the rate of 2.25 percent. One wonders if the terms of their policies had anything to do with their ability to give birth. The younger Lavinia had a five-year policy, while Laura's was for one year.

What do these policies teach us about enslaved people's monetary values? They tell us that enslavers capitalized on and thought about the deaths of their enslaved from the moment they were eligible to produce labor in industrial and plantation settings. They also tell us that valuable younger enslaved people had policies and premiums similar to those in their twenties, suggesting that the valuation of black bodies was a well-thought-out enterprise. Enslavers knew that the majority of their wealth was tied up in the lives of enslaved people and protected their wealth through insurance.⁹⁵

Burial

In addition to separation by sale, some of the most memorable moments in, enslaved people's lives were the deaths of their loved ones. Solomon Bayley, mentioned earlier, who went to his son's auction, was present at the deaths of his daughters Margaret and Leah. His two daughters died in 1821, just a few months apart—Margaret at age twenty-four in March, and Leah at age twenty-one in July. Bayley recalled that Margaret "bade us farewell, and looked as if she felt assurance and peace that destroyed the fear of death." In her last words, earnestly charged us to "meet her in heaven."⁹⁶ Leah, in her last moments, compared her suffering to that of Jesus and said, "I never shall say I suffer too much." Like her sister who had died a few months before, Leah "held out her hand, and with much composure of mind bade us farewell, as if she was only going for a short walk, and to return."⁹⁷ Just as today, the loss of a child is traumatic for any parent, yet Bayley shared these memories in an effort to celebrate their lives. We do not know how or where Margaret and Leah were laid to rest, and though the stories of their deaths end here, that was not the case for all enslaved people.

As mentioned earlier, some enslaved people received decent burials in plantation or city cemeteries. At Laurel Grove in Savannah, Georgia, 191 enslaved people between the ages of eleven and twenty-two received burials.

Most were laid to rest by their enslavers after suffering scarlet fever, typhoid fever, or yellow fever; a host of other illnesses such as consumption, pneumonia, syphilis, bronchitis, lockjaw, whooping cough, and pleurisy also claimed lives. Approximately fifteen different local physicians visited and treated some of them before their passing. This suggests that their lives had some value, as enslavers paid medical fees to white physicians for treating them. They also had to pay for burial expenses at the cemetery, further supporting the idea that these individuals were valued not only for their productive labor, but also perhaps for their humanness. Fourteen-year-old Mary Ann likely suffered breast cancer, as a Dr. Fish noted she had a tumor in her breast that could not be treated. A larger number of women, such as Maria (sixteen), Lavinia (seventeen), Maria Watts (eighteen), Julia (nineteen), Keziah (nineteen), Sue (twenty), Louisa (twenty-one), Katy (twenty-two), and Helena (twenty-two), died after giving birth. Many of their infants also died within days. For those who died under suspicion, like Cato (fifteen), a coroner's inquest took place to determine the events and perhaps the culprit.

If young enslaved people did not understand their commodification, those who experienced this humiliation knew very well that their bodies were treated as a movable form of property; by this age, they knew they were chattel. Between the ages of eleven and twenty-two, they experienced a deep understanding of soul value against the backdrop of market and appraised values. Some enslaved people knew in their core that they were not meant to be enslaved. They rejected the external devaluation experiences on the auction block and left slavery by escaping to Canada. Others, like the Bayley women, died enslaved yet expressed freedom of the soul as they looked toward the afterlife with grace and peace. Yet, as enslaved people aged and experienced more separation, they also acted out against their commodification through various forms of resistance. And when they did, many, like Celia, were executed. Upon their executions, their ghost values were assessed, and the financial transactions on their bodies continued. But what about their souls? The next chapter addresses the radical actions of some well-known enslaved people and the unlikely postmortem journeys of their bodies.

CHAPTER 4

Midlife and Older Adulthood

AVERAGE APPRAISED VALUES:

FEMALES: \$528 [\$15,515 IN 2014]

MALES: \$747 [\$21,950 IN 2014]

AVERAGE SALE VALUES:

FEMALES: \$494 [\$14,497 IN 2014]

MALES: \$792 [\$23,266 IN 2014]

I am here loaded with chains, and willing to suffer the fate that awaits me.

—Attributed to Nat Turner, 1831¹

We shall meet in Heaven, where we shall not be parted by the demands of the cruel and unjust monster Slavery.

—John Copeland, 1859²

Sometime in the early 1830s, a middle-aged Virginia woman named Fannie reluctantly stepped up to the auction block. As she approached the platform, however, she refused to stand. Instead, she kneeled down in prayer. Melissa, her two-year-old daughter, was in her arms, and her young son, Gilbert, stood nearby suppressing his tears. Under her breath, she murmured, "Trust in the Lord, And you'll overcome, Somehow, Somewhere, Someday!" These had been the final words of Nat Turner, who some believe was her husband. He had shared this prayer with his congregation on the eve of the Southampton rebellion. Now, nearly two months after his execution, the auctioneer commenced the bidding process for Fannie and her daughter. Her son would be sold separately. Fannie had already endured the hanging and decapitation of her husband and several others involved in the rebellion, and afterward, she too was allegedly "tortured under the lash." Now, Fannie would be separated from her young son, knowing she was unlikely to see him again.³