

RICE UNIVERSITY

**Fashioning Slavery:  
Slaves and Clothing in the U.S. South, 1830–1865**

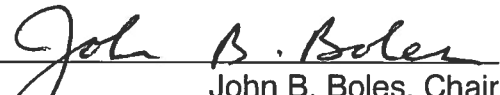
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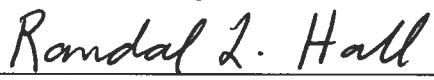
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Abstract  
Fashioning Slavery: Slaves and Clothing in the U.S. South, 1830–1865  
By Katie Knowles

This dissertation examines such varied sources as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Eastman Johnson's genre paintings, runaway advertisements, published narratives, plantation records, the WPA ex-slave narratives, and nearly thirty items of clothing with provenance connections to enslaved wearers. The research presented in the following pages seeks to reveal the complexities surrounding clothing and slave life in the antebellum South by examining a variety of sources in combination. Enslaved people resisted race-based slavery by individualizing their appearance when working and when playing, but they were ultimately unsuccessful in resisting their exclusion from the race-based American fashion system.

In bringing together previous scholarship on slavery in the American South, material culture, and fashion studies, this project reveals the deep connections between race and fashion in the antebellum United States. Enslaved people struggled against a racist culture that attempted to exclude them as valid participants in American culture. The individuality expressed by slaves through personalizing their clothing was a tactic of resistance against racism and race-based slavery. In many instances, enslaved people chose to acquire and dress in fashionable Euro-American clothing, a method of resistance because it was an attempt by them to disrupt the racially exclusionary fashion system of the antebellum United States.

Though relatively few garments survive today, the voices of enslaved people and the records of their oppressors provide a rich narrative that helps deconstruct the many ways in which slaves encountered clothing. Clothing played an integral part in the daily life of enslaved African Americans in the antebellum South and functioned in multi-faceted ways across the antebellum United States to racialize and engender difference, and to oppress a variety of people through the visual signs and cues of the fashion system. By combining written, visual, and material sources, this study demonstrates the imperative that dress be a central part of the analysis as scholars continue to explore the history of race and slavery in the United States.

## Acknowledgments

My love affair with history began when I first read Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* at age nine. The life and times of the March sisters became an obsession that extended beyond the realm of Alcott's imagination and into her own history. I owe a special debt of gratitude to women like Alcott who were not afraid to be bold or dream big, especially the women listed in these acknowledgments (and those I had to leave out) whom I have come to know professionally and personally as exemplars of strength. This dissertation has taken a long time to research and write, but the extended journey was well worth the delayed arrival. Numerous people have contributed to this project through their mentorship, scholarship, and friendship; I will try to thank as many as possible here without writing acknowledgments as long as the dissertation itself.

First on this list is Dr. John B. Boles, world-renowned adviser, mentor, and leader of successful dissertations. Dr. Boles accepted me as a student even with my unconventional goals; he embraced my desire to study material culture and encouraged me to pursue this line of inquiry. It was in his research seminar that the seeds of this project began as a case study of slave clothing in South Carolina. He saw something in that early research that I did not, and he pushed me to believe that I could take on a daunting topic that seemed at the time to have a small amount of sources (how wrong I was on that front). Without his steady, quiet guidance this project would not exist.

Randal Hall brought his careful editorial eye and his deep knowledge of southern historiography into this project. I am incredibly grateful to him for forcing

me to stand behind my arguments and to make them clearer and bolder. Randal graciously stepped into the role of second reader at a very late stage of the project despite his incredibly busy schedule, a testament to his dedication to the field.

Switching to a different second reader for this project near the end was the sad result of Stephanie M. H. Camp's illness and passing. Though she came to Rice after I had completed coursework, she enthusiastically took a position on my committee and she continued to correspond with recommendations and advice after returning to the University of Washington. Her comments on early parts of the writing were instrumental, and I hope that this project does justice to the legacy of her own excellent scholarship.

Caroline Levander stuck with this project from the beginning even with her increasingly demanding administrative duties at the university. In coursework, she taught me to read literature at a deeper level and to consider written sources as objects, and she encouraged me further in my pursuit of interdisciplinary approaches to historical scholarship.

