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On the Tails of the Trade: Enslaved Women, Slave Traders, and the Households they Shared

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Abstract
Throughout the antebellum period, enslaved women engaged in intimate relationships with white men, some of whom were actually slave traders, upholding the institution that kept them in bondage. While each individual’s experience varied, the origins and subsequent circumstances of these women emerged from white notions of enslaved and black women’s sexuality and the widespread sexual exploitation of enslaved women, particularly through the “fancy trade,” the trade of enslaved women specifically for their sexual labor. As the companions of slave traders, these women dealt intimately with the quintessential facets of the slave trade firsthand, living and even working around slave pens, auctions, and more. Though these women often resented the slave trade, they were likely compelled by two realities – that they lacked the agency to reject traders’ advances and a relationship could result in some stability and power. Indeed, for many women, it did, as these women’s partners gave them access to expanded resources and enabled them to build lives without fearing sale.

Keywords
slavery, slave trade, fancy trade, slave jails, concubinage, race, interracial relationships, Antebellum history

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ON THE TAILS OF THE TRADE: ENSLAVED WOMEN, SLAVE TRADERS, AND THE HOUSEHOLDS THEY SHARED

Zarina Iman

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For my grandparents
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Introduction

Slavery in the antebellum United States was facilitated by an elaborate network of slave traders. Based in major cities throughout these regions, these men each bought and sold hundreds of enslaved people annually, often housing them in slave pens or “jails” located either in or near their offices. Over the course of their dealings, some of these traders engaged in long-term intimate relationships and even started families with enslaved women they owned. Straddling two worlds, one of enslaved people and another of those who profited off them, these women were at some points victims and at others beneficiaries of slavery and the slave trade. As such, an understanding of their lives and their unique positionality complicates current notions of, and provides further insight to the slave trade and the institution as a whole.

Examining the enslaved partners of slave traders, it becomes clear that traders placed them into these relationships, by manipulating white society’s hypersexualized conceptions of enslaved women and taking advantage of enslaved women’s lack of agency to reject their advances. Traders also formalized the “fancy trade,” the market of enslaved women for companionship and sexual labor, further legitimizing these women’s sexual exploitation. Once in these relationships, women labored for their slave trading partners in their homes but also in slave pens. While the lives they built with traders afforded them access to unique opportunities, such as travel, and financial benefits, the women still lacked the rights of legal wives. This distinction curtailed their claims to wealth amassed by their partners and freedom. To handle these challenges, these women built diverse social network and eventually new lives, as their partners died. Into the emancipation era, these women’s lives diverge, with some feeling remorse for their role in the slave trade, many passing as white, and all attempting to move on.
Since the rise of social history in the mid-twentieth century, an increasing portion of this scholarship has and continues to focus on subaltern populations, including women of color and their interactions with institution of slavery. Thus far, this scholarly trend has resulted in pivotal works, such as *Ar'n't I a woman?* by Deborah Gray White or *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* by Jennifer Morgan, both of which detail aspects of labor and life unique to enslaved women. Works like these are indeed revolutionary and mandatory reading for those interested in the study of women of color and slavery; however, despite these foundational texts, there is still much work left to be done to complicate and expand on women of color’s interactions with slavery. This thesis pursues one of those avenues - the experience of enslaved women engaged in intimate relationships with slave traders – and also brings the disparate research about the slave trade, slave pens, relationships between enslaved people and slave owners, and even some of the specific women together.

Historians have recently tried to reconstruct the experiences of some of the women focused on in this research, but they have done so in different contexts. In her book *An Intimate Economy: Enslaved Women, Work, and America's Domestic Slave Trade*, Alexandra J. Finley, for instance, writes about some of the enslaved partners of slave traders in Richmond, Virginia and New Orleans to support broader points about enslaved women’s labor in the slave trade. Finley’s research, like that of others who mention specific women, provide a starting point for those who want to investigate the lives of these women further and are helpful for identifying primary source material. However, this work of historians on individual women, though helpful, differs fundamentally from this study, which compares the experiences of these women as a whole to draw out larger themes in their lives.
Beyond research into individual women, this research relies upon broader studies of the slave trade, sexual labor, and the “fancy” trade. Works on the slave trade in America, such as *Soul by Soul* by Walter Johnson, contextualize the world of slave pens, auction blocks, and slave advertisements that these women existed in. Further, articles, like Edward Baptist’s widely referenced piece ""Cuffy," "Fancy Maids," and "One-Eyed Men": Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States,” explain the sexual exploitation enslaved women, specifically “fancy girls,” faced, as well as the premium slave traders and buyers placed on whiteness among enslaved women. Though not all enslaved women in relationships with traders were fancy maids, many were mixed-race or possessed the fetishized whiteness and lightness that slave buyers and traders so highly valued. Therefore, these understandings of the trade and the value of projected white femininity help explain not only how these enslaved women found themselves in their circumstances but also how others perceived them.

Centered on enslaved people, especially those who were somehow aligned with or tied to enslavers, this thesis also demands that the agency of these women be considered. Walter Johnson’s article “On Agency” shows how historians’ understanding of agency has shifted and provides a nuanced explanation for the agency enslaved people had. Johnson argues that many conflate agency with humanity and that slavery permeated and ultimately limited most if not all of enslaved people’s decisions, curtailing any possible agency. His theory provides a lens with which this thesis will interpret the actions of these enslaved women. In addition, more general studies of enslaved women’s lives, such as Marissa Fuentes’ *Dispossessed Lives*, have proven instructive on how other historians have addressed agency. Moreover, these studies provide a model on how to conduct research on people similarly situated to the women in this research and to apply the limited primary sources available to draw conclusions. In essence, these secondary
source materials provide a broader understanding and general information about aspects of these women’s experiences, but no cohesive conclusions about the lives of these largely unstudied women.

Given the limited primary source material specifically about these women, due to their status as both women and enslaved people, this research includes as much information as available about every woman I could identify. Some women, like Corinna Hinton or Corinna Omohundro, left a significant paper trail, while others, like Beck Robards, had only a few documents tied to their name. Reflecting the source material, this research more heavily represents women who left more behind. This subset of women was likely among the more successful in navigating their circumstances, implying that there are probably many more women who had a more difficult time surviving their enslavement. Regardless, this study includes women in the archive on all points of the spectrum, in an attempt to honor the experiences of all women in similar circumstances and objectively understand the themes of their lives.

The primary source work for this research is largely genealogical, relying on items like census records and slave schedules, accounts of free people’s enslaved holdings taken with the census. These sources provided basic information about traders and their enslaved partners, like age or area of residence, which enabled a reconstruction of the overall trajectory of these women’s lives. Wills and financial records then enlivened these basic facts, adding details like what these women purchased in their day to day. Wills were especially revelatory, as traders and their partners seemed to use their deaths as an opportunity to speak more openly about and to their partners and families, reflecting possible family dynamics. These women too left information, albeit sparse, about themselves behind. There are some instances, like a letter from
Corinna Hinton to a Union General or Ann Marie Barclay’s testimony in a court case for her inheritance from her slave trading partner, where these women’s voices can be heard directly. Since these sources include information about these women’s lives in their own words, this research delves into these sources to tease out as much of their experiences as possible. Nevertheless, these sources are limited, and as such, this study fills gaps with letters from traders to each other and slave narratives from a variety of formerly enslaved people who passed through slave pens, like Solomon Northrup’s *12 Years a Slave*, ultimately reconstructing a fuller picture of these enslaved women’s lives.

To adequately delve into the daily experiences and overall lives of these women and their households, this thesis is composed of four parts. Chapter One provides context about how these women found themselves, or rather were situated, in relationships with slave traders. This section covers the major dynamics of the slave trade and general white society, including the hypersexualization of enslaved women and enslaved people’s lack of agency, that underpinned enslaved women’s concubinage to slave traders. Moreover, the chapter provides details about the fancy trade, specifically why white men bought fancies and how traders and buyers distinguished enslaved women to be a “fancy.” With this context, the following section, Chapter Two, describes the setting of these women’s lives with traders: slave pens or jails. While scholarship exists about individual pens, only a few studies, like Maurie D. McInnis’ "Mapping the Slave Trade in Richmond and New Orleans," provide cohesive insight into multiple pens. Additionally, only a handful of slave pens still stand today, further hindering research on these architectural fixtures of the trade. Thus, this chapter pulls together disparate research, firsthand accounts, and images of slave pens to illustrate the setting that traders and their enslaved partners lived around and worked in.
The final two chapters, the bulk of this research, unpack the actual lived experiences of these enslaved women. Chapter Three analyzes enslaved women’s daily lives while living with traders, covering the labor they performed, their families, and the unique resources they had access to, such as educations, material goods, the ability to travel North and live as white women, and more. Highlighting their status as concubines rather than wives, this section also covers the potential challenges these women faced, like reliance on their partners for freedom and financial support, and how women navigated this opposition with social networks of their own. Further, Chapter Three posits how these women may have felt about their circumstances, which is continued into Chapter Four.

The final section of this thesis, Chapter Four examines the lives of these women after the death of slave traders and emancipation, events that resulted in their freedom. In this new period of their lives, the women gained a new sense of agency that they exhibited in legal documents, letters, and actions. While still marginalized as Black women, these women can be examined for the first time beyond the coercive institution of slavery, providing a better understanding of how they truly felt about their circumstances. Through the death of their slave trading partners, many women received bequests to sustain themselves and their households, turning them into direct beneficiaries of slavery. Given that they were no longer living under enslavement, this chapter evaluates women’s actions with regard to these bequests they received, their former partners and more, to understand their emotions, and by extension their experience, in their relationships with traders. Again, these women’s status as concubines and not wives hindered their access to these finances, so they also turned to skills they gained during their enslavement to support their families. These women, taking advantage of their newfound freedom, utilized their social
networks, entered new marriages and relationships, and often passed as white, all to create new lives for themselves.
Chapter 1

“Made A Housekeeper”: How Traders Transformed Enslaved Women into Enslaved Concubines

Reflecting on his time in enslavement, William Wells Brown spent part of his 1847 narrative discussing his time working for a St. Louis slave trader he called Mr. Walker. Of the many enslaved people he encountered passing through Walker’s hands, he recalled meeting “poor Cynthia… a quadroon, and one of the most beautiful women.” Brown told readers Walker presented Cynthia with an ultimatum: either live with Walker or be sold as a field hand. Despite Cynthia’s initial rejections and Brown’s attempts to comfort her, he stated that he “foresaw but too well what the result must be” and that Cynthia was eventually “made a housekeeper” by Walker.¹ Brown then informed readers that Cynthia served as the mistress of Walker’s household and had children with him, before he sold her and the children in anticipation of his marriage to a white woman.

Cynthia’s experience of exploitation, sexual and otherwise, embodies that of countless other enslaved women who found themselves in intimate relationships with enslavers and slave traders specifically. These traders, and much of white Southern society, essentially turned enslaved women into concubines through hypersexualizing them, formalizing the “fancy trade,” the trade of enslaved women primarily for sex, and preying on enslaved women’s lack of options. As an enslaved woman, Cynthia faced the reality that she lacked the ability to secure her own body and was therefore always sexually available in the eyes of white men. Further, although Brown does not explicitly call Cynthia a “fancy,” his reference to her as a “quadroon,” a woman with one-quarter Black heritage, indicates that she likely underwent additional

fetishization for her proximity to whiteness, as was characteristic of the “fancy trade.” Moreover, his deliberate description of Cynthia as a quadroon shows that Brown expected readers would have some familiarity with the fancy trade or at least the premium placed on whiteness, in turn, reflecting how widespread the practice was.

Beyond revealing how traders mentally transformed enslaved women into sexual objects via their characterizations of enslaved women and their advent of the fancy trade, Brown’s recollections of Cynthia also show how traders capitalized on the little agency enslaved women had in these relationships. While Walker technically gave Cyntia a choice, Brown recognizes that such choice was superficial and framed Cynthia’s fate as an outcome that “must be.” Women like Cynthia were truly “made” into housekeepers, a common euphemism for enslaved women who engaged in relationships with the men who owned them. Cynthia’s experience and Brown’s own retelling of it reveals the coercion that underpinned enslaved women’s intimate relationships with slave traders.

Throughout the antebellum period, white society viewed enslaved women as hypersexual beings, incessantly available for the gratification of white men. This view was informed by multiple circumstances from the very beginning of the slave trade. In the first chapter of her book *Arn’t I a Woman?: Female Slaves In the Plantation South*, historian Deborah G. White details how English explorers’ initial misconstrual of African women’s partial nudity as inherently sexual rather than a response to their tropical climate gave rise to antebellum stereotypes that Black women were “jezebels,” promiscuous women who invited the advances of
men. As chattel slavery took hold in America, white men codified this initial notion of promiscuity by excluding women of color and enslaved women from laws punishing rape, implying that their mere existence was consent enough. Relying on this portrayal of enslaved Black women, white men used enslaved women as outlets for sexual conduct that was not socially acceptable for white women to engage in. For example, in her article on concubinage in the antebellum South, historian Brenda Stevenson notes how white teenage boys often had their first sexual experiences with enslaved women and girls, since white women and girls could not risk their reputations on sexual interactions outside of marriage. In fact, Stevenson writes, such interactions were sometimes even facilitated by white fathers who probably underwent similar experiences in their own youth, reflecting how the exploitation of enslaved women was propagated by generations of society, almost as a rite of passage for white men.

In addition to engaging purely in sexual exploitation, scholar Libra Hilde observes that for white men who lacked the means or maturity to have a white wife, enslaved women provided companionship without the standards and upkeep demanded by wives. Speaking to young white men in New Orleans, Frederick Law Olmstead wrote about how one man showed him that “it was cheaper for him to placer,” the practice of living with a free mixed race woman, “than to live in any other way which could be expected of him in New Orleans.” This man noted that the

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woman, referred to as a placee, “did not, except occasionally, require a servant; she did the marketing, and performed all the ordinary duties of housekeeping herself.” Unlike a white wife who had “expensive tastes” and necessitated an “extravagant style of housekeeping,” this woman served as both a companion and housekeeper. If men could extract such inexpensive labor from free women of color, they could certainly receive the same and more from enslaved concubines.

These notions of hypersexuality and promiscuity influenced how people viewed enslaved women as they passed from the auction block into the hands and homes of slave traders. Witnessing the auction of a young girl dressed in “silks and satins,” as “fancy maids” commonly were, white southern diarist Mary Chesnut wrote that the girl “seemed delighted with it all, sometimes ogling the bidders.” In her short description, Chesnut portrays the enslaved girl not only as an accomplice to her own sale but an active participant. In using the word “ogling,” Chesnut insinuates that the girl desired her sale and additionally desired her own subsequent sexual exploitation.

Chesnut along with some of the men who bought themselves “housekeepers” and “fancy maids” may have invoked the idea that enslaved women “ogled” and chose their partners to create the illusion of consent. Historian Emily Owens explains that while socially and legally acceptable, slave owners wanted to avoid the blatant use of force on women of color, as it underscored the reality that these men were abusing their power on women who had no say in their circumstances. As such, these men manipulated the law to render women of color “unable to consent and unable to refuse to consent” of men, which “upheld the allure of consent’s presence, while also leaving open the possibility of forced sex without consequence.” However,

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regardless of consent, whether actual or fictive, slave traders thought of and treated enslaved women as beings who were always available for their use.

Planter and slave trader Rice C. Ballard and his famed partner, Isaac Franklin, who would become one of the wealthiest slave traders in the nation, and Isaac’s nephew, James, all blatantly operated under this belief when writing to each other. In their letters, these men candidly shared details of their personal sexual relationships with, their opinions of, and sometimes even sexual banter about enslaved women. Writing to Ballard, James Franklin recounted his seeing “a handsome girl,” who to his “certain knowledge had been used & smartly at that by a one-eyed man about [his] age and size.” He then goes on to declare that he “shall do the best with and for the fancy white maid.” Delving into the younger Franklin’s quote, historian Edward Baptist clarifies that “one-eyed man” was a contemporary euphemism for a penis and one that both Franklins used in their letters to Ballard when referring to slave trading and slave holding white men. As such, in his letter, James informs Ballard that the “handsome woman,” whom he implies is his own “fancy white maid” only one sentence later, was “used” or sexually exploited by a penis similar to his own. Given that James expresses his “certainty” of the events and asks Ballard to “forgive [his] foolishness” in the letter, it becomes apparent that James’ anecdote is a long-winded tongue-in-cheek brag about himself and his “one-eyed man’s” sexual abuse of his light-skinned or “white” fancy maid. James’ jovial tone when retelling the rape of the enslaved woman reflects his disregard for the autonomy of enslaved women and his own entitlement to their bodies and sexuality. While this excerpt is one of the most overt instances of these traders

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11 For more on Franklin, his business partner John Armfield, and Ballard see The Ledger and the Chain: How Domestic Slave Traders Shaped America by Joshua D. Rothman.
discussing their violations of enslaved women, their letters contain multiple references to fancy maids in a similar merry tone.

Isaac Franklin, also writing to Ballard, asked his partner, "the fancy girl, from Charlattsvilla, will you send her out or shall I charge you $1100 for her? Say quick, I wanted to see her." Teasing Ballard about charging him for the “fancy girl” in his possession, the elder Franklin intimated that he believed Ballard is using the girl himself. The letter suggests that Ballard’s sexual exploitation of enslaved women he planned to sell did occur, even if not in this instance. This implication is further corroborated by a quip Franklin makes later in the letter, where he wrote that he thought Ballard would already “be satisfied with two or three maids.”

