

Victims of Lust and Hate: Master and Slave Sexual Relations in Antebellum United States

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One of the most important aspects of slave hardship was the sexual abuse they faced, especially that experienced by women. A powerful quote from the narrative of former female slave Harriet Jacobs exemplifies the sexual abuse of slaves and extremely different viewing of white and black sexuality.

I once saw two beautiful children playing together. One was a fair white child; the other was her slave, and also her sister... The fair child grew up to be a still fairer woman. From childhood to womanhood her pathway was blooming with flowers, and overarched by a sunny sky... How had those years dealt with her slave sister, the little playmate of her childhood? She, also, was very beautiful; but the flowers and sunshine of love were not for her. She drank the cup of sin, and shame, and misery, whereof her persecuted race are compelled to drink.¹

This shows the stereotyped difference between white and black women, how slave owners fathered slave children, and how slave women would experience sin and shame due to sexual abuse by their masters. Sexual abuse of slave women was extremely common, and the victims experienced no justice.

One of the most important works about this subject is *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by former female slave Harriet Jacobs. This book was first published in 1861, and was the first slave narrative showing masters' sexual abuse of slaves. Research into this subject began in the

¹ Jacobs, Harriet A. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*. Edited by Jean Flagan Yellin. (Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1987), 29.

1970s, during the feminist movement, and took off in the 1980s and 1990s, with many works on this subject coming about. Jacobs' *Incidents* was published under the pseudonym of Linda Brent. Scholar Jean Fagan Yellin discovered that Jacobs was the true author in the 1980s; however, she began this work during the 1970s.² Scholar Catherine Clinton has contributed to this subject, with works such as *Half-Sisters of History: Southern Women and the American Past* (1994) and a book chapter entitled "Souls of Darkness: Dominance and Submission in the Narratives of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs" (1997). Also, scholar Adrienne D. Davis wrote about "Slavery and the Roots of Sexual Harassment," which also looks into the sexual abuse of slaves. Though these works are just the tip of the iceberg, they show that research into masters' sexual abuse of slaves is fairly recent.³

How and why did slave owners make use of sexually abusing their slaves? How and why did slaves respond to sexual abuse? Also, how did the white men's assumption of black women's submissiveness arise? There are a number of reasons why slave owners sexually abused their slaves: economic gains, desire for domination and control, and as a form of punishment;⁴ conversely, slaves also used sex to rebel through resistance, abortion, and infanticide.⁵ First, after the Trans-Atlantic slave trade ended in 1808, masters needed to keep

² Nakao, Annie. "Her tale was brutal, sexual. No one believed a slave woman could be so literate. But now Harriet Jacobs has reclaimed her name." *SFGate online newspaper* (June 23, 2004).

<http://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/Her-tale-was-brutal-sexual-No-one-believed-a-2747114.php>

³ Glassco, Jalyn. "Master Slave Sexual Abuse." *College of Wooster* (May 8, 2013).
<https://masterslave.voices.wooster.edu/historiography/>

⁴ Foster, Thomas A. "The Sexual Abuse of Black Men under American Slavery." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* (University of Texas Press, 2011), 445-464.

https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_the_history_of_sexuality/summary/v020/20.3.foster.html

⁵ Hine, Darlene C. "Female Slave Resistance: The Economics of Sex." *Western Journal of Black Studies*, (WSU, 1979). <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ210341>

getting more slaves without buying them, hence getting them to reproduce, either with the masters or through forced relations with other slaves.⁶ Next, masters desired complete domination over the mind, body, and soul of their slaves. Sexual submission of female slaves was one-hundred percent expected, but it was not always gained, as will be shown later in the paper. Sex was another powerful form of ensuring the authority of masters over slaves.⁷ Lastly, slave owners used sex as a form of punishment.⁸ Rape and sexual assault are much more demeaning than other forms of physical punishment such as flogging. This took away the slaves' privacy, dignity, and every ounce of control that they previously had over their body. Rape would have been a much more effective way to ensure that a slave would comply with what the master desired.