Finally, Linda Eaton served as a fourth outside reader, bringing her vast knowledge of textiles and clothing to the research and analysis. Linda taught me how to read textiles and clothing and to understand their contributions as sources at a level I never could have imagined. Her unbridled enthusiasm for all young scholars, especially textilians, is invaluable.

The nature of this project required quite a bit of travel to a variety of archives and museums, as well as the assistance of staff who corresponded

virtually when I could not make it in person. I would particularly like to thank the librarians, curators, and others at the following institutions: South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston; South Caroliniana Library at the University of South Carolina, Columbia; Duke University Special Collections, Durham, North Carolina; Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Witte Museum, San Antonio, Texas; Alamance County Historical Society, Burlington, North Carolina; Chicago History Museum; Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia; Charleston Museum; Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans; and Historic New Orleans Collection.

I received support from several avenues for this project, including monetary assistance for conducting research, presenting at conferences, and in the final stages of writing. For this aid I would like to thank the Costume Society of America for awarding me the Stella Blum Research Grant, which was matched with funds from the Rice History Department. The History Department has funded numerous smaller research trips and conference presentations over the years that have added depth and value to my work. Finally, the Coordinating Council for Women in History provided support for writing through the Ida B. Wells Graduate Student Fellowship.

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*the Material Culture of Texas, the Lower South, and Southwest* (Houston, Tex.: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2012). I am grateful to the Costume Society of America and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston for permission to include portions of these publications in the dissertation.

The images throughout this work are integral to the analysis. The following institutions allowed me to use images of objects in their collections: Small Special Collections Library at the University of Virginia; The Library Company of Philadelphia; Rubenstein Library at Duke University; New York Historical Society; Art Institute of Chicago; Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Museum of the Confederacy; Stephens County Historical Society; Charleston Museum; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Louisiana State Museum; Historic New Orleans Collection; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts; South Carolina State Museum; Chicago History Museum; Alamance County Historical Society; Witte Museum; Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library; and Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Many of these places allowed me to use images without cost, including those that allow open access: National Portrait Gallery; National Archives and Records Administration; and Library of Congress. I would particularly like to thank the following institutions for waiving reproduction and rights fees: The Art Institute of Chicago, The Charleston Museum, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Beyond the scope of research and writing, completing a dissertation requires assistance from other colleagues. Many of these people contributed by sharing their knowledge, while others provided moments to escape from the

rigors of dissertating. The entire staff at Winterthur Museum, Garden, and Library deserve special recognition for welcoming me into their world and sharing with me all they could stuff into my brain about material culture. Linda Eaton is foremost among this group, but I would like to especially thank everyone at Winterthur for making my time there intensely entertaining.

I have spent so much time in the Rice History Department that thanking all of the faculty, staff, and fellow graduate students who have gotten me through would take pages. And so I will collectively thank this invaluable group of people and let them know that I definitely could not have done it without their guidance, informative emails about paperwork, or meandering conversations over drinks (that invariable led to historiographical debates no matter how hard we tried to avoid them). I must call special attention to the staff at the *Journal of Southern History*, which has bookended my time at Rice. Learning the ins and outs of academic publishing is a wonderful asset to my knowledge, and all of the cookies, cakes, and camaraderie certainly helped to make graduate school a little bit fun. I would particularly like to thank Randal Hall and Bethany Johnson for helping me through this last year by being flexible and enthusiastic.

Over the past few years I have gained curatorial experience working with former Rice colleague and now curator Sally Anne Schmidt. Time spent in her office pondering over Civil War collectibles and her willingness to commiserate with being a graduate student were a needed outlet as I pushed through to the end. Sally Anne's mentorship and friendship have helped me from the beginning; her success in doing public history at Rice encouraged me to follow in her steps.

Finally, I must thank my mentor and colleague Anya Jabour at the University of Montana. I was unsure of my future path as an undergraduate history student, but Anya encouraged me to apply to graduate schools and become a professional historian. Without her guidance I'd probably be a lawyer. Anya has continued to be a source of inspiration and a model of professionalism. Without her I know I would not have pursued a career that I am truly passionate about.