Like his nephew, Franklin’s joking tone highlights exactly how little traders were concerned by the sexual abuse of enslaved women. In fact, Franklin’s only qualms with Ballard retaining the enslaved woman was the possible money lost and the fact that he too wanted to abuse or “see” her. In Franklin’s eyes Ballard, not the enslaved woman, was the obstacle standing between him and his ability to “see” her, again demonstrating white men’s entitlement to enslaved women and their bodies.

A final excerpt from the letters shared among these traders underscores the pervasiveness of slave owners’ entitlement to and their hypersexualization of enslaved women. Isaac Franklin, again writing to Ballard, noted that Ballard’s “old Lady and Susan could soon pay for themselves by keeping a whore house.” Although not completely clear which women Franklin is referring to, historian Sharony Green posits that the “old Lady and Susan” were likely Avenia White and

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15 Isaac Franklin to R. C. Ballard, January 11, 1834.
16 Wendell Holmes Stephenson, Isaac Franklin: Slave Trader and Planter of the Old South, With Plantation Records (Baton Rouge, La., 1938), 35-36.
Susan Johnson, two enslaved women, whom Ballard freed and relocated to Cincinnati along with their children prior to his marriage to a white woman. Ballard’s records reveal that he kept in contact with these women after freeing them and provided them and their children with some financial support. This preferential treatment indicates that Ballard likely engaged in intimate relationships with these women and fathered their children and that he held some sort of affection or attachment to them. Franklin was aware of this attachment, as he calls one of the women Ballard’s “Old lady,” a common term when referring to someone’s wife. Still, Ballard’s connection to these two formerly enslaved women did not prevent Franklin from hypersexualizing them. Franklin likely knew of Ballard’s connection to these women, since he mentions them by name and nickname. He may have even met their children. Nevertheless, by virtue of being enslaved and Black, these women were also subjected to hypersexualization, reflected in Franklin’s belief that they were suited for and would succeed at sex work, or more plainly, that they were “whores.”

Despite all enslaved women facing white society’s condemnations for being promiscuous Jezebels, women who engaged in intimate relationships with slave traders, like Avenia White and Susan Johnson, were often directly a part of the fancy trade. Throughout the antebellum period, traders cultivated the fancy trade, the submarket of enslaved women specifically for sex and companionship, making the trade widespread. While some invoked euphemisms and metaphors, like “housekeeper,” “seamstress,” or “fancy maids,” many traders took no issue with

18 Green, Remember Me to Miss Louisa, 52.
openly discussing the fancy trade and its purpose. Acting as an administrator of a will, Zacariah Trice advertised that he was selling “several fancy girls” in the sale of an estate that he was the administrator of in Georgia. In Norfolk, Virginia, trader Joseph Holladay touted “a colored girl, of very superior qualifications.” Holladay noted that the girl was “what speculators call a Fancy Girl -- bright mulatto, a fine figure, straight black hair, and very black eyes” and invited potential buyers to “try her a month or more.” Holladay did not exactly state that the enslaved woman’s purpose was sex; however, he deem her a “fancy,” discussed her body or “figure,” and underscored her ability as a “seamstress,” invoking the language used to describe fancy girls. The implications of Holladay’s advertisement were clear enough for Northern newspapers to reprint the text as evidence of the “outrage on humanity and decency” that was the fancy trade.

Discussion of the fancy trade was not limited to advertisements. In letters to Ballard, Isaac Franklin mentions the demand for “fancy maids,” clearly delineating the trade as a market in and of itself just like the market for male field hands. Letters from Phillip Thomas to his Virginia-based slave trading partner William A. J. Finney overtly detail multiple fancy trade transactions carried out by Thomas, Finney’s nephew, Zachary, and others. One of Thomas’ letters from July of 1839 plainly informs Finney that “Zach bought a Fancy at $1325,” and in another from October of the same year, he writes that “Huse paid Lumpkin $2000 for his

20 Walter Johnson, Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market, (United Kingdom: Harvard University Press, 1999), 114. Many often employed these euphemisms in legal documents, such as wills. This silence in records indicates that society still stigmatized these relationships.
22 "A Southern Advertisement," The Farmers’ Cabinet, January 24, 1850, Readex: America's Historical Newspapers.
23 "Outrage on Humanity and Decency," Salem Gazette, September 1, 1849. Readex: America's Historical Newspapers.
Repeatedly using “Fancy” to describe the enslaved women these traders purchased, Thomas relies on a vocabulary that he expected Finney to understand. His letters reflect that he, Finney, and the other traders knew that “Fancy” was an established category of enslaved women, and the fancy trade was a definite fixture of the antebellum slave trade. Similarly, a letter from North Carolina-based trader Elias Ferguson to trader John J. Toler reads “mr. h d sold a brown skin fancy to day for $1600 and a littler one with child that said she was a seamstress for $1500.” Ferguson too draws from the vocabulary of the fancy trade, and like Holliday, he also reinforces the connection between “fancy” and other euphemisms, in this case “seamstress,” that he expected Toler to understand.

Fergusson and Thomas’ listing of prices of each fancy purchase also corroborates the notion of a known market. By including the prices, Thomas implies that there were a number of other transactions for fancies that Finney could use to compare and evaluate the purchases he mentioned. At one point, Thomas himself speculates on a fancy trade transaction when writing that he found a “13 year old girl bright colour nearly a fancy for $1135. she can be sold for $1350.” Thomas’ ability to estimate the girl’s selling price shows that Thomas either partook in or knew of enough other fancy transactions that he felt he could accurately name a price for the girl. Thus, despite some disapproval within white society for the fancy trade and mixed-race sexual encounters, the fancy trade was definitely a substantial part of the larger domestic slave trade.

26 Lumpkin was a slave trader and slave jail proprietor in his own right. He is one of the many traders who had a longstanding relationship with an enslaved woman, which is relatively well documented. Finley, An Intimate Economy, 22.
Knowledge of the fancy trade went beyond auction houses, slave pens, and traders’ letters to the broader public sphere. John Winston Coleman Jr., a historian from the 1930s who researched the Kentucky slave trade in depth, wrote about how Lewis C. Robards’ “'choice stock’ of beautiful quadroon and octoroon girls... was indeed the talk and toast of steamboat bar-rooms, tippling houses and taverns, even as far away as old New Orleans.”\textsuperscript{28} Robards was a major slave trader and slave pen owner in Lexington, and though Coleman does not use “fancy” to describe Robards’ “girls,” his mention of their whiteness and beauty implies that Robards likely marketed them as fancies.\textsuperscript{29} The discussion of fancy girls in public spaces not directly related to the slave trade suggests that for many white southern men, it was socially acceptable to, at the very least, observe and comment on fancies in public.

When examining traders’ and others’ descriptions of fancy maids, it seems they standardized selecting women with some proximity to whiteness. Traders and buyers often made use of labels like mulatto, quadroon, or octoroon, or characterized these women’s skin color as lighter. By using these classifications, traders and buyers wanted to communicate how much white ancestry these enslaved women had. In fact, these women’s possible white ancestry, and consequent skin tone, was deemed so intrinsic to their value that Tyre Glen and Isaac Jarratt, two slave trading partners based in Alabama and North Carolina, included descriptions of enslaved women’s skin tones on bills of sale. Using words like “yellow,” “copper colored,” and “black,” these men found skin tone to be so important that they codified it in their legal documents.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{28} John Winston Coleman, \textit{Slavery Times in Kentucky}, (Johnson Reprint Corporations, 1970), 158.
\textsuperscript{29} Coleman, \textit{Slavery Times in Kentucky}, 159, 211.
Why was skin color and whiteness a key piece of determining enslaved women’s value, especially within the fancy trade? Walter Johnson, Edward Baptist, and Emily Owens, historians of the domestic slave trade, offer some answers. In *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*, Johnson’s comprehensive book on the slave trade, he observes that “slaveholders small and large were constructing themselves out of slaves.” Slaveholders, according to Johnson, defined themselves, their whiteness, and the power their whiteness held, by subjugating enslaved people. Building off this idea, Baptist argues that mixed-race enslaved people specifically represented the power white men had over the bodies of enslaved women and people in general. Moreover, Owens shows that visibly mixed-race women enabled white men “to keep looking by making her white enough to sanction intra-racial contact with her, and black enough to sanction public sex with her.” These women gave men a unique “form of sexual license” and sense of power that they could not acceptably exert on the bodies of white women or enslaved women who were considered more “black.” Therefore, in carefully procuring mixed-race women for the fancy trade, slave traders fetishized not only these women’s bodies but the implications of the whiteness of their bodies.

Compounding the appeal of mixed-race enslaved women were also Eurocentric standards of beauty that privileged white features and skin color. An advertisement for field hands that

32 Baptist, “‘Cuffy,’ ‘Fancy Maids,’ and ‘One-Eyed Men,’” 1648-1649.
33 Owens, “Fantasies of Consent,” 146-147.
34 Owens, “Fantasies of Consent,” 146-147.

In his article, "The Slave Trader, the White Slave, and the Politics of Racial Determination in the 1850s," Walter Johnson illustrates how this fetishization of whiteness could backfire. Johnson points to the case of Alexina Morrison, a white passing enslaved woman who sued for her freedom by claiming she was white, to underscore the inherent tension that existed between the fetish for whiteness from women enslaved on the basis of being non-white.
Richmond slave trader Hector Davis released announced the sale of the “best young men” and “best black women.” Davis drew attention to the “youth” of the men because young men were thought to be better workers by slaveholders. Likewise, Davis’ use of “black” women implies that darker women were seen as the ideal physical laborers, as opposed to their lighter counterparts. On the slave market, fancies served a different purpose - to do domestic labor, which included being a sexual companion. As a result, the ideal fancy would be aesthetically pleasing and fit the standard of beauty, which in antebellum society was white women. To be sure, enslaved women with all skin tones and features endured sexual exploitation, but there was a definite premium placed on whiteness for women marketed as fancies.36

Slaveholders’ demand for “whiter” enslaved women to sexually abuse resulted in the self-propagation of the fancy trade and exploitation of lighter enslaved women. In his famed memoir 12 Years a Slave, Solomon Northup recalled being transported through the trade with a woman named Eliza. Entering the slave pen dressed in silk and other expensive material, Eliza related her story to Northrup. She had served as the fancy maid of Elisha Berry, who built her a home and fathered her two children, also confined to the pen, before Berry’s family sold them without his knowledge.37 At their auction in New Orleans, slave trader Theolophius Freeman refused to sell Eliza’s mixed-race daughter, Emily, to the man who bought Eliza and her son. Explicitly referring to Emily as a “fancy piece,” Freeman remarked that “there were heaps and piles of money to be made of her... when she was a few years older.”38 Freeman’s statement

36 Stevenson, “What’s Love Got to Do with It?” 165.
Hilde, Slavery, Fatherhood, and Paternal Duty in African American Communities Over the Long Nineteenth Century, 181-182.
Slave traders did not value lighter skinned men particularly highly because these men were a direct challenge to the white male power they held, unlike lighter skinned women who, regardless of skin tone, remained subordinate to men.
38 Northup, 12 Years a Slave, 46.
again emphasizes the value of whiteness and the beauty it implied in enslaved women, but more
notably it shows how purchasers imagined a woman’s status as a fancy maid as hereditary.
Harriet Jacobs, who documented her time as a slave in her narrative, *Incidents of the Life of a
Slave Girl*, underwent a similar situation to Eliza. Jacobs’ owner, Edward Norcum, taunted
Jacobs with the fact that her daughter, whom she had with another white man, would “sell
well.” Though Jacobs resisted Norcum’s advances much to his annoyance, she did enter into an
intimate relationship with another white man. Through this relationship, Jacobs, who was
already mixed-race, passed on her whiteness and consequently her marketability to her daughter,
who would likely be prized and fetishized on the market.

There are countless other examples of mixed-race enslaved women bequeathing their
status as fancy maids to their daughters. Elizabeth Hemings, a half white enslaved woman,
served as the mistress of John Wayles, the white planter who owned her. Sally, one their
children, all of whom were three-fourths white, went on to engage in a long-term relationship
with Thomas Jefferson. Similarly, Corinna Hinton, born to an enslaved woman and white man,
entered a decades long relationship with Silas Omohundro, a major slave trader, who likely
purchased her as a fancy. The heritage of each of these women demonstrates how white men’s
fetishization of mixed-race enslaved women was self-sustaining. Their sexual interactions with
enslaved women, both within the formal fancy trade and outside of it, produced more mixed-race
enslaved women, reinforcing the power white men held over enslaved women and their bodies
and providing traders with more women for the fancy trade.

(Boston, 1861): 129.
40 Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 84-86.
41 Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (United Kingdom: W. W. Norton,
42 Alexandra J. Finley, *An Intimate Economy: Enslaved Women, Work, and America's Domestic Slave Trade*
The prevalence of the fancy trade indicates that it was socially acceptable among white southerners, but for some slave traders, fancy maids may actually have been socially useful. In an attempt to distance themselves from brutal images of the slave trade, like the separation of families, slave holders often blamed slave traders for the inhumanity of slavery. Planter Daniel Hundley denounced slave traders as “hard hearted” with “provincial in speech and manners… a dirty tobacco-stained mouth, and shabby dress” in his 1860 book *Social Relations in Our Southern States*. Hundley goes on to exclaim that “for ingenious lying you should take lessons from the Southern Negro Trader!” and continues that “the natural result of their calling seems to be to corrupt them.”

Other slaveholders’ unflattering characterizations of slave traders as cruel, dirty, and corrupt likely led to traders facing some degree of isolation from broader Southern society. In actuality, the distinction between slave holders and traders was not so clear cut, as Edward E. Baptist notes, “many traders became planters, while planters became traders.”

However, ostracization may have still had some effect on traders. A bachelor over forty, Bacon Tait, proprietor of a slave jail in Richmond repeatedly wrote of the isolation he felt in letters to Ballard. “When you shall have numbered as many years and mishaps in affairs of gallantry as I have,” he wrote to his slave trading friend, “you will find that many ladies have hearts as hard as the steel pen with which I now write.” In another letter dated just weeks later, he recounted “until last Saturday I had not sat at a table in a private house with ladies for more than twenty years.” While the reason for Tait’s repeated rejection or “mishaps in gallantry” with women

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43 Daniel Robinson Hundley, 1860, *Social Relations in Our Southern States*, Documenting the American South. (University Library: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1990), 140-142.
44 Baptist, “‘Cuffy,’ ‘Fancy Maids,’ and ‘One-Eyed Men,’” 1627.
45 Bacon Tait to Rice C. Ballard, August 4, 1839, Subseries: 1.2. 1835-1842, August-September 1839. MS Folder 28, Rice C. Ballard Papers.
46 Bacon Tait to Rice C. Ballard, August 16, 1839, Subseries: 1.2. 1835-1842, August-September 1839. MS Folder 28, Rice C. Ballard Papers.
was unclear, it is likely that his reputation as a slave trader played a role. His isolation from women or the “domestic circle,” as he put it, definitively affected him. According to historian Hank Trent, this loneliness and failure to court a white woman probably led Tait to court and marry Courtney Fountain, a free Black woman.\textsuperscript{47} Though Fountain was not enslaved, Tait’s experience bore some similarity to that of his fellow traders, like Ballard, Silas Omohundro, Hector Davis, and more, all of whom eventually established long term relationships with enslaved women.

Narratives of enslaved people held in slave pens lend further credence to the notion that slave traders frequently resorted to enslaved women for some semblance of companionship. In his 1856 book about the life of the formerly enslaved Anthony Burns, Charles Emery Stevens wrote about Burns’ time in Robert Lumpkin’s Richmond slave pen. Burns recounted to Stevens that Lumpkin had an enslaved wife that “he had married as much from necessity as from choice, the white women of the South refusing to connect themselves with professed slave traders.”\textsuperscript{48} Though unclear if this conclusion was Burns’ or Stevens’ own editorializing, it indicates that white society’s rejection of slave traders was relatively well known, and traders turning to enslaved women was commonplace. In his 1855 narrative, John Brown stated that “the youngest and handsomest females were set apart as the concubines of the masters.” Later, he claims that “the slave-pen is only another name for a brothel.”\textsuperscript{49} Paralleling Brown’s observations, Moses Roper, a runaway enslaved person from Florida, also observed that “traders … will often sleep

\textsuperscript{47} Hank Trent, \textit{The Secret Life of Bacon Tait, a White Slave Trader Married to a Free Woman of Color}, (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2017), 3.
\textsuperscript{49} John Brown, 1855, \textit{Slave Life in Georgia: A Narrative of the Life, Sufferings, and Escape of John Brown, a Fugitive Slave, Now in England}, Documenting the American South. (University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2001), 111.
with the best-looking female slaves among them.” These statements not only attest to the fact that relationships between traders and enslaved women were commonplace but also contextualizes how and why enslaved women were “made housekeepers.”

Ultimately, these women were bought and placed into these situations by slave traders, who were emboldened by notions of Black women’s sexuality and the bustling fancy trade. Silas Omohundro bought Corinna Hinton, as John Hagan bought Lucy Ann Cheatham, as George A. Botts bought Ann Marie Barclay. The list goes on, but the pattern is clear. Having perpetuated the hypersexualization of enslaved women, as the much of white society did, and having normalized the fancy trade, the final step for traders to obtain their own concubines was to physically do so. Thus, benefitting from enslaved women’s lack of power, slave traders placed these women into these intimate entanglements. Even when given options, each woman’s “choice” was couched in veiled or explicit threats, like the ultimatums Walker gave Cynthia and Norcum gave Harriet Jacobs or the more subtle yet ever present threat of sale and separation from loved ones.