On the other hand, masters were not the only ones making use of sex in this relationship. Slaves also used sex as a weapon, but as a weapon of resistance instead of oppression. They rebelled by refusing sexual relations with masters and/or other slaves and sometimes aborting children that masters had impregnated them with.⁹ The sexual relationship between a slave and a master had potential benefit for both parties as weaponry. Yet, what about when slaves had supposed consensual relations with their masters? This paper will address this issue by asking what can be considered consensual relations, and how to identify whether slaves and masters could even have consensual sex. The issue of sexual relations

⁶ Boundless. *Women and Slavery - Boundless Open Textbook*. (Boundless U.S. History. July 21, 2015)

⁷ Brooten, Bernadette J., ed. *Beyond Slavery: Overcoming Its Religious and Sexual Legacies*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 295.

⁸ Foster, "The Sexual Abuse of Black Men under American Slavery."

⁹ Hine, "Female Slave Resistance."

between masters and slaves is a crucial component of researching slavery, so that citizens and historians alike can have a better understanding of American slavery.

Though morally wrong, slavery was a very profitable institution. Since it was so profitable, slaves were continually being brought to the United States of America from 1619 until 1808 when the government banned the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Slave owners thought of an effective way to ensure that there were continuously more slaves, without the slave trade. This is why they would force reproduction on their slaves, but how did they do this? Masters had two different methods for ensuring that their slaves would reproduce. Either masters themselves would engage in forced sexual relations with their slaves, or they would force two slaves to engage in sexual relations for the purpose of reproduction. Forcing slaves to reproduce was also known as “slave breeding.”¹⁰ There were also arranged marriages between two slaves that masters thought would produce physically productive children.¹¹ Former slaves Sam and Louisa Everett said, “if their master thought that a certain man and woman might have strong, healthy offspring, he forced them to have sexual relations, even though they were married to other slaves.” This goes to show how slave masters viewed slaves as animals, not even allowing them freedom in their sexual activities. As said by William Ward, a former slave from Georgia, “Dey uster [used to] take women away fum dere husbands an’ put wid some other man to

¹⁰ Boundless Textbook, *Women and Slavery*.

¹¹ Mann, Susan. “Slavery, Sharecropping, and Sexual Inequality.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* (1989), 790. http://scholarworks.uno.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=soc_facpubs

breed jes' like dey would do cattle."¹² Scholar Bernadette Brooten has shone light upon the "sexual economy" of slavery.¹³ Fertility also made a slave more valuable, and therefore impregnating a slave was doubly profitable. There would be one more slave (the baby), and the slave mother would be more profitable to sell.¹⁴ Another quote from Harriet Jacobs, a former slave, is, "women are considered of no value, unless they continuously increase their owner's stock. They are put on a par with animals."¹⁵

However, the slave women who were impregnated most often had inadequate healthcare. Also, the care of slave children was most often carried out communally. Slave mothers were forced to work and had little time to care for their babies. Also, the fathers were often absent. This was because either he was the slave master and wanted nothing to do with the child, or he was an enslaved male and either did not want to help, could not because he had to work, or because him and the mother were separated (most likely by one being sold to another master).¹⁶ This displays how concerned slave owners were with economic gain. They wanted the women to produce healthy babies, but were unwilling to assist in this. Also, white men did not have to offer emotional or physical support to slave children that they fathered.¹⁷ This all continued the sexual abuse of slaves by masters. Though profitability was a main

¹² National Humanities Center. "On Slaveholders' Sexual Abuse of Slaves." *News of the National Humanities Center*. (North Carolina 1937), 21 Sept, 2015. <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/enslavement/text6/mastersslavesexualabuse.pdf>

¹³ Brooten, *Beyond Slavery*, 13.

¹⁴ Hallam, Jennifer. "The Slave Experience: Men, Women, and Gender." (PBS 2004). Accessed October 12, 2015. <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/experience/gender/history.html>

¹⁵ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 49.