No scholar can exist in a completely academic world, and I must turn to thanking the friends who have gone on this journey with me. My neighbors on the 1000 block of Columbia Street provided much-needed laughter over great food. I'd especially like to thank my next-door-garage-neighbor Barbara Bahm, who always made sure I had Internet access, food to eat, and wine to go with it. The Johnson family—Laurel, Mark, Ivy, and especially Kathy—somehow gained an extra family member in me. I am thankful beyond words for their housing, feeding, and, most important, loving me.

Finally, I must thank my family. Lulu and Ellie have followed me around the country as I pursued professional opportunities, have endured long stretches of my absence on research trips, and are always ecstatic when I return from my historical endeavors. I honestly do not know how anyone survives graduate school without dogs and cats to remind them what is truly important in life. My extended family have been waiting and wondering a long time about this doctorate thing I am doing, I thank them for their patience and their encouragement.

This dissertation would never have been possible without the support of my parents and my little sister. Both of my parents instilled in me an appreciation for handcrafts, which has greatly impacted my research on textile history. Their love is immeasurable and they have shaped me into the person I am proud to be today.

Mom, Dad, Poopsie—this is for you.

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## *Introduction*

Our imaginations often depict slaves in the antebellum United States South trudging through fields in drab, rough, monochromatic attire. Barefoot and ragged, these imaginary slaves project a picture of uniformity and mindless drudgery. The research presented in the following pages seeks to reveal the complexities surrounding clothing and slave life in the antebellum South by examining a variety of sources in combination. Clothing functioned in multi-faceted ways across the antebellum United States to racialize and engender difference and to oppress a variety of people through the visual signs and cues of the fashion system. Enslaved people resisted race-based slavery by individualizing their appearance when working and when playing, but they were ultimately unsuccessful in resisting their exclusion from the race-based American fashion system.

In bringing together previous scholarship on slavery in the American South and fashion studies, this project reveals the deep connections between race and fashion in the antebellum United States. The oppositional dualities of enslaved people's lives as products and as people speak well to theories of fashion studies. Fashion is inherently contradictory as a method of expressing one's self as belonging to a group or society while also maintaining a sense of individualism.<sup>1</sup> Enslaved people struggled against a racist culture that attempted to exclude them as valid participants in American culture, and even as human beings. The individuality expressed by slaves through personalizing their clothing was a tactic of resistance

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<sup>1</sup> Malcolm Barnard, *Fashion as Communication* (2nd edition; London and New York, 2002), 12; Tim Edwards, *Fashion in Focus: Concepts, Practices, and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 2; Ruth P. Rubenstein, *Dress Codes: Meanings and Messages in American Culture* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2001), 150.

against racism and race-based slavery. In many instances, enslaved people chose to acquire and dress in fashionable Euro-American clothing, a method of resistance because it was an attempt by them to disrupt the racially exclusionary fashion system of the antebellum United States.

Gus Feaster, a ninety-seven-year-old black man, remembered going on a grand adventure as a child with his mother to a trading post so she could buy herself a bonnet. As an enslaved child, Feaster was dressed only in a one-piece loose garment known as a shirttail, but a trip to the store required that he acquire pants. His aunt, Feaster recalled, “fotched me a pair of new pants dat was dat stiff, dat dey made me feel like I was all closed up in a jacket, attter being used to only a shirt-tail!”<sup>2</sup> When Feaster and his mother arrived at the post, he stood mesmerized by the vast quantity of peppermint sticks before his eyes. His mother traded ten dollars worth of cotton for her bonnet and bought him five cents worth of candy. She warned him not to get any red sugar on his clean shirt, and they headed back to the plantation. Being a little boy, Feaster dribbled red sugar onto his shirt. When his mother noticed she exclaimed, ““Didn’t you hear me tell you not to git dat new shirt all red? Look dar a streaming down off’n your chin at dar red.””<sup>3</sup> She then took off his shirt and washed it clean in a brook. As they continued down the road, Feaster in his now clean but wet shirt, his mother suddenly dropped her bundles and bent into a curtsy before her master, whom she had spied riding down the road. She warned her young son, ““Git dat hat off dat head and bow your head for’ he git here!””<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* (1941, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Company, reprint ed., 1972), 2.2: 69.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 69–70.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

Feaster did as he was told, and after a short exchange with the master the two took up their journey.