As enslaved people, or simply property, these women’s agency was severely diminished. Despite receiving immediate material benefits, like clothes, or abstract benefits, like safety from hard physical labor, they acted under duress. They entered and maintained these relationships out of survival for them, their relations, and their general familial connections. For example, Planter L.R. Starks wrote to Ballard that the woman, Maria, whom he purchased from Ballard acquiesced to his sexual overtures and later revealed that he agreed to purchase Maria’s son. While these women’s actions may on the surface seem like discrete choices, they were not. In his

50 Moses Roper, 1838, *A Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper, from American Slavery*, Documenting the American South. (University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1990), 53.
brief but poignant article *On Agency*, Walter Johnson underscores that agency does not equal humanity. In fact, he comments that slaveholders often used enslaved people’s humanity against them to ensure their compliance.52 Slave traders could and did force these women’s hands through inflicting physical violence, leveraging the threat of sale and disconnection from their family and community, and more. Therefore, though these women indeed had humanity and the capacity to make decisions as all humans do, their agency and choices were manipulated by the traders around them. In the purest sense, both white society and individual slave traders directly “made” these women enter these relationships.

Chapter 2

Fences, Cells, and Trap Doors: The Physicality of Slave Pens

Slave pens, compounds where slave traders housed enslaved people in between sales, were a key component of the infrastructure of the slave trade. In fact, many of the traders who had longstanding relationships with enslaved women owned and operated their own pens. Traders usually lived within or near to their slave pens, meaning their enslaved partners often did as well. These women had to navigate these beacons of the slave trade daily and worked directly in facilitating their operations. Even for those women who did not live-in close proximity to or help operate slave pens, these pens were a key component in the business of the traders they were in relationships with, indirectly connecting them to these structures. Moreover, as enslaved people, these women likely passed through slave pens before meeting the traders they eventually would cohabit with. Thus, to understand the day-to-day experiences of these women, an examination of slave pens or jails is necessary.

Though condemned by much of antebellum society for being overt components of the crass slave trade, slave pens existed throughout the antebellum South. Through his study of the slave trade geography in Richmond and New Orleans, historian Maurie McInnis shows that in major slave trading cities, like Richmond, New Orleans, and Natchez, these pens were clustered together and usually relegated to poorer and more commercial neighborhoods, like Richmond’s Shockhoe Bottom district.¹ New Orleans officials actually banned slave pens or “depots” in the city’s upscale French Quarter, again, likely to create physical distance between the trade and the wealthy society it ironically upheld.² Pens also existed in more rural areas but were less common

and less complicated operations compared to their urban counterparts. For example, John W. Anderson’s pen in Germantown, Kentucky, was a two-story building constructed out of logs, while pens in large trading centers, like that of Robert Lumpkin in Richmond or John Robards in Lexington, included courtyards and multiple buildings.³

Pen designs could also differ between cities. Opening his pen near the Washington Mall, William H. Williams operated a pen known as the “yellow house,” after its outward appearance.⁴ According to Solomon Northrup, who was kidnapped by Williams’ associates and held there before his transport to New Orleans, the pen “presented only the appearance of a quiet private residence. A stranger looking at it, would never have dreamed of its execrable uses.”⁵ In

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disguising his pen as a house, Williams shielded the harsh realities of his pen and the slave trade from onlookers. When visiting a jail nearby, known as Robey’s Pen, Edward Abdy, a British academic and abolitionist, also noticed “the outside [of the pen] alone is access able to the eye of a visitor” because it was shielded by a wooden fence. Williams and Robey likely adopted these facades to comply to ordinances that required the fronts of buildings be uniform. However, Williams’ particular attention to camouflaging his pen was also probably related to the heightened ire slave pens in Washington drew from abolitionists.

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because of their presence in the nation’s capital and its nearness to emblems of freedom.\textsuperscript{8} While William and Robey could not fully neutralize the attention, their presentation of their pens, or lack thereof, likely appeased the greater part of white antebellum society that accepted slavery but too spurned the trade and its hallmarks.

Traders in other cities also adopted similar, though less elaborate, techniques to obscure the inner workings of their pens, likely for the same effect. At 1315 Duke Street in Alexandria, Virginia, a slave pen that passed through the hands of multiple major traders, a twelve-to-fifteen-foot brick wall surrounded the property.\textsuperscript{9} Following the property’s original proprietors, Isaac Franklin and John Armfield, who became the largest and wealthiest domestic traders in the country, another set of traders, Price, Birch & Co, then erected a series of shorter cellblocks to hold enslaved people that the wall rendered invisible to passersby.\textsuperscript{10} Archeologists of the site also speculate that the Franklin and Armfield and the traders who used the pen after them held people in the basement or cellar, yet the only outward facing portion of the property was the neat three-story brick building that stood above, where the traders conducted business seen in Figure 3. Miles away in Richmond, Robert Lumpkin surrounded his infamous jail

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{8} Forret, \textit{Williams’ Gang}, 209.}  
\textsuperscript{10} Skolnik, \textit{1315 Duke Street}, 106.
with iron tipped spikes. Likewise, in New Orleans, trader Theolophius Freemen encircled his complexes with a fence of sharpened wooden planks, though he would eventually downsize his operations to a shed in the backyard of a house he resided in with an enslaved woman, Sarah Conner. When opening his Charleston-based “slave mart” in the late 1850s, Thomas Ryan erected an elaborate stone front with an archway and octagonal pillars, hiding a shed and auction rooms where slaves were traded within. According to historians Edmund Drago and Ralph Melnick, Ryan intended his mart to “blend architecturally” with the surrounding buildings. These men, like their Virginian counterparts, likely understood the need to hide their taboo business dealings. With New Orleans restricting the slave sales in the French Quarter in 1829 and Charleston doing the same with one of its major commercial districts in 1856, they likely faced additional pressure via ordinances passed by city officials and those they represented. Further, as jails, these barriers between the slave trade also served a more basic purpose: protection. Describing her time in a pen, Bethany Veney stated that there was a “fence, so high that no communication with the outside world was possible.” By limiting contact, these barriers inhibited enslaved people’s chance of escape. Richmond trader Bacon Tait further highlighted this purpose of the pens when advertising his newly constructed jail on Carey Street,

11 Charles Emery Stevens, Anthony Burns: A History, (Boston: John P. Jewett And Company, 1856), 188.
12 Northup, 12 Years a Slave, 39.
Northup, 12 Years a Slave, 39.
14 A General Digest of the Ordinances, 147.
assuring the public that the pen was “erected upon an extensive scale, without regard to cost, my main object being to insure the safe keeping” of their property.16

Despite their attempts to visually conceal the slave trade, traders ultimately did little else to sanitize their business. Their advertisements in newspapers alone made their trafficking obvious. Traders like R.H. Dickenson and N.B. & C.B. Hill, filled newspapers with frequent advertisements of their wares.17 In New Orleans, trader Thomas Foster regularly advertised his pen with announcements like “for Sale, 150 Virginia and Carolina Negroes.”18 Foster also noted that he kept enslaved people “constantly on hand and for sale,” reflecting the ever-present nature of the trade, no matter how it was disguised or regulated.19 Likewise, another set of New Orleans traders, C.F. Hatcher and his partners, actively encouraged the public to “give us a call whenever they have business in our line,” assuming their “line” was known throughout the city.20 Richmond trader Lewis A. Collier echoed this sentiment when announcing that he had taken over Bacon Tait’s old pen. He wrote that at all times he had about one hundred enslaved people on hand and “respectfully requested” all those interested in the trade “to give [him] a call.”21 No matter how “respectful” and mild-mannered Collier attempted to make his advertisement, his engagement in the slave trade was clear to those who read the ad and all those who witnessed the about one hundred people he boasted being transported in and out of his pen, or at the very least heard them from behind the fence erected around the pen. In that vein, a firm based in Galveston,

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17 "Advertisement." Enquirer (Richmond, Virginia), May 24, 1850: 3. Readex: America's Historical Newspapers.
19 "Foster’s Slave Depot." New Orleans Daily Creole (New Orleans, Louisiana), November 18, 1856: 2. Readex: America's Historical Newspapers.
21 "Advertisement." Enquirer (Richmond, Virginia) XXX, no. 48, October 22, 1833: [4]. Readex: America's Historical Newspapers.
McMurry & Winestead, announced that they “receive[d] fresh lots every month,” meaning the residents of Galveston likely witnessed a procession of slaves to their pen at least once a month, similar to the image at the bottom left of Figure 2.\textsuperscript{22} While traders like Collier may have been demur in their advertisements, others were not. Seneca Bennett, trying to break into the New Orleans trade, the epicenter of the slave trade at the time, repeatedly ran an advertisement with the title “NEGROES FOR SALE!!!” for about a year. His brash advertisement then provided traders across the south as “references,” including Alexander Hagan of the Hagan Brothers, two members of the slave trading Slatter family, one in New Orleans, the other in Baltimore, and more.\textsuperscript{23} Bennett’s title alone made the presence of the slave trade clear, but his reference to a network of traders across the country reinforced how deeply entrenched the trade was to southern commerce.

Beyond their ads, the slave traders, as businessmen, eagerly welcomed the public into their pens to show off the “wares” they held. When St. Louis abolitionist Galusha Anderson toured other abolitionists around the slave pens of the city, trader Bernard Lynch welcomed his party into the pen, thinking they were buyers. Even after a member of Anderson’s party jokingly warned Lynch to “look out for here fellows, they are a pack of abolitionists,” Lynch only “heartily laughed.”\textsuperscript{24} While Lynch may have been completely unaware of these men’s beliefs, Anderson did note he and Lynch shared a “slight acquaintance” suggesting he was aware of at least Anderson’s leanings. Even so, Lynch admitted the men into his pen at the chance that at least one of them was a buyer, indicating his prioritization of business and that he was not

\textsuperscript{22} “Negros for Sale.” Huntsville Item (Huntsville, Texas) X, no. 24, March 16, 1860: [3]. Readex: America’s Historical Newspapers.
\textsuperscript{23} “Advertisement.” Times-Picayune (New Orleans, Louisiana), November 15, 1838: 1. Readex: America’s Historical Newspapers.
\textsuperscript{24} Galusha Anderson, The Story of a Border City During the Civil War, (Boston: Littleton, Brown & Co. 1908), 183.
especially afraid of any abolitionist ire he might draw.\(^{25}\) Other visitors to pens found slave traders to be equally open about their dealings as Lynch. Swedish social reformer and abolitionists, Fredrika Bremer, recalled visiting a Washington D.C. pen, likely Williams’, with her host who wanted to purchase a boy. Bremer described encountering a “good-tempered, talkative” trader, “who seemed pleased to show [them] his power and authority” at the pen.\(^{26}\) Based off her recollection, it seems the trader flaunted his business rather than hiding it. This trader then laughed when Bremer’s host expressed indignation at the way the trader treated enslaved people.\(^{27}\) When William Chambers visited the pens around Shockhoe Bottom in Richmond, he made it clear to the trader he spoke to that he was not interested in making a purchase and just wanted as much information as possible. The trader obliged with “politeness,” telling Chambers he would provide him the estimate of prices he asked for “with much pleasure.”\(^{28}\) With no underlying business motivation, this trader and his openness about his business reinforces that in spite of the barriers traders erected around pens, they truly felt no need to hide their business. Even when British artist and abolitionist Eyre Crowe was removed from a Richmond slave pen, the trader who asked him to leave reasoned that he was interrupting business, as potential buyers were distracted by Crowe’s sketching of the auction and were not bidding.\(^{29}\) According to Crowe’s account, the trader was not upset at potential exposure but rather the stifling of his trade. This trader’s sense of security, when taken with others’, in the face of strangers and even abolitionists, underscores that no matter the public opinion, slave pens and the trade were a widespread and clear part of southern life.


\(^{27}\) Bremer, *The Homes of the New World*, 492-493.


Behind their facades, slave pens shared the same function and consequently similar anatomies. In fact, the facets of slave pens were so specific that traders often sold their pens to other traders in their networks, as Franklin and Armfield did with 1315 Duke Street, Thomas Ryan with his “Slave Mart,” and Lewis Robards with his Lexington based jail. Traders kept enslaved people for themselves and others in cramped dark spaces, usually segregated by gender, charging their owners cents per day for upkeep. Enslaved people could spend days to months at a time in these pens depending on their salability. “You may confine him in gaol until they rise or get to him a good price,” R.H. Dickenson instructed one of the managers at his pen. For those at 1315 Duke Street or Charles Logan’s South Carolina Pen, this meant sleeping in a cell with a small, barred window. These cells were probably akin to the four or more basement cells

Silas Omohundro, "Money Paid Out and Received, No. 1, 1851-1877,” Accession 29642, Business and Estate records, 1842-1882, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.
32 McInnis, “Mapping the Slave Trade,” 110.
Bernard Lynch had at his St. Louis pen.\textsuperscript{33} Anthony Burns, recalling his time in Lumpkin’s slave pen, spent four months in a “room only six or eight feet square, in the upper story of the jail, which was accessible only through a trap-door.”\textsuperscript{34} Other enslaved people may have experienced staying in similar cramped spaces, for pen owners would sometimes contract nearby homeowners to house slaves when their own pens were full, further spreading the reach of the slave trade.\textsuperscript{35} A Depression Era survey funded by the Works Project Administration of Hector Davis’ Richmond pen noted a shed used to house both enslaved people and livestock, probably like Freeman’s later shed.\textsuperscript{36} Though traders like Bacon Tait boasted about the comfort of their pens, slaves were more likely to receive the accommodations that Burns and Northrup did—nothing other than a bench and maybe a blanket.\textsuperscript{37}

Outside of these holding areas were yards, which traders often allowed enslaved people to use during the day and occasionally sleep in at night. Northrup likened one pen’s layout to a “barnyard,” echoing the sentiments held by the WPA surveyor of Davis’ pen decades later.\textsuperscript{38} While these yards provided enslaved people with much-needed air and space, they too became tools of the slave trade. Within these yards, traders forced enslaved people to ready their bodies for sale. During his time working for a slave trader, William Wells Brown remembered how the trader had him “set [enslaved people] to dancing when their cheeks were wet with tears.”\textsuperscript{39} In

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\item \textsuperscript{33} "Four Slave Cells to Disappear When Stadium Site Is Cleared," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, February 17, 1963, 6.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Stevens, \textit{Anthony Burns}, 188-189.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Finley, \textit{An Intimate Economy}, 33.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Daisy L. Avery, William M. Evans, and G. W. Glass, \textit{Slave Market of Hector Davis: Survey Report, 1937}, (Richmond, Works Project Administration of Virginia, June 11, 1937).
\item \textsuperscript{37} Trent, \textit{The Secret Life of Bacon Tait}, 79-80.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Stevens, \textit{Anthony Burns}, 189.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Northup, \textit{12 Years a Slave}, 17.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Northup, \textit{12 Years a Slave}, 17.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Avery, \textit{Slave Market of Hector Davis}.
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addition to being another form of exercise to ensure enslaved people were physically fit, this
rehearsed choreography would be performed for buyers either in these yards or in auction rooms
either within the jail compounds or at separate auction houses to create the illusion that these
enslaved people were happy.\footnote{Freeman put enslaved people at his pen through similar training
in an attempt to make them seem “smart” to buyers, as did the owners of the New Orleans pen
where Henry Bibb was held, who instructed their enslaved prisoners to stand straight to make
their enslaved people “sprightly.”\footnote{Northup, \textit{12 Years a Slave}, 41.}}

Manipulating their physicality, traders and their workers too groomed enslaved people for
sale at their pens. Pens usually had kitchens or kitchen building, like John Hagan’s New Orleans
pen.\footnote{McInnis, “Mapping the Slave Trade,” 119.} Traders, like Silas Omohundro, stocked these kitchens with inexpensive food staples, such
as bacon and bread, to keep enslaved people fed and fit for sale.\footnote{Ommohundro, ”Money Paid Out and Received.”}\footnote{Northup, \textit{12 Years a Slave}, 41.} Traders then cleaned and
dressed enslaved men and women in uniform outfits that were cheap yet presentable. Men were
dressed in suits, occasionally with hats, and women in dresses often made with calico or some
other inexpensive cloth.\footnote{Finley, \textit{An Intimate Economy}, 51-52.} The formerly enslaved Bethany Veney remembered wearing a “muslin
apron … and a large cape, with great pink bows on each shoulder,” during her sale to “attract the
attention of all present.”\footnote{Veney, \textit{The Narrative of Bethany Veney}, 29-30.} The accessorizing of these sale outfits, like top hats seen in Figure 6
or Veney’s pink bows, underscore traders’ emphasis on presentation. Hector Davis and
Omohundro both regularly spent money purchasing clothes, cloth, and paying seamstresses.\footnote{Ommohundro, ”Money Paid Out and Received.”}

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40 Walter Johnson, \textit{Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market}, (United Kingdom: Harvard University
Press, 1999), 116, 119.
41 Northup, \textit{12 Years a Slave}, 41.
York: Henry Bibb, 1849), 103.
43 McInnis, “Mapping the Slave Trade,” 119.
44 Ommohundro, ”Money Paid Out and Received.”
45 Finley, \textit{An Intimate Economy}, 51-52.
46 Northup, \textit{12 Years a Slave}, 41.
48 Ommohundro, ”Money Paid Out and Received.”
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number of formerly enslaved people also recalled that men would have their hair blackened or shaved in an attempt to hide their age, and others remember being covered in grease or oil to make them seem more “lively.” All these measures, Walter Johnson highlights, obscured the differences between enslaved people and rendered them canvases for the personal histories traders constructed for them. At auction, traders pitched the enslaved people they held as fieldhands, cooks, blacksmiths, and more, sometimes lying outright to buyers, like the traders who sold Solomon Northrup under the name “Platt,” as traders did with other free Black people. Presentation was so vital to the trade that in addition to his auction rooms for men and women, Lewis Robards created a separate, more ornate room for fancy maids, where they would act in tableaus of domesticity, showcasing their sewing and other talents. At his Carey Street jail, Tait similarly advertised separate rooms for “genteel house servants.” Even if they did not have special rooms, many pens had auction galleries. Within his pen, John Hagan converted a part of the four-room cottage, known as a “creole cottage,” into an auction gallery. In Charleston, as one of the larger pens, Thomas Ryan’s pen contained multiple auction spaces or “galleries.” Nevertheless, not all slave pens were equipped with auction spaces, and though traders readied enslaved people for market at pens, many often transported these people to designated auction houses.