¹⁶ Mann, "Slavery, Sharecropping, and Sexual Inequality," 781.

¹⁷ Brooten, *Beyond Slavery*, 193.

motivation for slave owners to engage in sexual relations with their slaves, it was not the only one.

Slave owners desired complete control and domination over their slaves, and engaging in sexual acts with them was one way to assert their dominance and proclaim to the slave that they had control over slaves' bodies. As described by Harriet Jacobs about her master, "Dr. Flint loved money, but he loved power more."¹⁸ Slaves were seen not as humans, but as property. Since slaves were legally owned by their masters, female sexuality was also seen as the property of the masters.¹⁹ James Henry Hammond, a plantation owner with more than 300 slaves, oppressed his female slaves by sexually abusing them. He also intervened in the family lives of his female slaves, with the aim of showing that could control all aspects of their lives. As one scholar has argued, "sexual exploitation was one of the most intrusive ways masters asserted dominance over their slaves as it further removed a slave's right to her own body."²⁰

Though beatings also took away the slave's control of their bodies, sexual domination comprises an entirely different realm compared to physical or mental domination. The slave owners were not just punishing their slaves physically on their external bodies; they were penetrating the female slave's bodies, even taking away the security they might have had that at least their internal bodies were safe from master domination. Men used, or attempted to use, the bodies of female slaves for sex whenever they saw fit. However, this was not always the

¹⁸ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 80.

¹⁹ Brooten, *Beyond Slavery*, 295.

²⁰ Dirkse, Lindsey. "Slavery & Place: The South Carolina Case." (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill 2010) Accessed October 12, 2015. <http://slaveryandplace.web.unc.edu/about/>

case, as will be discussed below.²¹ Female sexual abuse reinforced the display of domination of masters over slave men *and* women. Slave men were unable to protect slave women from being victims of sexual abuse, therefore emasculating them and taking away their role as protectors of women.²²

Male slave owners were not the only ones that took advantage of slaves sexually. There is also evidence that elite white women coerced enslaved men into sexual relations. During this time period, women were still considered to be subservient to men and played a submissive role in their lives. Since white women were typically dominated by white men, these white women most likely sexually abused male slaves for purposes of domination and control. Abusing male slaves was a way for these women to feel that they had some aspect of domination and/ or control in their own lives, and to escape the submissive role they were forced into by their husbands and society.²³ A quote from an unnamed former slave from Georgia exemplifies the submission to which black *and* white women were expected to adhere: "In them times white men wen [went] with colored gals and women bold[ly]. Any time they saw one and wanted her, she had to go with him, and his wife didn't say nothin' bout it."²⁴ This displays the expectation by men that they could engage in relations with women besides their wives, relations which were forced upon the enslaved females, and usually neither the white women nor the black women could stop this from happening or confront the issue. This desire

²¹ Brooten, *Beyond Slavery*, 295.

²² Foster, "The Sexual Abuse of Black Men under American Slavery".

²³ Allain, Jacqueline. "Sexual Relations Between Elite White Women and Enslaved Men in the Antebellum South: A Socio-Historical Analysis." *Student Pulse - Online Academic Student Journal*. (2013).

²⁴ National Humanities Center.

by masters for domination and control over their slaves ties into the next reason why masters sexually abused their slaves.

Masters expected to engage in sexual relations with their slaves, and some female slaves were sold exclusively for the purpose of concubinage.²⁵ But why was this so, and how did whites' stereotype of black women's sexuality come about? Men thought African-American females should be available for sexual relations with any black or white man. In this time, whites viewed blacks as completely separate beings. They were considered property and treated like animals. Since whites treated them like animals, this perpetuated the stereotype that black sexuality was more animalistic, and therefore many white men saw it as more attractive.