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48 Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 121.
49 Northup, *12 Years a Slave*, 39.
50 Coleman, *Slavery Times in Kentucky*, 192.
52 McInnis, “Mapping the Slave Trade,” 119.
53 Drago, "The Old Slave Mart Museum," 143-144.
54 Slave auction sites too were often relegated to more undesirable parts of cities. However, that was not always the case. In New Orleans, for example, auction houses were allowed in the French Quarter, and some even occurred in grandiose spaces, like Banks Arcade, a well-known hotel. No matter the location, auctions were well attended both by those wanting to buy enslaved people but also by those who simply wanted to observe the auction as a spectacle.
For traders and greater society alike, referring to pens as jails or “gaols” was not just a
euphemism. Aside from the confinement that all enslaved people faced in the form of high
fences and barred windows, pens indeed served as places of punishment. Again, reflecting on his
time working in a slave pen, Wells Brown stated, “in most of the slave-holding cities, when a
gentleman wishes his servants whipped, he can send him to the jail and have it done.” 55 In his
adulthood, a man recalled his owner sending him to Lumpkin’s jail with a note when he was a
child. Though he could not read at the time, the note evidently told Lumpkin to punish the boy
for some indiscretion, and so he was beaten by one of Lumpkin’s workers. 56 This man’s memory
coupled with Brown’s anecdote of slaveholders delegating physical punishment to traders not
only reflects the gap in respectability between slave holders and traders that but also shows that
in pens traders offered punishment, essentially torture, as a service outright. At Lumpkin’s jail,
there was at least one entire room dedicated to punishing enslaved people with specific

55 Brown, Narrative of William W. Brown, 44.
56 Corey, History of the Richmond Theological Seminary, 48-49.
modifications, like rings on the floor to keep enslaved people in place for beatings. 57 Northrup’s experience of being chained and beaten with a cat-o-nine tails in a cellar of William’s pen indicates that while not as overt as Lumpkin, other pen owners reserved spaces for punishment as well. 58 Moreover, punishment in pens or jails was not always blatantly forceful but could also take the form of what would commonly be thought of as imprisonment. When staying in Lumpkin’s pen, Anthony Burns related that he remained handcuffed and sequestered in his small space for the duration of his four-month imprisonment, likely as retribution for his earlier escape. 59 In that vein, Omohundro’s account books for expenses relating to his pen reveal that he frequently purchased handcuffs, both a symbol of slavery but also punishment especially reserved for enslaved people who did not comply to demands. 60 Even Anderson’s smaller more rural pen had a beam where archeologists believe he shackled enslaved people to, reaffirming that punishment was engrained into the daily operations of slave pens. 61

Figure 7. “Lumpkin’s Jail,” from Charles Henry Corey, A History of the Richmond Theological Seminary, (Richmond: J.W. Anderson Company, 1895). This building is likely where enslaved people were held.

57 Corey, History of the Richmond Theological Seminary, 50.
58 Northup, 12 Years a Slave, 18-19.
59 Stevens, Anthony Burns, 187-189.
60 Omohundro, "Money Paid Out and Received."
Alongside these dark manifestations of captivity and discipline, slave pens often also included room and board for traders transporting their coffles, or stock of enslaved people, through the pen. C.F. Hatcher placed advertisements in other slave trading hubs, such as Nashville, about the “comfortable rooms and board on reasonable terms” of his New Orleans pen. To entice traders visiting New Orleans, another trader, B.C. Eaton, went so far as to offer those who kept their slaves at his pen free board, as he expected to get a cut of their profits. In Richmond, Silas Omohundro’s account books list charges traders who boarded at his pen. At these boarding houses, traders ate, rested, and socialized, sometimes inviting guests to dine with them for an extra fee. Adding to the dissonance, some brought their wives and others, their enslaved partners, making a temporary home, yards away from where their hosts imprisoned their enslaved people.

It was in these complicated spaces that many of the enslaved partners of traders found themselves at one point or another. Most, if not all, stayed at a pen for at least a period of time, possibly meeting their future partners there. Some, like Mary Lumpkin, Lucy Ann Cheatham and Corinna Hinton Omohundro, lived with their partner in the slave pen compound and worked there too, by tending to other enslaved people or the traders that brought them in. Sarah Conner, the partner of Theophilus Freeman, even operated her own makeshift pen out of her attic for a period of time. Others, like Ann Marie Barclay, may have not directly interacted with their partner’s trade, but in serving their partners, they tangentially contributed to and benefitted from the trade. Following the death of traders, some women even found themselves the new

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62 McInnis, “Mapping the Slave Trade,” 118.
64 Omohundro, "Money Paid Out and Received."
66 Finley, An Intimate Economy, 84.
proprietors of these pens. Regardless, these women had all witnessed or heard of the workings of the slave pens their partners depended on. They had to navigate the physical space of slave pens, or at the very least, reconcile with the operations of the pen and how it supported them and their households. As such, while few pens remain standing today, they doubtless were an ever-present part of these women’s lives daily.
Chapter 3

“As wife or concubine”: the Daily Experiences of Living with a Slave Traders

Testifying in an 1857 lawsuit between slave trader George A. Botts’ executor and Ann Maria Barclay, the formerly enslaved woman he lived with, J.A. Beard, a well-known slave trader in his own right, stated that Barclay lived with Botts “as wife or concubine.”¹ In his brief yet telling characterization of Barclay’s relationship to Botts, Beard reveals the vague distinction between the roles of wives versus concubines. Indeed, Beard’s interchangeable use of the two words indicates that the enslaved and formerly enslaved women in relationships with slave traders spent their daily lives fulfilling the role of a “wife.” Like most wives, their daily lives were shaped by labor for their households, husbands, and by extension the slave trade. In fact, in many instances their work and daily lives were comparable to that of white women involved in the trade. Further, these women were dependent on their partners financially and legally, as most wives at the time were. However, this dependency was heightened by the fact that many of these women were not free and if they were, none were legally married, thereby lacking the legal protections afforded to wives. Still, Beard’s interpretation also shows that despite their limited options, the enslaved partners of traders occupied a unique positionality that enabled them to have more freedom, which they exercised to create social networks for themselves and sometimes even be perceived as free.

The beginning of these enslaved women’s’ lives as partners of slave traders all began similarly. Though their early biographical information is not well-documented, these women were usually in their late teens and early twenties when acquired by the traders who were far

older than them and with whom they would eventually enter into relationships with. Born in 1835, Corinna Hinton was about twenty when she first appeared in the account books of slave trader Silas Omohundro, who was about forty-eight. Nearby, in Richmond, Mary Lumpkin, born 1832, had her first child with Robert Lumpkin at thirteen and was either bought at that age or younger. Born in 1830, Ann Banks Davis was fourteen to fifteen years younger than prominent trader Hector Davis. In New Orleans, trader George A. Botts, twenty-six years old himself, purchased Anna Maria Barclay in 1838 at the age of fifteen or sixteen. Reduced to bills of sale, notes in account books, and other legal documents, it is unclear if these specific women were marketed and bought as “fancies,” though their new owners were definitely aware of and engaged in the trade. In his account books, Omohundro denotes multiple enslaved women as “fancies,” and letters from trader William A. Finney detail that Lumpkin too sold fancies. Adding further ambiguity to the circumstances of their sale, it is unclear whether these traders bought these women for themselves or as a part of their general trade. However, documentation of Lucy Ann Cheatham provides some insight into what these women may have experienced.

A slave ship manifest dated December 11th, 1848 lists Lucy Ann “Cheatem,” a twenty-one-year-old, standing five feet and three inches tall, as the only “mulatto” woman of thirteen

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4 Finley, *An Intimate Economy*, 36.
5 *Ann Maria Barclay, f.w.c. v. Sewell, curator.*

people imported from Richmond to New Orleans by John Hagan. A large-scale trader who ran his slaving business across the South with his two brothers, Hagan seasonally traveled to Richmond to procure enslaved people. That winter, Cheatham had caught his eye, so he purchased her, though it is not entirely clear from whom, and incorporated her into his coffle. As she and the twelve other enslaved people boarded the ship that would carry them to New Orleans, Cheatham left behind her enslaved mother, two half-sisters, and probably more friends and family. While not all women were necessarily pulled out of their communities and trafficked to distant places, some, like Cheatham, definitely were, as family separation was a hallmark of the slave trade.

The lack of information on her prior owner obscures whether Hagan had already decided to force a relationship with Cheatham upon purchase or auction her off. Moreover, it is unclear whether Cheatham was specifically considered and sold as a fancy girl. Still, the listing of her full name, rather than a first name, on the ship manifest and her being the only mixed-race woman in his cargo that season suggests he distinguished her from her counterparts. In fact, aboard the ship, he may have turned these notions into action, even if he did not intend to keep Cheatham as a long-term concubine. Both Solomon Northrup and William Wells Brown observed that when traveling by ship, traders often kept enslaved women they wanted to have sex within their personal cabins. Cheatham, as well as other concubines relocated by traders,

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10 Manifest of Slaves, Richmond, Virginia: December 15, 1848.
could have indeed experienced something similar. Regardless of when their intimacy began, two years later, the 1850 New Orleans census confirms that Cheatham was still living with Hagan. While her enslaved status prevents her from being named in the census, the slave schedule shows that Hagan, about thirty-seven at the time, owned only one “mulatto” woman, who is recorded to be twenty-one, about the age Cheatham would be.12

As concubines and as enslaved women with no bodily autonomy, a large part of these women’s labor, and ultimately lives, was sexual. The most obvious evidence of this labor was the children the women bore by the traders they served as partners to. All but one of the women examined, Sarah Conner, had children with the traders who owned them. Cheatham had four or five children with Hagan.13 Omohundro fathered seven children with Hinton and five with another enslaved woman, Louisa Tandy.14 Mary Lumpkin had five children with Robert.15 According to J.A. Beard, Ann Maria Barclay had one child with G.A. Botts, who the pair passed off as her sister.16 Born over the course of their mothers’ partnerships to their slave trading fathers, these children show how the sexual labor these women performed was frequent and a core part of their roles in their respective households. Barclay, as well as Conner, were identified by their sexual relationships with the traders who owned them, indicating how fundamental their sexual labor was to their existence in these relationships. J.A. Beard had specifically referred to

12 1850 U.S. Census, slave schedule. Orleans Parish, Louisiana.
13 Succession of Lucy Ann Hagan, 21696.
15 Julia Wilbur, *Diary of Julia Wilbur. May to September 1865*, May 18th 1865, HC.MC-1158, Box 5, Haverford College Quaker & Special Collections.
16 *Ann Maria Barclay, f.w.c. v. Sewell, curator.*
Barclay as a concubine, implying the sexual and other labor she performed for Botts. More overtly, business partners of Theophilus Freeman, the owner of Conner, recounted that he sometimes conducted business while in bed with her, reinforcing that sexual labor was a part of these women’s daily lives.

For these women, this form of labor had both physical and psychological consequences that they grappled with often. Childbirth alone could have been a source of trauma. While not the concubine of a trader, Elizabeth Keckley, a formerly enslaved woman and seamstress for Mary Todd Lincoln, verbalized this suffering in her memoirs. “I was regarded as fair-looking for one of my race, and for four years a white man… had base designs upon me,” Keckley writes, “I do not care to dwell upon this subject, for it is one that is fraught with pain. Suffice it to say, that he persecuted me for four years, and I—I—became a mother.” Her refusal to elaborate on her assault and her deliberate stammer when describing her becoming a mother reflects both the pain enslaved women felt when sexually violated and the trauma that subsequent motherhood could induce. While not all of the women may have empathized with Keckley, it is reasonable to assume that some suffered the same physical pain, trauma, and even shame in their relationships with these traders. These feelings were likely especially present in the initial stages of these relationships when the women were younger, like thirteen-year-old Mary Lumpkin, and bearing their first children, and these traders were essentially strangers. In addition to childbirth, at least some of these women also faced miscarriages and the death of their children. Hinton, for

17 Ann Maria Barclay, f.w.c. v. Sewell, curator.
19 Elizabeth Keckley, Behind the Scenes, or Thirty years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House, (New York: G.W. Carleton & Co., 1868), 39.
20 In her Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery, Jennifer Morgan argues that for enslaved women, reproduction was a form of labor because slave owners often would rely on their labor to replenish their workforce or sell off. For these women, reproduction seems to be more a byproduct of their primary labor as concubines, especially because traders usually did not sell of their children or put them to work.
example, had at least one miscarriage, resulting in Omohundro paying for a doctor to visit her, the burial of the child, and a mourning veil. 21 Her miscarriage and subsequent doctor’s visit underscores the physical toll of the sexual labor these women performed. Hinton’s mourning veil, a constant reminder of her child’s death, suggests that these losses took a psychological toll as well. Cheatham’s loss of one of her young children reinforces this theory. Mary Lumpkin, who knew Cheatham, recalled that after her child’s death, Cheatham went from wanting more children to wanting none. 22 Her abrupt shift in attitude is illustrative of the psychological pain these women underwent that could have been compounded by the coercive nature in which these children were conceived.

It is impossible to determine how consensual these interactions were. Mary Lumpkin’s statement about Cheatham wanting more children shows that at certain points these women may have willingly been intimate with their trader partners. Moreover, the legal wives of men during the antebellum period too were expected to conduct similar sexual labor, as they were considered their husband’s property. 23 Nevertheless, they, unlike enslaved women, had some limited legal and societal recourse to stop their husbands. By contrast, the women’s enslavement alone, coupled with the age difference between them and their owners, rendered them unable to formally consent to the labor they undoubtedly performed and provided them little to no leeway to resist advances. These circumstances fundamentally cast a coercive shadow on their partnerships with slave traders as a whole and specifically on the sexual labor they carried out.

21 Finley, An Intimate Economy, 19.
22 Succession of Lucy Ann Hagan, 21696.
23 The U.S. operated under an adapted version of British common law that included, coverture, the practice of married women and their property transferring to the control of their husbands. For more read Richard H. Chused’s, “Married Women’s Property Law 1800-1850,” Georgetown Law Journal, and Kirsten Swords’ “Wives Not Slaves” in Wives Not Slaves: Patriarchy and Modernity in the Age of Revolutions.
Aside from their sexual labor, these women’s days were filled with work in the homes they shared with traders and the pens these traders owned. Omohundro’s personal account book lists multiple payments for Hinton to “make market,” and in 1855, he noted explicitly that he gave her money to purchase fruit for “pickles and preserves.” Given that she went to the market herself, rather than another enslaved person or domestic worker, Hinton probably also prepared these foods for the household as well, perhaps with the help of an enslaved cook. The Omohundro-Hinton household was either near or in Omohundro’s pen compound, yet Hinton’s food probably did not feed the enslaved people held there. Omohundro’s business account books reveal that he frequently purchased large quantities of bacon and other cheap food staples for the pen. However, Hinton’s cooking still figured into the operations of the pen. Like many slave pens, Omohundro’s pen included a boarding house primarily for traders traveling with enslaved people held in the pen. Guests of these boarding houses often could pay extra for meals for themselves and those they invited to the house. This food would require more preparation and care compared to enslaved people’s rations. As such, Hinton likely cooked and served these meals or at least oversaw their creation. Notations in Omohundro’s account books support this idea, for he lists multiple charges for the operation of the boarding house under the category of “Mrs. Omohundro’s Bill.”

Tasked with serving the boarders at her dining table, Hinton directly interacted with and fed the men who advanced the slave trade, her husband included. It remains unknown what Hinton’s interactions with these men, like Austin Woolfolk, who for a time was Baltimore’s

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26 Omohundro, "Money Paid Out and Received, No. 1, 1851-1877."
27 Finley, *An Intimate Economy*, 34.
largest slave trader, looked like when preparing and serving their breakfasts and dinners. As traders, these men upheld the bondage of her and those like her, but they were also Omohundro’s business associates, acquaintances, and even friends. Did she harbor animosity towards these men or view them as friendly, familiar faces? Of equal importance is how they viewed her. When hired out to work at the boarding house where her owner, Mr. Cook boarded, Louisa Piquet recounted how Cook repeatedly harassed Piquet to sleep with him, even offering her extra money. Did boarders approach Hinton with similar offers, or were they deterred by Omohundro? Regardless, Hinton had to navigate these encounters daily, balancing whatever personal feelings she had with the reality that she was enslaved and thus bound to do this work, and she was not alone.

Two other Richmond traders, Robert Lumpkin and Hector Davis, who owned Mary Lumpkin and Ann Banks Davis respectively, also kept boarders. When describing his boarding house operations to abolitionist Julia Wilbur in 1865, Lumpkin noted that he “did board white gentlemen & their colored mistresses.” Mary confirmed this decades later when noting that Cheatham and Hagan stayed with her several times on their visits to Richmond. For Mary, who probably helped with meal preparations like Hinton, the addition of “colored” women, enslaved or free, to her dining table further complicated how she navigated the situation. In addition to the opinions she held of traders, she may have felt heartened by the company of other women with lives like hers, as is evinced by her friendship with Cheatham. However, these women could also have been a reminder of her own reality of enslavement.

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28 Omohundro, “Money Paid Out and Received, No. 1, 1851-1877.”
30 Wilbur, Diary of Julia Wilbur.
31 Succession of Lucy Ann Hagan, 21696.
Beyond the work within the house or boarding house, these women tended to enslaved people held in the pens. This labor was multifaceted and varied from simply supervising enslaved people to readying them for sale. Henrietta Wood, a formerly enslaved woman who was freed and then kidnapped and sold into slavery, recalled being placed in the care of Beck Robards in Lexington, Kentucky. Afraid that Wood would be taken from the pen, her owners sequestered her in the house Beck and the pen’s owner, Lewis Robards, shared. Beck, she described, was “a colored woman, and was known as his wife.” Wood recounted her and Beck eating breakfast together in the kitchen of the house.\(^\text{32}\) The location of their meals, the kitchen, not dining room, and Beck’s eating with an enslaved woman, suggests that Beck too was enslaved. Again, Beck’s feelings about her work are unknown, but Wood’s account shows that she dutifully carried it out. One morning a white man and Wood exchanged smiles, and Beck, who observed the interaction immediately reported it to Lewis, demonstrating her commitment to the task of surveilling Wood.\(^\text{33}\)

In Richmond, these enslaved women’s labor for the pen manifested in another way, by outfitting enslaved people for sale. On multiple occasions Omohundro gave Hinton money to purchase dresses and accessories, like two dollars and fifty cents for “1 pair earrings for Girl Jane & stockings” or three dollars and fifty cents for “1 Dress and stockings” for Caroline, who, with Jane, was an enslaved women held at his pen.\(^\text{34}\) In doing so, Omohundro delegated a core part of the trade, marketing enslaved people to buyers, to her. The repetition of his payments also show that he believed Hinton was doing a suitable job. While Hinton bought outfits, other enslaved women also made them. The Richmond based trader, Hector Davis records paying the

\(^\text{32}\) "Kidnapped and Sold into Slavery," *Ripley Bee*, February 27, 1879.
\(^\text{33}\) "Kidnapped and Sold into Slavery."
\(^\text{34}\) Finley, *An Intimate Economy*, 19, 22.
Omohundro, "Money Paid Out and Received, No. 1, 1851-1877."
enslaved Virginia Ishram to sewing and crafting various clothing items, like hats and shirts.\textsuperscript{35} Though Ishram was not in a relationship with Davis, Ann Banks Davis, an enslaved woman, was, and may have also sewed for Hector, who likely felt it was unnecessary to pay her, given that he owned her and her labor. Furthermore, Lumpkin mentioned that she met Cheatham, when they were both seamstresses, so their partners too may have tasked them with sewing or mending clothes for the enslaved people housed at their partners’ pens.\textsuperscript{36}

Once produced, these outfits were distributed to enslaved people at the pen. Enslaved women given dresses, especially the more ornate dresses fancy girls would have worn, were probably helped by Hinton and others. How might these women have felt preparing other enslaved people, specifically women and younger girls, for sale? The process likely dredged up memories of their own experiences. Since none left behind reflections on their times working in the pen, only their actions in the pens can be interpreted. Some provided enslaved people being trafficked comfort, a response borne out of empathy, or at least sympathy. Describing his time being transported from Richmond to New Orleans aboard a ferry, Solomon Northrup wrote that “a mulatto woman who served at table seemed to take an interest in our behalf—told us to cheer up, and not to be so cast down.”\textsuperscript{37} Although not necessarily a concubine, let alone the concubine of a trader, this “mulatto woman” labored in a space that facilitated the slave trade, similar to the pens. Like her, some of these women probably “took an interest” in the enslaved people they labored around and tended to, and consequently tried to encourage and console them. When held in Lumpkin’s pen, Anthony Burns recalled that Lumpkin’s “yellow wife,” or Mary Lumpkin,

\textsuperscript{35} Hector Davis, “Daybooks, 1857-1865, Miscellaneous reel 6215,” \textit{Hector Davis and Company (Richmond, Va.)}, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

\textsuperscript{36} As noted in Chapter 1, “seamstress” was a common euphemism used for fancy maids. To avoid dredging up her and Cheatham’s past as concubines, Mary may have repurposed this euphemism as a way to hide their past when testifying in court.

Succession of Lucy Ann Hagan, 21696.

\textsuperscript{37} Solomon Northup, \textit{12 Years a Slave}, 27.
gave him a book of hymns to read to bide his time as he was held in a cramped attic for
months. \textsuperscript{38} Burns also noted that Lumpkin had another “black concubine” who held conversations
with him through a window in Lumpkin’s house that faced the window of where he was confined
until Lumpkin forced her to stop. \textsuperscript{39} These gestures of compassion were small but were probably
all that these women could manage while laboring around the pen without drawing criticism and
punishment from the traders.

However, just because these women shared an enslaved status with those in the pens did
not mean they always felt solidarity with them. Like Beck Robards, who monitored and reported
on Henrietta Wood’s smallest of actions, some women chose to create distance between
themselves and the enslaved people in the pen. In fact, upon receiving her freedom, Sarah
Conner, who maintained a relationship with trader Theophilus Freeman, held enslaved people in
the attic of the boarding house she ran, operating her own makeshift pen. \textsuperscript{40} Her actions embody
how some women may have viewed themselves as different from the enslaved people slave
traders trafficked. Ultimately, as they labored in the pens, each woman chose to maneuver their
interactions with enslaved people held there differently.

Conner’s more individualistic approach to labor also represents how occasionally the
enslaved women found ways to engage in work for their own profit. Of course, Conner’s free
status provided her more room to partake in working for profit, but even when enslaved to her
owner prior to Freeman, Conner found time to work for herself. Witness affidavits in a lawsuit
involving Conner and one of Freeman’s creditors relate that when enslaved, Conner “worked
very hard late at night” by taking in loads of laundry for extra money. She, in fact, grew her

\textsuperscript{38} Charles Emery Stevens, \textit{Anthony Burns: A History}, (Boston: John P. Jewett And Company, 1856), 192.
\textsuperscript{39} Stevens, \textit{Anthony Burns: A History}, 193.
\textsuperscript{40} Finley, \textit{An Intimate Economy}, 84.
laundry business by hiring three other enslaved women to help her. Conner’s ability to do this labor rested the leniency of her owner at the time, Jane Shelton. It is certainly possible that many of the traders denied the enslaved women they were in relationships with the opportunity to labor for themselves. However, in his account books, Omohundro lists loans he gave to Hinton, implying that she had her own funds, and means to garner funds, to pay him back. The work Hinton did to obtain her own money probably looked similar to Conner’s, involving domestic tasks and errands for boarders and others. Thus, Conner and Hinton serve as a model for what labor for personal profit could look like, when and if these women were afforded the opportunity.

Still, when freed, these women could find themselves continuing to work for their slave trading partners. After saving money for her freedom, Conner negotiated with Theophilus Freeman to purchase her from her current owner and eventually free her. In years following her emancipation, Conner faced lawsuits from Freeman’s creditors who alleged that he freed her to trade slaves in her name to avoid paying his debts and bankruptcy. In court, Conner argued that she was only a client of Freeman’s and that her assets, enslaved people included, were her own. However, the creditors’ allegation were not unfounded. Bernard Kendig, another trader with a dishonest reputation, was taken to court by his own creditors and accused of using women, including his white wife, in a similar ploy. Additionally, after Botts went bankrupt in

42 Finley, An Intimate Economy, 35.
43 Finley, An Intimate Economy, 73-4.
1842, he instructed Ann Maria Barclay on trading enslaved people.\textsuperscript{46} Conner, who was likely illiterate, as she signed her legal documents with an “X” rather than her name, leaves no record of her version of events beyond the one her lawyers presented in court.\textsuperscript{47} As a free woman, she had no legal obligation to aid Freeman. However, she, as well as Barclay and Kendig’s wife, may have felt pushed to do so given their relationship, along with the added pressure of his freeing her and the insecurity of her existence as a woman of color. The truth of her reality is not completely known, yet the allegations she faced reveal a possible motivation for why traders who freed these women early, like G.A. Botts freed Barclay, would do so and how the labor for the slave trade was an ever-present part of their lives.

Like Bernard Kendig’s wife, the white wives of slave traders and white women in general did labor in the pens comparable to that of enslaved women. The wife of slave trader M.M. Lee oversaw enslaved people bathing in the pen in preparation for sale, similar to Hinton and Beck.\textsuperscript{48} Omohundro and Davis paid white women to create clothes for enslaved people as well. Moreover, Omohundro referring to Corinna as “Mrs. Omohundro” and Mary Lumpkin adopting Robert’s last name suggests that these men may have conceived of these women as their wives in their day to day lives. Nevertheless, despite there being similarities in their work and how slave traders perceived their partners, white women still had more privilege than their enslaved counterparts. Omohundro and Davis paid white women more that enslaved women for their sewing, emphasizing that the labor of white women was valued more.\textsuperscript{49} In addition, whatever pressure white wives received from their husbands to complete their labor, enslaved women were

\textsuperscript{46} Ann Maria Barclay, f.w.c. v. Sewell, curator.
\textsuperscript{47} Sarah Conner Petition, August 1, 1849, Folder 101693-014-0209, Race, Slavery, and Free Blacks, Series II: Petitions to Southern County Courts, Part F: Louisiana (1795-1863), ProQuest History Vault.
\textsuperscript{49} Davis, “Daybooks.” Omohundro, "Money Paid Out and Received.”
inherently placed under additional stress. Whether leveraged by their trader partners or not, enslaved women were constantly reminded that like those in the pens, they or their children too could be sold away or harmed, if they did not perform their roles as expected. Thus, while both sets of women operated under oppressive systems, the circumstances these enslaved women were unequivocally more oppressive and coercive.

The proximity of these women to slave traders filled their days with labor in and around slave pens and the trade but simultaneously gave them access to unique material goods and experiences. In 1855, Omohundro gave Hinton money to purchase clothes for her and their children. The following year, he commissioned a “likeness” of her, and the year after, bought her a false set of teeth. Among the most expensive items he purchased was a 100 dollar “dimont ring” in 1862.  

50 He also gave Hinton another diamond ring and diamond encrusted cross.  

These purchases are a sampling of the goods Omohundro gifted Hinton during their relationship. He also annually gave Louisa Tandy, another enslaved woman who he fathered children with, 12,000 dollars annually to support her and their children.  

52 When in England, G.A. Botts, who eventually declared bankruptcy, borrowed a total of 45 dollars from fellow trader J.A. Beard and more money from John Hagan to buy European dresses for Ann Maria Barclay.  

53 Ann Banks Davis enjoyed similar goods. Though records of purchases Hector Davis, who was amongst the wealthiest of the Richmond traders, made for her are not available, Omohundro’s accounts show that he gifted her silverware, implying that she too had similar material possessions.  

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50 Finley, *An Intimate Economy*, 19.  
53 *Ann Maria Barclay, f.w.c. v. Sewell, curator.*  
54 Finley, *An Intimate Economy*, 138.
Perhaps these gifts were demonstrations of genuine affection that the traders held for the enslaved women they lived with. Omohundro purchased the 1862 diamond ring for Hinton on December 23, two days before Christmas, hinting at some sentiment between them. Botts, who went bankrupt in 1862, also seemed to put effort in marshaling his dwindling resources to provide Barclay with European dresses. However, bestowing these items upon women they owned or formerly owned was not necessarily a wholly positive act. To be sure, possessing such expensive items may have brought these women some happiness. Indeed, these items could have empowered them by giving them a way to challenge social norms by wearing and displaying these items publicly as women of color. Nevertheless, when examining the items traders gave their enslaved partners, a pattern emerges - most objects, from clothes to Hinton’s false teeth, were related to the women’s appearances. While this trend was a function of the objectification all women faced at the time, it also must be examined in the context of the slave trade and fancy trade. Though these women’s circumstances changed, they and those held in the slave pens were still being outfitted by the same traders. Whether consciously or not, Omohundro did list Hinton’s purchases for herself and their children and those she made for the enslaved women he sold in the same fashion. For these traders, these purchases, while partially rooted in affection, were also likely an attempt to sell themselves the very tableaus of domesticity that they sold to others when auctioning off fancy girls.

A less ambiguous privilege these women and their children attained through their slave trading partners was access to education. Omohundro paid a Mr. Cawfield to tutor Hinton in reading and writing. According to Lumpkin, she and Cheatham too were literate and

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56 *Ann Maria Barclay, f.w.c. v. Sewell, curator.*
57 Omohundro, "Money Paid Out and Received."
exchanged letters throughout their enslavement.\textsuperscript{59} While Lumpkin does not explain where the pair learned to read, they were probably educated similarly to Hinton, privately in their homes, since educating enslaved people was wholly or partially illegal throughout the South.\textsuperscript{60} If they were not educated directly by their partners, they felt comfortable enough to somewhat openly exercise their abilities in front of them, a luxury that other enslaved people often did not have. Further, education expanded how these women could fill their days. Literacy provided an avenue for them to express themselves in private letters, like those shared between Lumpkin and Cheatham. It also enabled them to spend time reading anything from the hymn book Lumpkin gave to Anthony Burns to newspapers. Historian Calvin Schermerhorn noted how slave pens served as a conduit for information among enslaved people, a phenomenon he dubs “the grapevine telegraph.”\textsuperscript{61} For those of the women who were literate, for not all were, they could have easily contributed to this telegraph, alerting enslaved people in the pens of personal and general news and information.

In addition to their personal instruction, education factored into these women’s lives through their children. Many of the traders arranged for their children to be educated in the North. Omohundro, John Hagan, and Robert Lumpkin all sent their children to schools in the North. Omohundro and Hagan chose schools in Pennsylvania, and Lumpkin, Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{62} For the supposed sister or daughter of Ann Maria Barclay, G.A. Botts organized her education in the North.\textsuperscript{63} Omohundro also funded the education of the children he had with Louisa Tandy in

\textsuperscript{59} Succession of Lucy Ann Hagan, 21696.
\textsuperscript{61} Schermerhorn, \textit{Money Over Mastery}, 101.
\textsuperscript{62} Succession of Lucy Ann Hagan, 21696.
\textsuperscript{63} Ann Maria Barclay, \textit{f.w.c. v. Sewell}, curator.
Cincinnati, sending them to the all-white Hughes High School.\textsuperscript{64} Lumpkin revealed why these traders may have felt compelled to send their children so far afield. He explained that he educated his daughters in the North out of fear that they would be sold if he ever went into debt.\textsuperscript{65} That the traders worried for the welfare of their children and spent considerable resources educating them displays that they did care for their children. While slave traders fearing the sale of their own family is ironic, who better would know the dangers of maintaining an enslaved family than those who actively tore them apart as a profession?

Working in the pens, these women were also familiar with the insecure status of enslavement and consequently were likely supportive of these maneuvers to keep their children safe. Still, it is impossible to know whether traders took these partners’ opinions into account when making their decisions. These efforts to protect their children often resulted in them being separated from their children for periods of time. Traders did allow for their partners to travel North and stay with their children for periods of time, but these women were not with their children constantly. Instead, care of the children was turned over to the institutions they attended or caregivers. For example, Hinton released her children, Silas Omohundro Jr. and Alice Morton Omohundro, to the care of their tutor, Mary Davis, and Eliza Cheatham, an enslaved woman who Omohundro referred to as Hinton’s sister.\textsuperscript{66} This dynamic affected the kind of labor these mothers did in their household by removing childcare from their responsibilities. Moreover, it had ramifications for these women’s connections to their children. Mary E. Wood, who described herself as a “confidential friend” of Cheatham, recalled that she wrote Cheatham’s daughter Fredericka, who was away at school, about the death of Cheatham’s child and

\textsuperscript{64} Finley, \textit{An Intimate Economy}, 28.  
\textsuperscript{65} Corey, \textit{History of the Richmond Theological Seminary}, 48.  
\textsuperscript{66} Finley, \textit{An Intimate Economy}, 66. Given that the two were originally from the Richmond area, Eliza also may have been related to Lucy Ann Cheatham.
Fredericka’s brother, who she only remembered by the nickname “Button.”  That Wood sent the letter, as opposed to Cheatham or Hagan, suggests that they were occupied with their loss. The pair, or at least Cheatham, clearly cared deeply for the child, as they gave him an endearing pet name. Further, Wood’s anecdote of Fredericka not being present for the death of her brother and learning of it via mail captures the strain that this separation could have on these households. The death of Silas Jr. in 1861 at about age eleven, while he was at boarding school away from most family, further underscores the toll educations far afield could take. By being sent to school, these children gained freedom – Silas Jr. died, and presumably, lived as “white” -- but missed key moments in the households, and their mother’s likely missed important moments in their lives. These women sacrificed, or were made by traders to sacrifice, time with their children as a cohesive household for their education, and more importantly, safety and freedom. Thus, despite education being a unique privilege for them and their children, it could have also been a source of strife in their lives.

A final advantage the enslaved partners of traders received was freedom of movement. Lumpkin recalled how she used to occasionally visit Cheatham’s mother to deliver news of Cheatham, and Omohundro allowed Hinton to travel to the market. These women probably made these trips without supervision, but even if they were supervised, these instances still demonstrate that traders gave them a degree of physical freedom. When testifying to whether Barclay was free, which legally she was, J.A. Beard noted that Barclay could “move about freely” without Bott’s permission. Beard’s citing Barclay’s ability to navigate spaces on her

67 Succession of Lucy Ann Hagan, 21696.
69 Succession of Lucy Ann Hagan, 21696.
70 *Ann Maria Barclay, f.w.c. v. Sewell, curator.*
own as evidence of her freedom, implies that these women’s freedom to move was not the norm but a privilege that remained unavailable to other enslaved people.