The supposed animalistic nature of black women's sexuality was a stark contrast to the assumed purity and submissiveness of white women.²⁶ As one scholar has argued, "white society believed black women to be innately lustful beings. Because the ideal white woman was pure and, in the nineteenth century, modest to the degree of prudishness, the perception of the African woman as hyper-sexual made her both the object of white man's abhorrence and his fantasy."²⁷ The laws during the nineteenth century also fed the stereotype of black women's sexuality being promiscuous and lustful there were no laws in place protecting black women from sexual assault. This is because white Americans thought black women were unable to be raped because they were supposedly "impure." However, they were only impure because of slavery, so whites used sexual abuse of their slaves to justify the ideas that black women were

²⁵ Boundless Textbook, *Women and Slavery*.

²⁶ Brooten, *Beyond Slavery*, 253.

²⁷ Hallam, "The Slave Experience."

impure.²⁸ Impurity in this context means non-virginal, and usually frequently sexually active, either with one or multiple men. One scholar argues, “some whites defended the sexual exploitation of enslaved women as necessary to protect white womanhood from men’s base passions; slaveholders, they argued, could satisfy their sexual appetites with enslaved women, thereby preserving white women’s purity.” African-American women were also referred to as “whores,” a derogatory term for a sexually promiscuous woman. Also, there was no punishment for white men for raping their female slaves because slave bodies legally belonged to their owners.²⁹ Most of the time, masters engaged in, or tried to engage in, sexual relations with young, single female slaves, but occasionally married slaves were raped.³⁰

The institution of slavery put enslaved women into one of two categories. Either they were considered to be a “Mammy” or a “Jezebel.” Mammy was thought of as being asexual, usually worked in the home, and exemplified “ideal slave behavior.” She was seen as a loyal caregiver and sometimes as a “surrogate mother” who was totally unappealing to white men because she was generally depicted as overweight and older, with typical African-American features. This pleased the masters’ wives, since they did not have to worry so much about their husbands engaging in relations with a slave that was seen as maternal and unattractive. In blunt contrast to the Mammy figure was Jezebel. Jezebel was an over-sexualized female slave that supposedly acted solely based upon her sexual desires. She was seen as a temptress that could allure “innocent” men (slave owners and/ or overseers) into sexual relations with her. Brooten

²⁸ Brooten, *Beyond Slavery*, 43.

²⁹ Brooten, *Beyond Slavery*, 45.

³⁰ Hallam, “The Slave Experience.”

has argued, “the ideological construct of the lascivious Jezebel legitimized white men’s sexual abuse of black women; for if black women were inherently promiscuous, they could not be violated.”³¹ Some of these “jezebels” were female slaves that, as previously mentioned, were sold for the purposes of concubinage. They were referred to as “fancy maids.” This means that the female slave would live with the master, and usually engage in sexual relations with him, but has a lesser status than his wife.

That white men saw these black women slaves as more attractive did not give them an advantage in this institution. These concubine slaves had even less of a chance of resisting their masters’ advances, since they were sold solely for the purposes of sex and therefore expected to be available for this whenever the master desired.³² Jacobs said, “if God has bestowed beauty upon her [the female slave], it will prove her greatest curse.”³³ Many masters did engage in sexual relations with female slaves, generally without caring how their wives’ felt about it.

Another example from Jacobs discusses this aspect of the master and slave relationship:

The slave girl is reared in an atmosphere of licentiousness and fear...When she is 14 or 15, her owner, or his sons, or the overseer, or perhaps all of them, begin to bribe her with presents. If these fail to accomplish their purpose, she is whipped or starved into submission to their will.³⁴

Many slave women were subjected to sexual abuse by multiple men on just one plantation, offering them little hope for resistance. Since sexual relations were usually forced and unpleasant for the slave, slave owners used sexual abuse as a form of punishment.

³¹ Brooten, *Beyond Slavery*, 45.

³² Boundless Textbook, *Women and Slavery*.