This ability to “move freely” and exist freely was heightened when traders brought their partners north, which happened frequently. Just as he had sent his children to school in the North, Robert Lumpkin eventually set up a household for Mary and their children in Pennsylvania.\textsuperscript{71} Possibly discussing this arrangement with Lumpkin, Omohundro also purchased a home in Pennsylvania where he, Hinton, and their children spent periods of time.\textsuperscript{72} Though not a permanent arrangement, Conner accompanied Freeman on his business trips to Washington D.C., Philadelphia, and New York. \textsuperscript{73} Since Freeman had already freed Conner, he may not have felt it necessary to establish a permanent northern residence.

Outside the context of the slave trade, these women and their children passed as white. No portraits of Mary Lumpkin exist, but when visiting her daughters, Reverend Charles H. Corey described them as “so white that they passed in the community as white ladies.”\textsuperscript{74} The appearance of her daughters coupled with Anthony Burns’ description of Lumpkin as “yellow” indicates that she probably could pass as white.\textsuperscript{75} Multiple Pennsylvania residents recalled that Hinton was “introduced by [Omohundro] in society as his wife” and that their associates accepted them as such.\textsuperscript{76} The widespread acceptance of Hinton as Omohundro’s wife implies that she too passed as white. Freeman and Conner’s repeated trips across multiple states as a couple demonstrate that they traveled without any major difficulties, suggesting that Conner

\textsuperscript{71} Wilbur, \textit{Diary of Julia Wilbur.}
\textsuperscript{72} Silas Omohundro Will. \textit{Omohundro’s Estate.}
\textsuperscript{73} Finley, \textit{An Intimate Economy,} 75.
\textsuperscript{74} Charles Henry Corey, \textit{History of the Richmond Theological Seminary: With Reminiscences of Thirty Years' Work Among the Colored People of the South,} (Richmond, J.J. W. Randolph Company, 1895), 48.
\textsuperscript{75} Stevens, \textit{Anthony Burns: A History,} 193.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Omohundro’s Estate.}
could also easily be considered white. With transformed racial identities, these women experienced heightened freedom in these new northern locales. Since their new communities were largely unfamiliar about their and their partner’s histories, these women could fully immerse themselves in white society. In the North, the women’s white skin was proof enough of their freedom, so they could be openly literate, socialize freely, and travel where they wanted all without fear of losing what little freedom they had. In essence, for a period, these women could exist as wives rather than concubines.

While some traders periodically sent their partners North, others established more permanent residences for these women, particularly in Cincinnati, Ohio. A free state bordering the Upper South, Ohio played a role in many of the lives of traders’ enslaved partners. G.A. Botts left Barclay there from New Orleans in 1839 for a few months to establish her freedom. 77 Freeman also sent Conner to Cincinnati to live with a freewoman, Fanny Preston, for a brief period. 78 In addition to these brief stays, Cincinnati also became a permanent home for some traders’ partners, likely because of its proximity easy access to the South with the Ohio River, its strong abolitionist presence, and its range of work opportunities as a growing port city. 79 Slave trader Rice Ballard arranged for two enslaved women, Avenia White and Susan Johnson, and their children, likely by him, to live in a boarding house run by Frances Bruster, a free woman, and Ballard would support and maybe visit the women every so often. 80 Though these women and their children did live their lives as free people in Cincinnati that was not the only factor motivating Ballard’s decision to resettle them. Ballard, who was preparing to court and marry a

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77 Ann Maria Barclay, f.w.c. v. Sewell, curator.
78 Finley, An Intimate Economy, 75-6.
80 Green, Remember Me to Miss Louisa, 47-8.
white woman, sent the women away shortly before his marriage, likely to avoid conflict.\textsuperscript{81}

Though Omohundro did not have a white wife, he too organized a similar set up for Louisa Tandy and their children, also in Ohio. Tandy received an annual allowance to maintain a house for herself and her children, and Omohundro would occasionally visit her, resulting in them having a total of five children.\textsuperscript{82} Like the other women who periodically traveled north, Tandy and her children passed as white but with some difficulty. According to lawyer Adam N. Riddle, Tandy had “coppery” skin which generated questions and gossip within the community. As a result, Omohundro intervened and explained that Tandy had “no African blood in her but rather West Indian.”\textsuperscript{83} Similar to White and Johnson with Ballard and his wife, Tandy seems to have been a secondary figure in Omohundro’s life compared to Hinton. Though it is impossible to know why Omohundro chose to build more of a life with Hinton rather than Tandy, her skin tone may have played a role, as it ultimately did with Ballard, who prioritized his white wife over two non-white women. Maybe Omohundro regarded Hinton as a more suitable partner. Regardless of their differing circumstances from Hinton, Lumpkin, and others, these Ohio-based women also enjoyed heightened freedom as compared to other enslaved people.

Despite the labor they completed and privileges they were afforded, the enslaved partners of traders were still far from wives that they pantomimed when visiting the North. Instead, they

\textsuperscript{81} Green, \textit{Remember Me to Miss Louisa}, 47-9.
\textsuperscript{82} 1850 U.S. Census, population schedule, Ward 6 of Cincinnati, Ohio, s.v. “Louisa Tandy,” Digital Images, \textit{Ancestry.com}.
\textsuperscript{83} Finley, \textit{An Intimate Economy}, 28.

While Omohundro’s lie was beneficial for Tandy and her children, he was probably partially motivated out of self-interest. When deciding whether Hinton was legally Omohundro’s wife, a Pennsylvania judge stated that Omohundro pointed out that he referred to Hinton as his wife because “he could not indulge in the practice of concubinage with her… as he had done in Virginia, without subjecting himself to reproach, and perhaps to banishment.”
had no claim to rights wives had and were both financially and legally dependent on their slave trading partners. Perhaps the most blatant demonstration that these concubines were not wives is the polygamy their partners openly engaged in. While not all traders had multiple partners, many did: Lumpkin had a “black concubine” in his home with Mary, Omohundro supported families concurrently with Tandy and Hinton, and Ballard likely fathered children with Johnson and White. Although probably well aware of this infidelity, they were powerless to stop it. Unlike wives, who could file lawsuits and divorce petitions, these women had no ability to do so because they were not wives and also because many had no legal rights as enslaved people.

Even when these women were free, they were often financially and legally powerless. Avenia White and Susan Johnson’s circumstances embody this helplessness. In 1838, Ballard freed them and their combined four children and resettled them in Cincinnati.84 Adapting to their new home, White and Johnson found that their expenses and that of their children, at least two of whom were likely Ballard’s, outweighed their earnings doing domestic work. In need of financial support in their new environment, White wrote to the man that had placed them there in the summer of 1838. Addressing the father of her children as “Mr. Ballard,” she wrote, or rather dictated to her landlady, Frances Bruster, her concerns.85 Her letter, sent to his Louisville office, went unanswered, possibly because Ballard was traveling. Still financially struggling, she attempted to reach Ballard again in October. “Mr. Ballard, I am compelled to write you again,” she dictated in a deferent but urgent tone. In this letter, White attempted to leverage any affection Ballard had for the children, by providing him details about their needs, like the fact that Harvey, Johnson’s son, was sick. She also tried to play on any affection he had for her, by sending her

84 Green, Remember Me to Miss Louisa, 47-8.
85 Green, Remember Me to Miss Louisa, 50.
Avenia White to Rice C. Ballard, September 18, 1838, Subseries: 1.2. 1835-1842, May-September 1838. MS Folder 24, Rice C. Ballard Papers.
“love” to Ballard, though she continued to address him as “sir.” 86 This letter, directed now to Ballard’s Natchez office, too went unanswered. A third letter from Bruster herself, detailed how she needed 100 dollars to make the final mortgage payment on the house she, White, Johnson, and their children shared or the “children will be deprived of a home.” 87 Like White’s previous letters, Bruster’s tone was deferential, and she too highlighted the children. This letter finally elicited a response from Ballard, who sent 150 dollars, fifty of which were allotted to White alone, to Calvin Fletcher, a white councilman who acted as a liaison between him and the women. 88 White quickly sent a thank you letter in response. 89 While Ballard, who was constantly traveling for the trade, may have truly missed White's earlier letters, this situation underscores how these women were entitled to no support but instead had to rely on the generosity of their partners. White’s consistent deference and her attempts to play on Ballard’s affections for her and his children underscore this dynamic. White, and Bruster, knew that they needed Ballard’s support but that he also Ballard owed them nothing, so they chose their words carefully, crafting letters to appeal to his sensibilities. Other women likely came to this conclusion as well and in response, tailored their speech and actions to secure the financial support that they could not get otherwise.

Legally free and financially independent, Barclay and Conner further demonstrate how enslaved and formerly enslaved partners were different from white women and wives. Despite being free for years, both women found themselves in drawn out legal battles challenging their

86 Avenia White to Rice C. Ballard, October 25, 1838, Subseries: 1.2. 1835-1842, October-December 1838. MS Folder 25, Rice C. Ballard Papers.
87 Frances M. Bruster to Rice C. Ballard, November 29, 1838, Subseries: 1.2. 1835-1842, October-December 1838. MS Folder 25, Rice C. Ballard Papers.
88 Green, Remember Me to Miss Louisa, 52.
89 Calvin Fletcher to Rice C. Ballard, January 28, 1839, Subseries: 1.2. 1835-1842, January-April 1839. MS Folder 26, Rice C. Ballard Papers.
freedom. Following Botts death, Barclay was taken to court by the executor of Botts’ will in 1854. The executor challenged her claim to the bequest Botts had left her. He argued that Barclay herself was never freed under Louisiana law and was actually part of the estate. Thus far, Botts had shielded Barclay from challenges to her free status, now with him gone, she had to confront these challenges head on. While the executor’s argument proved unsuccessful, his case demonstrates how these women’s freedom was consistently insecure, relying on their slave trading partners to provide legitimacy to their claims.  

90 Conner’s legal battles further underscore this instability. Conner, who had saved 950 dollars for her freedom, had Freeman purchase her from her owners and eventually free her. However, whether intentional or not, Freeman did not file all the necessary paperwork to free Conner.  

91 Thus, when his creditors sued him in 1844, they were able to legally reenslave Conner and sell her to pay his debts.  

92 Another trader was able to purchase Conner and sold her back to Freeman, who did not object when she filed for emancipation in 1846.  

93 Still, Conner’s legal freedom was ultimately at the mercy of her white partner, whose inaction had resulted in the total loss of her freedom for a period, however brief. In the decade after her reenslavement, Conner continued to have her freedom questioned. Freeman’s creditors sued her for the enslaved people she owned, implying that they saw her claims to the enslaved people, and by extension her freedom, as unviable.  

94 These constant challenges to their authority were an experience unique to these concubines of color.

Though these women performed similar labor and could live in comfort equal to or even surpassing that of white wives, they were ultimately concubines, except for Mary Lumpkin who

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90 Ann Maria Barclay, f.w.c. v. Sewell, curator.  
91 Finley, An Intimate Economy, 73-4.  
93 Finley, An Intimate Economy, 76-8.  
94 Sarah Conner Petition, April 26, 1848 to December 31, 1848.  
Sarah Conner Petition, August 1, 1849.
was legally wed to Robert after the Civil War. Historian Alexandra Finley notes that concubinage “denied... both the legal inheritance of a wife and the legal compensation of an employee,” and these partners of traders experienced this disparity daily. Their relationships with partners lacked the legitimacy of marriage, curtailing these women’s actions, finances, and freedom.

As these women navigated their distinctive and complicated daily lives, they formed a network of people, enslaved and free, black and white, that they drew support from. They often forged strong bonds with each other or other women of color, enslaved and free. Lumpkin and Cheatham’s relationship is the clearest manifestation of these bonds. The two women, who had met sewing in Richmond, remained in contact even as Cheatham was transported to New Orleans. Throughout their tenure as slave traders’ concubines, they wrote each other frequently with Cheatham sending gifts and money for Lumpkin to pass on to her mother. The Lumpkins also hosted Cheatham and Hagan on multiple occasions, allowing these women to further deepen their connection. The pair’s friendship was likely built on their shared experience. Each woman probably found some solace and relief in having someone to relate to. In Lumpkin, Cheatham also found a way to connect with family members she had been taken from. Though the women eventually stopped writing to each other, Lumpkin noted that she kept tabs on Cheatham through others. Moreover, in 1887, when Cheatham’s children were attempting to access their inheritance from their mother, they called on Lumpkin to testify in court that they

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96 Finley, *An Intimate Economy*, 83.
97 Succession of Lucy Ann Hagan, 21696.
98 Succession of Lucy Ann Hagan, 21696.
99 Succession of Lucy Ann Hagan, 21696.
were the rightful heirs. Cheatham’s children knowing to turn to Lumpkin coupled with
Lumpkin’s willingness to testify reflect the strength of the bonds formed between these
women.\textsuperscript{100} It is likely that Hinton shared a similar bond with Ann Banks Davis, whom
Omohundro gifted several items and to whose husband Omohundro sold a plot of land to.\textsuperscript{101}
Omohundro’s gifts imply that he and Hinton were family friends with the Davises, but Hinton
and Banks Davis’ relationship probably ran deeper, paralleling Lumpkin and Cheatham’s
friendship.

Beyond the concubines of slave traders similar to them, these women created bonds with
women of color in general. While enslaved to Jane Shelton, Sarah Conner kept the money she
earned from additional work with another enslaved woman who owned a box to keep the money
safe.\textsuperscript{102} Not much else is not known of the situation, but that Conner felt comfortable entrusting
this woman with her pathway to freedom clearly shows that these women had strong trust
between them. In that vein, Cheatham befriended Mary Wilson and Mary E. Wood, two women
of color who, like Lumpkin, testified for her children. Wilson first met Cheatham in 1850 when
she was enslaved to Hagan, and the two remained friends for thirty-seven years. In fact,
Cheatham was staying with Wilson when she died in 1887.\textsuperscript{103} Mary E. Wood met Cheatham
before emancipation, as well. Wood declared that she was a “confidential friend” of Cheatham’s,
and her characterization seems to ring true. When her young son died, Cheatham, who took the
loss hard, relied on Wood to write to her daughter and inform her about the death.\textsuperscript{104} These
helpful acts from Wood and Wilson are likely only a fraction of the many ways these women

\textsuperscript{100} Succession of Lucy Ann Hagan, 21696.
\textsuperscript{101} Finley, \textit{An Intimate Economy}, 138.
\textsuperscript{102} Hector Davis, “Daybooks, 1857-1865, Miscellaneous reel 6215.”
\textsuperscript{103} Finley, \textit{An Intimate Economy}, 73.
\textsuperscript{104} Succession of Lucy Ann Hagan, 21696.

Wilson may have been the concubine of another trader, J.M. Wilson.
\textsuperscript{104} Succession of Lucy Ann Hagan, 21696.
supported each other over the course of their decades’ long friendships, and they explain who these women turned to for help and encouragement in their times of need.

In addition to these friendships, some women established relationships with those within in their household. Corinna Hinton, for example, shared her household with Eliza Cheatham, another enslaved woman. Likely working as Hinton’s assistant in the household, Eliza earned the trust of Corinna and Silas, who tasked Eliza with accompanying and living with their children in the North. In Pennsylvania, Silas Omohundro introduced Eliza as Hinton’s sister. While the veracity of this claim is unclear, Silas’s choice to describe the two as sisters, as opposed to any other relationship, indicates that the two women were close, not just as coworkers within their household but as family.\textsuperscript{105} Hinton may have felt similarly about Patsy Clark, an older enslaved woman who was notably listed as the head of a household that included Hinton and her children and was near to Omohundro’s household in the Census for Free Inhabitants.\textsuperscript{106} Clark probably held a similar role to Eliza, and while no sources beyond the census reference her, her inclusion in the census alone suggests that she was an important enough part of the household to be listed with the other family, unlike other slaves who were namelessly recorded in the slave schedules.

Although these women were able to form lasting bonds with women of color, they may have also encountered isolation from other people of color, both free and enslaved. Historian Libra R. Hilde notes that other enslaved people often mistrusted or even resented enslaved concubines, causing them to distance themselves from these women.\textsuperscript{107} Even if enslaved people did not intentionally mean to avoid them, Hilde highlights that they may not have had access to

\textsuperscript{105} Omohundro’s Estate.
Enslaved concubines usually led very different lives from other enslaved people. Many had dwellings separate from other enslaved people or lived directly with their owners. Other enslaved people whose movement was already limited often lacked the freedom to enter these spaces and interact with these women, leaving enslaved concubines with less interaction and a decreased ability to bond with other enslaved people.

Among free people of color, these enslaved women could also face criticism, resulting in their isolation. At least some free people of color felt like David Walker, a Black abolitionist who believed solidarity among Black people should come above all else. In his pamphlet titled the Appeal, which called for a slave rebellion, Walker commented on a report from Ohio of enslaved people attacking the traders who were transporting them. Following the attack, an enslaved woman in the coffle helped one of the surviving traders, who in turn was able to recapture some of the escaped slaves. In no uncertain terms, Walker condemned “the actions of this deceitful and ignorant coloured woman,” deeming them absolutely “insupportable.”

If this overtly negative reaction was Walker’s response to this woman saving a trader’s life, he would probably be even more critical of women who spent their lives making households with traders. Walker’s views were extreme, even amongst free people of color and abolitionists. However, his response definitively shows how these women could face disapproval and outright hate from free people of color for engaging in an interracial relationship, instead of sympathy for their enslavement and the coercive nature of their relationships. This animosity may have also been heightened by respectability politics and free people of color wanting to distance themselves

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Hilde, Slavery, Fatherhood, and Paternal Duty, 217.


Walker’s demonization of this “coloured woman” has sexist undertones. He deems her to simultaneously be both consciously malevolent or “deceitful” and naïve or “ignorant,” playing on stereotypes that women still face today. His bias, which was likely shared, may be part of the reason that when befriending people of color, these women turned to other women more often than men.
from the overtly sexual and consequently disreputable status concubines held. This deeply critical mindset likely did cause at least some free people of color to ignore and avoid these women.

Living in white spaces and sometimes living as white women, these women also formed connections to white people. These relationships especially came to light when their legitimacy as wives was questioned in court. During Ann Maria Barclay’s legal battle with Botts’ executor for her portion of the estate in 1854, two white men testified on her behalf. The first was a contractor Botts and Barclay hired to construct a home for them. The contractor testified he “believed Barclay was a white woman” and that she was “hardworking and industrious.”

Though the contractor did not know Barclay for a long time, she clearly struck up a friendship or acquaintanceship with him to the point where he could comment on her personality and was willing to testify on her behalf. Barclay’s second witness, J.A. Beard, who testified a few years later, knew her even better, further demonstrating that these women forged bonds with white people. As they were both New Orleans slave traders, Beard knew Botts, and by extension Barclay, from at least the time Barclay was purchased in 1838. Beard seems to have been close with the couple. He loaned money to Botts, bought and sold slaves on behalf of Barclay, and even knew that they had a child that they passed off as Barclay’s sister. While he probably felt closer to Botts, with whom he had more in common with, Beard had definitely formed a connection to Barclay. Whether he viewed her as a friend or as the wife of a friend, Beard clearly felt some sort of obligation to Barclay, leading him to testify that she was Bott’s “wife or concubine.”

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110 Ann Maria Barclay, f.w.c. v. Sewell, curator.
111 Ann Maria Barclay, f.w.c. v. Sewell, curator.
112 Ann Maria Barclay, f.w.c. v. Sewell, curator.
ambiguous because he includes “concubine,” he likely knew that concubine was a legal category in New Orleans and that concubines had claim to at least some inheritance. 113 It is unclear what Barclay and Beard’s interactions looked like, but over her years living with Botts, Barclay clearly put in the effort to incorporated Beard into her social network to the point where she could call on him for help. Hinton or Mrs. Omohundro, as she was known in Pennsylvania, did something similar, though under the guise that she was white. When battling for her portion of Omohundro’s estate in 1870, Hinton’s lawyers solicited testimony from multiple white residents in Pennsylvania. Three white men, William Carpenter, Michael O. Kline, and A.W. Rand all claimed that Hinton was Omohundro’s wife. 114 These men’s declaration and defense of Hinton’s status as Omohundro’s wife, again reflect that these women formed relationships with white people that they could ultimately depend on in times of distress. These relationships taken with the bonds the women formed with people of color reveal that they had diverse and dynamic networks that they could employ to both enrich and tackle the problems of their daily lives.

J.A. Beard’s description of Ann Maria Barclay’s status provided unintentional insight into her daily reality and that of women like her. These women spent their days laboring as both concubines and wives for the men who upheld the slave trade and essentially, for the trade itself. While their relationships to slave traders gave them unusual access to material goods, education for themselves and their children, and even the opportunity to live as white women in the North, these privileges were tempered by enslaved women’s existence “as” wives. As Beard makes clear, these women were not wives but rather proxies for the role who lacked the legal protections actual wives held. Consequently, they relied heavily on their partners for the

113 Finley, *An Intimate Economy*, 83.
114 *Omohundro’s Estate.*
financial maintenance of their lifestyles and relative freedom. Though they created multifaceted
social networks to handle these challenges to their status as wives, as well as their other daily
struggles, these women’s existence were tied to their slave trading partners, and as such, the
deaths of said partners immediately before and during the Emancipation period jeopardized the
lives they had built.
Chapter 4

“My house”: Formerly Enslaved Concubines Carving Out Lives After Slave Traders

In 1876, when Hector Davis’ executor’s appeal reached the United States Supreme Court, Ann Banks Davis must have been frustrated. Hector had died in 1859, and about seventeen years later she was still embroiled in lawsuits about the sizable portion of his estate that he left her and their four children.\(^1\) By then, she was living in Philadelphia with her youngest children or with her eldest son, Audubon, and his growing family, completely free and as a white woman. It is unclear if she took on work, but her days were probably filled with housework and taking care of her children and grandchildren.\(^2\) Banks Davis seemed to have already accessed a portion of the estate, as census records in 1860 record her having $3000 in assets, but the executor’s investments in Confederate bonds complicated her ability to access the rest.\(^3\)

Banks Davis’ life after her slave trader partner and emancipation is emblematic of the experience of formerly enslaved partners after the lives of slave traders and the Civil War. Despite, or maybe because of, the circumstances of their unions, the traders often left bequests to their enslaved families, expressing varying degrees of affection in their wills. Traders’ family members or associates frequently interfered with these bequests, though their challenges usually were discounted by courts. As such, the women received these assets, all of which made them and their children direct or indirect beneficiaries of the slave trade. While some women recognized this fact, finding ways to distance themselves or defy slavery, many still took the opportunity to pass as white in the post emancipation era. With these new identities and

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\(^1\) *Davis v. Crouch*, 94 U.S. 514 (1876).

sometimes in new locations, these formerly enslaved women constructed new lives for themselves, usually drawing from skills they attained during their enslavement.

Facing death, slave traders gained a degree of liberty to acknowledge their enslaved family and express their feelings for their enslaved family. Preparing their wills, each of the slave traders made arrangements to protect their enslaved family members, as they had during their lives. Their wills, the final piece of writing that they would publicly share, document these preparations and reflect their devotion to their enslaved concubines and their children. In his 1843 will, Zephaniah Kingsley, a Florida based trader, wrote of Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley, an enslaved women whom he freed in 1811, that “her truth, honor, integrity, moral conduct or good sense will loose [sic] in comparison with any one.”

Kingsley’s affection for and admiration of Anna is apparent. In fact, he became an advocate for interracial marriage later in life and spent other portions of his will condemning the “illiberal and inequitable” laws preventing Anna and their children from living freely. In using such descriptive language, Kingsley probably intended his will to serve as a final goodbye to Anna but also perhaps a show of support for her and his children directed at his family, friends, and the wider community. While he could no longer shield her from the disadvantages of being a woman of color, he could try to ease her way in the world with a codified endorsement of her. Though not radical with his words, Silas Omohundro too employed a similar strategy. Omohundro, whose will was probated in March of 1864, presumably shortly after his death, dedicated a portion of his short will to describe his partner. “Corinna Omohundro has always been a kind, faithful and dutiful woman to

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me, and an affectionate mother, and will continue to be so, and bring up her children in a proper manner," he wrote. Omohundro’s praise for Corinna Hinton, his enslaved concubine, is clear, but he also subtly claims Corinna as his wife, styling her, and their children in the other portions of the will, with his last name rather than her own. Omohundro’s flowery writing for Corinna starkly contrasts his one sentence for Agnes, another enslaved woman whom Omohundro only referred to as “my woman Agnes” and instructed be freed with her two daughters. Again, Omohundro likely expected that the will would be shared with Corinna but also the society they lived in. Thus, Omohundro, a wealthy and respected trader like Kingsley, probably hoped his vote of confidence would help Corinna navigate life without him.

Aside from bolstering their enslaved families’ reputations, traders also left their partners with tangible assets and provisions. Kingsley left Anna and his eldest children the majority of his estate and instructed his executors to relocate the family to Haiti, where they could exist without hindrance. In the years before his death, Kingsley traveled to Haiti to prepare for his family’s arrival, indicating the lengths traders would go to safeguard their enslaved family. Omohundro verbalized a similar level of care, writing “my sole purpose in making my last will, is to give my whole estate… to Corinna and her children,” and his will did exactly that. Aside from freeing his family, Omohundro gave Corinna all their household items, her jewelry, and a choice to inherit and live in his Richmond compound or on property in Philadelphia, stipulating that the other property be sold and the profits paid to her semi-annually. He also made a specific bequest to one of his older sons, Colon, leaving him a gold pocket watch, also suggesting sentimentality.

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5 Omohundro’s Estate, 66 Pa. 113 (1870).
6 Will of Zephaniah Kingsley.
7 Schafer, Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley, 87-89.
8 Omohundro’s Estate.
9 Omohundro’s Estate.
Other traders’ wills, though not as expressive, showed affection, or at the very least obligation, toward their enslaved families. In his will written a year before his death, trader John Hagan first instructed his executors to free Lucy Ann Cheatham and their children, one of whom he refers to by the nickname Dolly. He repeats his wish to free them “as soon as possible” again at the end of his will. Though he does not wax poetic on his and Cheatham’s relationship or her mothering, like Omohundro, his prioritizing of her freedom above all and his reference to their child with a pet name implies the intimacy they shared as a family. Given that his will was a public facing document, shared with his black and white family, his mother included, Hagan likely felt it was best to keep displays of affection for Cheatham and their children to a minimum to avoid controversy. Nevertheless, he makes his relationship with Cheatham clear by leaving her their home, the site of his slave pen, in New Orleans and five thousand dollars. Likewise, Hector Davis displayed his feelings for Ann and their children not through words but through the twenty thousand dollars and interest on that money he left them. Davis also instructed his executors to free his enslaved family and move them out of Virginia, indicating he was mindful of their safety and ability to live freely. All these traders made long-term arrangements for their enslaved families, some well before their deaths, reflecting a level of care. Even G.A. Botts, who went bankrupt and had no major assets to bequest Ann Maria Barclay as a result, helped her acquire plots of land and build a house on one of those plots to give her some security at the time of his death. Perhaps the best prepared was Robert Lumpkin, who lived into the post-

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11 Will of John Hagan #10362.
12 Will of John Hagan #10362.
13 *Davis v. Crouch*, 94 U.S. 514 (1876).
14 *Davis v. Crouch*, 94 U.S. 514 (1876).
emancipation period, and legally married Mary Lumpkin, ensuring the seamless transition of his assets, including his slave pen compound, to her. However, formal marriage like the Lumpkins’ was not the norm, likely because many of the traders died before emancipation.

Lacking a legal relationship to these men, other than “property,” many of these women faced interference from the state, executors, and distant relations when attempting to access their inheritance. Arguing that she was Omohundro’s wife, Corinna sought to avoid inheritance taxes. She brought her case in Pennsylvania, where Omohundro’s will was filed and where the two lived periodically. Although their Pennsylvania based neighbors testified that Omohundro repeatedly introduced Corinna as his wife, the court decided that the matter would have to be settled in Virginia, where the couple was from and where Corinna was enslaved by Omohundro and subjected to inheritance tax, as she was not his legal wife. This fact was reinforced when W.W. Crump, from whom Omohundro had bought a plot of land in Virginia, sued his estate for the rest of the payment of the land and won. Though Omohundro’s executor, Richard Cooper, was tasked with dealing with these suits, they still sapped the inheritance of Corinna, and similarly positioned women, and delayed their overall inheritance. At one point, Cooper had to sell silverware and jewelry that would likely have otherwise been Corinna’s to pay off Omohundro’s outstanding debts, demonstrating how closely her lifestyle was tied to Omohundro’s estate.

Even when women accepted the terms of their inheritance as concubines, not wives, their ability to access their inheritance was repeatedly hampered, sometimes by the very people who

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17 Omohundro’s Estate.
18 Omohundro’s Estate.
19 *Omohundro’s Ex’or v. Crump*, 59 Va. 703 (1868).
20 Omohundro, "Money Paid Out and Received."
were supposed to help them. While Barclay had undertaken much of the work to build her home and maintain the plots of land she owned, Bott’s executor disputed her ownership of the plots. He then challenged Barclay’s freedom altogether, claiming that she was Bott’s property, surely contradicting the wishes of Botts, who freed her decades ago in 1839 and treated her as his wife.21 Bott’s executor was unsuccessful, but his suit is representative of the barriers executors could pose to formerly enslaved, faced when trying to access their assets. In a similar vein, Hector Davis’ executor invested some of the $20,000 that was rightfully Ann Banks Davis’ into Confederate bonds without her knowledge.22 Only after years of legal proceedings did courts finally order the executor to give Ann an account of how her money was invested.23

While executors could be obstructive, these women faced even more acute legal challenges from those who had absolutely no obligation to them and possibly even harbored some resentment for them, like traders’ family members. Following the death of her partner, Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley was taken to court by his distant white relatives who challenged her ability to inherit most of Kingsley’s estate.24 Anna eventually won the suit, yet her experience reinforces the real illegitimacy of her and her family, despite the wishes of her slave trading partner.25 Corinna’s experience more explicitly illustrates these difficulties. In 1873, Littleton Omohundro, Silas’ son by the formerly enslaved Louisa Tandy, also sued the estate.26 Littleton showed that prior to the Civil War, Omohundro had initiated building Tandy and their children a house in Ohio where he had relocated them. Due to the outbreak of the Civil War, Silas was unable to pay the remaining $4390, though his attempt to build Tandy and their

21 Ann Maria Barclay, f.w.c. v. Sewell, curator.
22 Davis v. Crouch, 94 U.S. 514 (1876).
23 Davis v. Crouch, 94 U.S. 514 (1876).
24 Schafer, Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley, 87-89.
25 Schafer, Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley, 87-89.
26 Cooper v. Omohundro, 86 U.S. 65 (1873).
children a home indicates he felt some obligation towards them.\textsuperscript{27} Littleton’s suit, which was successful, embodies multiple ways women’s illegitimate status could influence their inheritance. His suit undermined Corinna’s claim on Omohundro’s estate, but also reveals that some women, like Louisa Tandy, were left with no support beyond what they received during the traders’ lifetime.\textsuperscript{28} Sarah Conner further demonstrates how women were legally due and could receive absolutely nothing. Conner, who ultimately supported herself, owning her own property and enslaved people, received nothing from her partner Theophilus Freeman. Known for his dubious business practices, Freeman disappears from the record after a series of lawsuits, leaving little to no assets for Conner or any other enslaved concubine he may have had. Women like Conner, Tandy, and others represent the experience of enslaved and formerly enslaved women, who after years of laboring as concubines, received nothing in return. Left out of wills and other lasting legal documents, these women’s experiences bear stark contrast to the lives of Corinna and others, who left their partnerships with at least some financial footing.

While all the lifestyles of these women, from second homes to jewelry, were financed in some way by the slave trade, their inheritance from their slave trading partners forced them to directly handle wealth generated by slavery. In July of 1864, Corinna chose to take a part of her share of the Omohundro estate in enslaved people. She received ownership of Polly, Lavenia, Thomas and Mariah, who were collectively valued at $15,202.\textsuperscript{29} Although she may have taken these four people for personal reasons, to keep them together perhaps, her inheritance still made

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Cooper v. Omohundro}.  
\textsuperscript{28} That the parties in the suit were Littleton and Cooper, rather than Tandy and Corinna, also reflect the male dominance within the legal field, which women without surviving male family members or sympathetic executors would have to navigate as an additional obstacle.  
\textsuperscript{29} “Corinna Omohundro's signature,” \textit{Online Exhibitions}, The Library of Virginia.
her a slave owner. Cheatham also became a slave owner following Hagan’s death. In 1860, Cheatham owned two enslaved women in their twenties, one sixteen-year-old boy, and a four-year-old girl. While these enslaved people were not directly given to Cheatham by Hagan, she probably purchased them with the wealth she inherited from him, which totaled about $22,000 in 1860. The ages of her enslaved people suggest that at least some of them were related, such as the four-year-old child to one of the older women perhaps. Like Corinna, Cheatham may have viewed her slave ownership as a necessary evil to keep these people together; she may have even viewed her enslaved people as kin of some sort. Nevertheless, just as Hagan had owned her and their children, she ultimately owned these people, and her bequest from Hagan enabled her to do so.

The bequests other women received were less direct than actual enslaved people but still undeniably transformed them from passing enjoyers to sole proprietors of the fruits of the slave trade. The man who helped construct Barclay and Botts’ home, for example, recalled being given several promissory notes and an enslaved boy worth eight hundred dollars for his work, tying her property directly to the slave economy. The property Omohundro posthumously funded for Tandy was likely financed in a similar way. Even if not directly paid for in enslaved people, these properties were paid for with money the traders had earned from housing and auctioning enslaved bodies. In some cases, the assets these traders left behind were vestiges of the slave trade in themselves. Corinna, Lucy Ann Cheatham, and Mary Lumpkin inherited the slave pens

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32 Ann Maria Barclay, f.w.c. v. Sewell, curator.
33 Cooper v. Omohundro.
they lived in while enslaved from Silas, John Hagan, and Robert Lumpkin, respectively. Though they had labored in service of slave traders and the slave trade as concubines, the bequests left by slave traders turned these women into stakeholders in the slave trade after the fact.