³³ Jacobs, *Incidents*, 28.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

Violence was always a threat to slaves. No matter how hard they worked, there was always a chance they would not be doing enough to please their master, and then would be punished.³⁵ There is a famous court case, *State v. Hoover*, of sexual violence against a slave, which took place in 1839. John Hoover was a land and slave owner residing in the small town of Statesville, North Carolina.³⁶ A scholar has argued, “it would appear that Hoover was desperately and violently trying to make Mira [his slave] abort her child, perhaps because he had fathered the baby or resented the man who had, or perhaps because he was driven by deep-seated emotions that defied understanding, even for Hoover.” It is likely that Hoover fathered Mira’s child, since it was well-known in his community that he sexually abused his slaves.

They [white residents of Statesville] probably believed that fornication by white males in southern society was tolerable but not as acceptable with women of a darker skin color... Yet those, like Hoover, who practiced promiscuous sexual liaisons coupled with extreme violent behavior with slave women could and did evoke the wrath of the community in which they lived.³⁷

Since Mira refused to abort her baby, Hoover felt that she deserved the ultimate punishment: she was sexually abused and tortured to death. The extreme torturing occurred from approximately December 15, 1838 to March 27, 1839 (her death). Hoover was the only slave master in the South to be hanged for killing a slave, probably because a new law enacted in 1817, giving slaves more protection, stated that slaves could be punished but not killed. However, people in the community spoke out not about the slave abuse, but about Hoover’s

³⁵ Mann, “Slavery, Sharecropping, and Sexual Inequality,” 788.

³⁶ Morton, Patricia, ed. *Discovering the Women in Slavery: Emancipating Perspectives on the American Past*. (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 50.

³⁷ Morton, *Discovering*, 51.

antisocial personality, because of a southern “code of honor” and white male community members were unlikely to get involved in a master/ slave relationship other than their own. Psychologists starting in the 1990s referred to Hoover as having a “sexual perversion,” possibly sadomasochism, that led him to abuse and beat Mira. Sadomasochism is when someone receives pleasure from inflicting pain on another person. Analysts of Hoover’s life and court case display that he most likely abused his wife and children as well.³⁸ This case shows that sexual abuse was used as a punishment, usually accompanied by physical abuse. There is also a quote from the narrative *Twelve Years a Slave* by Solomon Northup that shows the physical and sexual punishment faced by slave women:

If Patsey [23 year-old slave] uttered a word in opposition to her master’s will, the lash was resorted to at once, to bring her to subjection; if she was not watchful about her cabin, or when walking in the yard, a billet of wood, or a broken bottle perhaps, hurled from her mistress’s hand, and would smite her unexpectedly in the face. The enslaved victim of lust and hate, Patsey had no comfort of her life.³⁹

The jealous mistress would physically abuse Patsey, while the master sexually abused her other times, showing how this abuse was often intertwined.

Another case of sexual abuse led to death, but in a completely different way. The case of slave Celia and master John Newsome took place in Callaway county, Missouri in the 1850s. Newsome purchased Celia when she was 14 years old. Newsome certainly took advantage of her recent sexual maturity by raping her repeatedly from when she was purchased, causing her to bear two of his children. Though Celia had already considered the idea, George (a slave Celia

³⁸ Ibid., 49-56.

³⁹ Northup, Solomon. *Twelve Years a Slave*. Louisiana State University Press (1968), 143.

was involved with) encouraged Celia to end Newsome's sexual abuse. "On the night of June 23, 1855, Newsome made his last demand. As he approached Celia in her cabin, she hit him with a stick, causing him to fall to his death." Celia had a very public trial, which ended in her being hanged on December 21, 1855, at the age of nineteen. In the Hoover case, the courts went against the ideology of white social order, while in Celia's case the white social order was upheld. Though this case was not necessarily sexual abuse as a form of punishment, Newsome did not listen to Celia's pleas to end the sexual abuse, but, most likely to punish her for this, he came to her cabin every single night.⁴⁰ However, Celia's murder of her abusive master brings up the next point of slave response to sexual abuse.

Some female slaves responded to their masters' sexual abuse in order to rebel against their masters, the abuse, and/or the entire institution of slavery: "as often as black men, black women rebelled against the inhumanities of slave owners."⁴¹ While male slaves resisted by doing things such as refusing to work or breaking tools, females were able to resist in sexual ways. The case of former slave from North Carolina, Harriet Jacobs, is an example of the resistance of sexual abuse that some slaves utilized. When she was still a child, Jacobs was purchased as a slave by a man, Dr. Flint. Though Flint was married, when Jacobs reached sexual maturity, he began to pursue her, though she was not the first of his slaves to be sexually pursued by him. Flint would whisper sexual things to Jacobs, and incessantly tried to coerce her into submission and concubinage.⁴² "For years, my master had done his utmost to pollute my

⁴⁰ Morton, *Discovering*, 53 (whole paragraph).

⁴¹ Hallam, "The Slave Experience."

⁴² Jacobs, *Incidents*, 27-36.

mind with foul images, and to destroy the pure principles in calculated by my grandmother, and the good mistress of my childhood.”⁴³ Flint even went as far as to build a cabin for Jacobs on his property so he could sexually abuse her. However, Jacobs hatched a plot so she could resist Flint. Though Flint was constantly frustrated with Jacobs for trying to resist him, he would not sell her to anyone because of his obsession with gaining her submission. Fortunately, though it was a struggle, Jacobs was able to resist Flint throughout her entire life, though he incessantly pursued her throughout the country.⁴⁴

Though this is a prominent example of female slave resistance of sexual abuse, it is certainly not the only case. As mentioned previously, the slave Celia resisted her master Newsome’s sexual advances by eventually murdering him.⁴⁵ Darlene Hine argues the main methods of female slave resistance. They include sexual abstinence, abortion, and infanticide. Jacobs is an example of sexual abstinence, but some slaves went further than that. Some female slaves were unable to resist the sexual advances of their masters, and were forcibly impregnated. Though abortions during this time period were extremely dangerous, slave women were willing to abort their unwanted fetuses to rebel against their owners, depriving the owners of the economic gain the child would have brought, and lessening their masters’ feelings of superiority and control. Others participated in infanticide. If unable or afraid to abort the child, some slave women would carry the child until birth, deliver the child, and then kill the child within a year of birth. Though this seems cruel, one must look at the terrible situations

⁴³ Ibid., 54.

⁴⁴ Jacobs, *Incidents*, 27-85.

⁴⁵ Morton, *Discovering the Women in Slavery*, 53.

that female slaves were placed in to see their reasoning for killing their own child. The female slave would most likely have psychological damage from being enslaved and being sexually abused. Then, after the abuse, the women had to carry the baby they were forcibly impregnated with, knowing that their master was pleased and would benefit economically from the mother and child. Even if the mother was willing to raise the baby and care for it, she would most likely have no help or support from the father, be subjected to harsher treatment from the master's wife, and be forced to watch the child become a slave. Once all these factors are taken into account, it does not seem unreasonable that a slave mother would want to abort or commit infanticide on her child.⁴⁶

There was also another way that slaves used sex: "sometimes female slaves acquiesced to advances hoping that such relationships would increase the chances that they or their children would be liberated by the master." However, this was a rare occurrence. Slaves usually were not willing to sacrifice their reproductive abilities and dignity just in the hope of freedom. Also, slave owners that fathered slave's children rarely treated them well. Most of the time, they were sold off to other slave owners, because the jealous wives did not want reminders of their husbands' infidelity.⁴⁷ "He [Flint] never allowed his offspring by slaves to remain long in sight of himself and his wife."⁴⁸ This was the attitude that most slave owners who fathered slaves had. There is yet another master and slave dynamic that must be looked into carefully.

⁴⁶ Hine, "Female Slave Resistance."

⁴⁷ Hallam, "The Slave Experience."

⁴⁸ Jacobs, *Incidents*, 55.