Confronted with the reality that they were benefitting from slavery, these women expressed a continuum of responses to their newly augmented role in the slave economy. Given the option to move to Philadelphia, Corinna chose instead to remain in Richmond, residing in the slave pen compound she had once shared with Omohundro. While impossible to know what she thought of her circumstances, her choice to stay signals that she reconciled with the pen and hers connection to the enslavement of so many. Perhaps she, like Sarah Conner who traded in slaves after gaining her freedom, saw her situation as completely divorced from that of the enslaved and formerly enslaved people around her. Corinna may have even felt that she was owed the pen after years of laboring for the success of it and Silas, like Littleton Omohundro and Louisa Tandy with their home. In fact, Tandy deliberately embraced her connection to Omohundro, and subsequently the slave trade, by changing her surname from Tandy to Omohundro between the 1840 to 1860 censuses. With Littleton’s ongoing court case for the payment of their home, this may have been her way of asserting her right to Omohundro’s assets. By contrast, Mary Lumpkin, who also inherited a slave pen in the same neighborhood as

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34 *Omohundro’s Estate.*
Will of John Hagan #10362.
Corey, *History of the Richmond Theological Seminary,* 74-75.
36 Sarah Conner Petition, August 1, 1849, Folder 101693-014-0209, *Race, Slavery, and Free Blacks, Series II: Petitions to Southern County Courts, Part F: Louisiana (1795-1863),* ProQuest History Vault.
Finley, *An Intimate Economy,* 84.
Corinna sought to distance herself from the pen. Following the death of Robert Lumpkin, Mary donated the pen to Nathaniel Colver, a Baptist minister, who sought to create a school for freedmen in Richmond.\textsuperscript{38} Mary, who was known as being in “good and regular standing at the First African Baptist Church,” seems to have been fairly religious, even sneaking hymn books to enslaved people held in Lumpkin’s jail.\textsuperscript{39} With this context, her gesture aligns with her religiosity. However, it also indicates that she likely felt some guilt for what happened at the jail. One man who was whipped at Lumpkin’s jail as a child recalled that when he encountered Mary at church as an adult, she almost immediately recognized him and the punishment he endured as a child.\textsuperscript{40} Mary’s recollection of this man’s punishment so many years later demonstrates that what she witnessed and experienced in the pen made a lasting impression, one that she likely regretted.

In addition to reconciliation or regret, some women also exhibited defiance following the death of their partners. In losing their partners, these women found a chance to shape their own narratives often for the first time in their lives. When testifying about her relationship with Lucy Ann Cheatham in 1887 during hearings about Cheatham’s will, Mary Lumpkin explained that Hagan and Cheatham often stayed with the Lumpkins in Richmond. Mary repeatedly refers to the Lumpkin jail compound as “my house,” and in doing so reclaims the site of her enslavement and the enslavement of so many others.\textsuperscript{41} While Mary probably also chose her language carefully

\begin{footnotes}
\item 38 Corey, \textit{History of the Richmond Theological Seminary}, 74-76.
\item 39 Corey, \textit{History of the Richmond Theological Seminary}, 50.
\item Charles Emery Stevens, \textit{Anthony Burns: A History}, (Boston: John P. Jewett And Company, 1856), 192.
\item 40 Corey, \textit{History of the Richmond Theological Seminary}, 49-50.
\end{footnotes}
to shield Cheatham’s past as an enslaved concubine and her surviving children from scrutiny and stigma, her description of the jail as hers rather than “ours” reflects her taking authority and ownership over the space, which she was denied during Robert Lumpkin’s life. Cheatham too found space to express defiance against her circumstances in slavery after John Hagan’s death by renaming their daughter, who was likely the “Dolly” Hagan referred to in his will, Fredericka Bremer Hagan.\textsuperscript{42} A contemporary Swedish author, Fredericka Bremer was well known in the U.S. for her staunch support of abolition.\textsuperscript{43} In naming the daughter she shared with a slave trader after such a figure, Cheatham was openly rebelling against slavery. While these slights in language were not extreme acts, they represent how some of these women could subversively exercise their newfound freedom and express their frustration with the institution and people that kept them in bondage. Still, these women’s feelings about their circumstances were not one-dimensional. In her death, Cheatham chose to be buried next to her “husband” Hagan and their son, signaling she still held some affection for him at the end of her life.\textsuperscript{44} Similarly, one of Ann Banks Davis’ son’s named his child Hector, after his father, also demonstrating the familial devotion these women and their children held for slave traders.\textsuperscript{45} As she took care of her grandson, Ann probably felt some fondness for both Hectors, her grandson and her deceased partner, reflecting the multitude of feelings that these women experienced after the death of the traders.


\textsuperscript{43} Alexandra J. Finley, \textit{An Intimate Economy}, 107.


\textsuperscript{45} 1860 U.S. Census, population schedule, Philadelphia Ward 7.
Entering the postbellum period armed with freedom and often some assets, these women forged lives for themselves with newfound freedom but without the slave trading partners they lived and even grew up with. Responsible for supporting themselves and their children, these women usually sustained themselves by using skills they acquired in their enslavement. In April 1865, Corinna provides a picture of her life in two letters addressed to a Union general. Corinna complained that a man “claiming to be captain (but wearing no insignia of rank)” “forcibly entered” her home in Richmond with a group of Union soldiers and commandeered three rooms she was renting to “a colored man and two federal officers.”\(^\text{46}\) She also noted that there were three other women in the house who the soldiers threatened.\(^\text{47}\) In a second, seemingly more subdued letter, Corinna informed the general that she was “a widow with five small children of my own & two of a deceased sister” and that her only means of supporting them was “two houses in this city and a market garden.”\(^\text{48}\) Corinna’s letters, a rare glimpse into her life in her own words, provides insight into her reality. Incensed by the intrusion, Corinna boldly challenged the officers’ presence, even going so far as to question their rank. Though after the letter received no response, Corinna, maybe under the advice of friends, wrote the second letter, emphasizing her widowhood and the needs of her children. While only two letters, her writing brings to light the different roles, like assertive businesswoman or desperate mother, these women may have needed to play in their new lives, especially without a man to advocate on their behalf.

Moreover, these letters deliver clues about the activities and the characters that characterized Corinna’s new reality. According to her writing, Corinna’s days were filled with

\(^{46}\) Finley, *An Intimate Economy*, 128-129.
\(^{47}\) Finley, *An Intimate Economy*, 128-129.
\(^{48}\) Finley, *An Intimate Economy*, 129.
caring for her children, tending to boarders, and cultivating and selling produce. It is possible that her sister’s two children were the children of Eliza Cheatham, an enslaved woman who Silas often introduced as Corinna’s sister, and it is likely that at least some of the three women Corinna mentioned helped her with caring for the children and household. Regardless of who was helping her, Corinna likely had a strong command of her work, as is evinced by her operating multiple boarding houses. Housing men like the “colored man” or the “two federal officers” must have felt familiar to Corinna, who, when enslaved, had aided in the operation of Silas’ slave pen and attached boarding house just a block away from her new home. In fact, Corinna’s experience taking care of household duties for men, such as Silas and the pen’s boarders, likely influenced her choice of work.

Other women too repurposed the skills they gained during their enslavement, their survival now taking the form of money earned for themselves instead of money saved for the traders. Throughout the 1860s to 1880s, Lucy Ann Cheatham was listed in New Orleans censuses “keeping house” and “furnishing rooms” or providing rooms for rent, as she lived with her two children and changing group of boarders. For the initial period after Hagan’s death in 1856, she may have lived with Hagan’s brother, Alexander, who also was a slave trader, at the pen and home she inherited on Esplanade street. By 1860, though, Cheatham was the head of her own household, supporting herself and her family. For Cheatham, the transition from

49 Finley, An Intimate Economy, 128. Omohundro’s Estate.
50 Finley, An Intimate Economy, 129.
52 Finley, An Intimate Economy, 153.
laboring in Hagan’s household during her enslavement to one occupied by renters was likely seamless. Cheatham may have even found the work easier, for the renters did not demand the emotional and sexual labor Hagan expected. In addition to running households for boarders, these women could rely on other abilities that they used in their enslavement. Freed by Silas earlier than most concubines, Louisa Tandy was working as a seamstress by the 1860s. Given that traders often marketed “fancy maids,” or enslaved concubines, as seamstresses, Tandy likely had or acquired the ability to sew when enslaved by Silas. Decades later, she was using this skill to support the children he had fathered by her. As with other aspects of their lives, these women’s time in bondage influenced the ways they sought to support themselves in the postbellum period.

Although many women labored for themselves, some also found increased stability through partnerships with white men, which for the first time, could be consensual. Around 1868, Richard Cooper, Silas Omohundro’s executor, began listing his semi-annual payments to Corinna as payments to “Corinna Davidson” rather than Omohundro, reflecting Corinna’s marriage to Nathaniel Davidson. With Davidson, who was reported by the 1870 census to be a “coal dealer,” Corinna lived with her children as a white woman. No longer burdened with supporting her family by herself, Corinna was able to “keep confectionary” or open up a bakery in Richmond. This new business may have been a realized dream for Corinna, who had been growing and selling produce, making “pickles and preserves” for Omohundro, and cooking for her household for decades. Regardless, her bakery symbolized the increased stability she

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54 1860 U.S. Census, population schedule, Cincinnati Ward 9, Ohio.
55 Silas Omohundro, "Money Paid Out and Received, No. 1, 1851-1877,” Accession 29642, Business and Estate records, 1842-1882, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.
57 Finley, An Intimate Economy, 19.
gained from her marriage to Davidson. This stability was further established by 1880, when the couple had relocated to Washington D.C. with Davidson working as a journalist and Corinna “keeping house” or living as a housewife.\(^{58}\) Davidson also likely helped Corinna’s son Riley obtain his job as a reporter, reflecting how he provided stability not only for Corinna but her whole family.\(^{59}\) Ann Maria Barclay probably experienced something similar. Barclay who remained in New Orleans, married W.R. Verlander, a printer, in the 1850s. By 1860, she too was living as a white woman under Verlander’s name.\(^{60}\) Like Davidson, Verlander seems to have provided ample support for Barclay with the 1860 census showing they kept multiple paid servants.\(^{61}\) Further, accounts of Barclay’s assets at the time of her death in 1884 or 1885 show that she was able to maintain the plots of land Botts had helped her secure, suggesting that she and Verlander underwent no major financial hardship during their marriage.\(^{62}\)

Not all relationships were necessarily as formal, or secure, as the marriages. Sarah Conner, who had been running a boarding house prior to the Civil War, entered into a relationship with Smith Izard, a white bank officer, who had boarded with her since at least 1860.\(^{63}\) Throughout their relationship Conner continued to operate her boarding house on 216 Gravier Street, where the couple lived, suggesting that she either enjoyed her financial independence – perhaps she traded security for freedom -- or that Izard’s salary was not enough


\(^{59}\) 1880 U.S. Census, population schedule, Enumeration District 19, Washington.


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to sustain them. In spite of their finances, Izard was still able to offer some stability to Conner, for after a decade of living with him, Conner was recorded as white in the census, rather than mulatto as she had been the decade before. Following his death in 1872, at which point Izard bequeathed Conner some furniture and silver, Conner was again listed as mulatto in the 1880 census. The ambiguity of her race reflects how regardless of material wealth, attachment to a white man could prove beneficial to these women’s standing and may be another reason some women chose to enter new relationships. Not all formerly enslaved concubines passed as white or strove to pass as white, as in the case of the “nearly white” Mary Lumpkin who consciously joined the African Baptist Church. Moreover, later in life, she chose to live with another Black woman and identify as “mulatto,” which could be construed as another form of resistance against the existing racial hierarchy or even an act of self-care, given that Mary had lived among white people with little choice for much of her life. Still, existing as white did indeed make life easier. As such, the children of these women, including those who lived as “mulatto,” like Lucy Ann Cheatham and Louisa Tandy, usually chose to identify as white in their lives.

While some women entered relationships, many, especially those with older or adult children, chose to live alone. Mary Lumpkin, who had two adult daughters in Pennsylvania, rode

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66 Succession of Smith L Isard, 35917 District Court, Orleans Parish, Louisiana, s.v. “Smith Izard,” *Ancestry.com*.

These are just two examples of women’s children who identified as white. Further census data and other formal documentation indicates that most, if not all, these women’s children identified as white.
out the Civil War in Philadelphia at Robert Lumpkin’s behest. After his death, she returned to Richmond, before spending time in New Orleans and eventually settling in New Richmond, Ohio. Mary, who probably supported herself with her inheritance from being Lumpkin’s legal widow, likely chose New Richmond because of its large Black population, a result of its ties to the Underground Railroad. Mary’s one time friend, Cheatham, also chose to live alone in New Orleans and rent rooms to support herself. Testimony following Cheatham’s death reveal that she stayed in touch with her daughter, who lived in New York, and had a network of female friends, some of whom she met during her enslavement, like Mary Lumpkin. Cheatham was even staying with one of these friends, Mary Wilson, who may have been a formerly enslaved concubine herself, at the time of her death. Her network conveys the type of supportive communities these formerly enslaved women may have embedded themselves in during the postbellum period.

As they aged, other women chose to live with their families, who had likely only stayed intact due to the sexual and emotional labor these women conducted for slave traders during their enslavement. Ann Banks Davis spent the last decades of her life in Philadelphia, living with her son and his family and later with her daughter. Similarly, after Izard’s death Conner allowed her nephew, his wife, and their young daughter to move into her home. By 1890, Conner was

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70 Succession of Lucy Ann Hagan, 21696.
Corey, History of the Richmond Theological Seminary, 48.
71 Succession of Lucy Ann Hagan, 21696.
1900 U.S. Census, population schedule, Enumeration District: 0041, New Richmond Village.
73 Succession of Lucy Ann Hagan, 21696.
74 Succession of Lucy Ann Hagan, 21696.
75 1880 U.S. Census, population schedule, Philadelphia Ward 20.
76 1880 U.S. Census, population schedule, New Orleans Ward 3.
residing with them in Washington D.C. She probably relied on her nephew’s family to support her in her old age, though her will indicates she had a falling out with her nephew’s wife, Alice. Conner left multiple large bequests for her grand-nieces and nephews but explicitly disinherited Alice for her “conduct towards me.” Conner’s will also shows that she adopted a daughter, Mary Elanor Carter. The identity of this woman and legality of the adoption is unclear, but Conner’s adoption may have been another way to ensure she had support as she grew older or simply a gesture of affection for a friend or the child of a friend. In any case, Ann and Conner’s situations demonstrate how these women’s families could function as support systems later in life.

Beyond reflecting her familial bonds, Conner’s will epitomizes the experiences of formerly enslaved women in this period. Although many faced legal hurdles in accessing bequests from their slave trading partners, or in Conner’s case, received no inheritance at all, Conner’s assets, which ranged from plots of land to a grand piano, represent the financial stability these women achieved after emancipation. This financial security and even growth was driven by these women, who both fought for their inheritances and repurposed skills they attained while enslaved to support themselves. Further, Conner’s bequests of Smith Izard’s property back to his family members underscores how these women’s racial ambiguity enabled them to enter into new relationships with white men, which could be a source of not only affection but added stability, either financially or by helping them pass as white. Finally, Conner’s instruction that her remains be returned to New Orleans and buried in plot 181 of the

78 Will of Sarah A. Conner.
79 Will of Sarah A. Conner.
80 Will of Sarah A. Conner.
81 Will of Sarah A. Conner.
Cypress Grove Cemetery, located next to Lucy Ann Cheatham’s burial plot, situates her in a vast yet closely knit network of formerly enslaved concubines who knew or knew of each other, and seemed to support one another.\footnote{Will of Sarah A. Conner.}
Conclusion

When examining the enslaved partners of slave traders, it is tempting to explain their lives in extremes, deeming their relationships wholly coercive or their labor for traders as wholly complicit. Yet, the reality of these women was far more complex. With a long tradition of reconstructing the identities of the enslaved people they sold, slaves traders transformed enslaved women into enslaved concubines. They manipulated white society’s ideas of enslaved women’s sexual availability to commodify them via the fancy trade. They then purchased enslaved women and exploited their diminished agency to coerce these women to become their partners. As enslaved people and partners of traders, these women spent their days laboring for their families and household, which inevitably included helping traders and their work in slave pens. Indeed, they gained from these partnerships, obtaining material goods and distinctive experiences for themselves and their families, but their enslaved and unwed status left them dependent on the white men around them for support and to legitimize their freedom. These women developed diverse networks for themselves to handle these obstacles, though they continued to face challenges to their validity as wives into the emancipation period.

Struggling to receive the bequests their slave trading partners left for them and the children they shared or receiving no support from traders at all, these women turned to skills, like hosting boarders or sewing, that they had used in enslavement, to support themselves. Given the dearth of sources these women left behind, a result of their continuous marginalization, it is impossible to determine with certainty their feelings about their relationship with traders and their role in the operation of slave pens. However, their actions, which ranged from seemingly accepting to completely distancing themselves from their pasts, suggest these women experienced a multitude of emotions about their time in enslavement. Nevertheless, with the
death of their partners, the women, now free, forged another life for themselves, growing their network to include new partners and their growing families.

While this research covers only the few enslaved women who had relationships with slave traders that are identifiable by name, there were likely many more. When looking at census records of the households of traders whose possible relationships with enslaved women are not established, many of these records bear a resemblance to that of the women and traders covered. The continued presence of young, enslaved women and younger “mulatto” children from one decade to the next in the homes of these traders implicates multiple traders, like Bernard Lynch, the operator of a slave pen in St. Louis, Missouri.1 Without further documentation, these relationships cannot be substantiated. Still, the fact that households where these relationships may have happened exist adds to an understanding of how widespread this phenomenon was.

The lives and stories of the enslaved partners of traders are important in themselves, but they also reveal much about the inner workings of the slave trade, slave pens, and relationships between enslaved people and their owners. Stories, like Sarah Conner’s, emphasize how everyone in the antebellum South, even formerly enslaved people, could and often did trade in enslaved people, signifying the all-encompassing nature of the institution. Connections, like that between Mary Lumpkin and Lucy Ann Cheatham, demonstrate how enslaved people, specifically enslaved women, could form and maintain bonds that spanned decades and states. Finally, transformations, such as Corinna’s from holding the surname Hinton to Omohundro to Davidson, reflect the overall ambiguity of race in a system built on defining it.

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