In some cases, where slave owners did not force themselves on slaves, but they engaged in sexual relations together. This raises the question of “consensual” sexual relations. Consent is defined as permission for something to happen or agreement to do something. However, from today’s point of view, it is clear that the master and slaves relationship was inherently non-consensual. African-Americans were forced into slavery, and clearly suffered from their lower status. Since slave owners consented to owning slaves, but slaves did not consent to being owned, could consensual sexual relations have been possible? Today, most people would say no, since today consent is defined as yes means yes, and both parties must agree to the entire relationship. However, this was not the case for the nineteenth century. Wives were supposed to be submissive to their husbands, and not experience any of their own feelings of sexual desire, yet be available for sex when the husband’s desired. Sex for women was only acceptable within marriage, and even then was supposed to be infrequent and not too enjoyable. Men were allowed to engage in pre-marital sex, and it was more acceptable for them to have strong sexual feelings.⁴⁹ Even in slave marriage, the black male slave was considered the head of the family. Furthermore, all women in America at this time were considered property, not just slave women.⁵⁰

Perhaps the most famous supposedly consensual case of master and slave sexual relations is that of former president Thomas Jefferson and his slave Sally Hemings. Much evidence indicates that Jefferson and Hemings engaged in sexual relations beginning in the

⁴⁹ Radek, Kimberly M. “Women in Literature: Women in the 19th Century.” Illinois Valley Community College (21 April 2008), 10 Nov, 2015. http://www2.ivcc.edu/gen2002/women_in_the_nineteenth_century.htm

⁵⁰ Mann, “Slavery, Sharecropping, and Sexual Inequality,” 786.

1780s, and he fathered several of her children. Some think of their relationship as a “forbidden love,” but most of these people are likely trying to preserve Jefferson’s reputation. Though love is possible in any relationship, evidenced by women who stay with abusive husbands, neither Jefferson nor Hemings left any evidence such as letters to justify the claims of a loving, consensual relationship. Since Sally was young, pregnant, and enslaved, she had limited options other than to stay with Jefferson. Also, slave women did not have the power to avoid sexual relations with their masters and rarely had to be forced into them, since they knew they would not be able to refuse in most cases. Though Hemings could have stayed behind in France when she accompanied Jefferson there, it would have been extremely difficult for her to do so without any financial or emotional support. Lastly, though Jefferson did allow his and Sally’s two oldest children to run away in an attempt to gain freedom, sources say that he showed no evidence of his own children’s departure. Jefferson was well-known for finding the physical appearance of African-Americans undesirable, though Hemings was a lighter-skinned woman due to her mixed race, and therefore was seen as attractive.⁵¹ Though this relationship could have been loving and consensual, the evidence left by the relationship between Jefferson and Hemings strongly suggests that it could not have been and was not consensual, no matter how people wish to romanticize it. As said in the collection of essays *Beyond Slavery*, consent and coercion were not real alternatives in the lives of slave women, since they had no choice but to comply with their master’s wishes.⁵²

⁵¹ Brooten, *Beyond Slavery*, 191-201.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 194.

The sexual abuse faced by slaves at the hands of their masters is a tragic historical aspect of slavery. A quote from Thomas Foster sums up well the reasons for this sexual abuse:

“physical sexual abuse of women and girls under slavery ranged from acts of punishment to expressions of desire and from forms of forced reproduction to systems of concubinage.”⁵³

Whites also perpetuated predetermined notions about black women’s sexuality as being more animalistic and promiscuous, giving supposed justification to masters for sexually abusing their slaves.⁵⁴ Slaves responded to this sexual abuse as forms of resistance to their masters and the entire institution of slavery.⁵⁵ All of this information remains extremely relevant today, so historians and others can realize the true impact of the abuse that slaves experienced, and also to ensure that the stereotype of black women’s sexuality is not continued.

⁵³ Foster, “The Sexual Abuse of Black Men under American Slavery.”

⁵⁴ Brooten, *Beyond Slavery*, 253.

⁵⁵ Hine, “Female Slave Resistance.”