Gus Feaster told this story to an interviewer employed by the Works Progress Administration. The WPA conducted a series of interviews with formerly enslaved people across the South from 1936 to 1938. Feaster's story provides a glimpse into the life of an enslaved child living on a plantation in South Carolina in the decade leading up to the Civil War. While Feaster's childhood memory contains a wealth of information on various topics concerning slave life in the antebellum South, it is particularly interesting because of the centrality of clothing in the story. The entire episode takes place around the event of his mother buying herself a bonnet. Through the story we also learn the type of clothing a young slave boy wore, and that he was expected to take good care of his clothing and appearance. When the white master enters the scene, we can see that clothing played an important part in defining proper attitudes and postures of slaves toward their owners.

The role of clothing in the lives of slaves remains an understudied topic in scholarship on the history of the Old South and American slavery. Feaster's story is only one drop of evidence within a deep pool of sources that reveal the importance of clothing in the everyday life of slaves. Many historians of the South mention clothing in their investigations as an important aspect of women's lives; Catherine Clinton and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese both discuss women's work and clothing. Drew Gilpin Faust's study of white women during the Civil War includes an entire chapter devoted to fashion and gender identity.<sup>5</sup> Deborah Gray White's seminal work *Ar'n't I*

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<sup>5</sup> Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women*

*a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* mentions the gendered nature of textile production but does not include further details on the styles of dress or the attitudes of enslaved people toward their clothing.<sup>6</sup> Despite these forays into dress history, one is left with little sense of what the clothing looked like and what it meant for those wearing it. Black women are most often the makers, not the wearers, of clothing. And because clothing is often equated with fashion, which is misinterpreted as an exclusively female endeavor, men are largely absent.<sup>7</sup>

More common in southern history is the dismissal of clothing as peripheral or unimportant to the experience of enslavement. One frequently cited example is Ira Berlin's assertion that "plantation slaves—men and women—worked stripped to the waist wearing no more than loin cloths."<sup>8</sup> Berlin uses this statement to call attention to the ways in which slaveholders perpetuated their ideas of black people as savages. Berlin's book focuses on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, not the nineteenth century as this study does. His conclusions are often applied and cited by historians describing slavery in the antebellum period. Though there were undoubtedly some slaves who worked nearly naked in the Old South, Berlin's comment cannot be applied as a general statement of their experiences. The

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*of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996). Most monographs on women in the antebellum South provide a brief glimpse into clothing, such as the one-page summary in Brenda E. Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 89.

<sup>6</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999). See especially pages 121–123.

<sup>7</sup> Tim Edwards presents a detailed and nuanced historiography of fashion studies and the limits of current theories when applied to the history of men's clothing. See Edwards, *Fashion in Focus: Concepts, Practices, and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 160. A more detailed and accurate, though still brief, accounting of colonial slave clothing appears in Edmund S. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 125–133.

sources studied for this project indicate that most enslaved people in the antebellum South had clothing that was a simplified version of typical men's and women's clothing of the period and was made from cheap materials.

There is also a difference between dressing for work and dressing for pleasure. This distinction is possibly the most misunderstood aspect of enslaved people and their clothing. Much more attention has been paid to the fashionable or fancy clothing slaves obtained through various means. Dressing up is often interpreted rightly as an opportunity for slaves to have greater individual and community expression through more colorful, higher quality garments and accessories than their everyday work clothing.<sup>9</sup> The examination of fine clothing as a site for resistance against oppression has resulted in the ignoring of the importance of everyday clothing to the material life of slavery. Enslaved people spent the majority of their time laboring; thus, they spent most of their lives wearing work clothing. As historian Walter Johnson noted, "When slaves went into the field, they took with them social connections and affective ties"; in other words, their time working could not be totally separated from their time not working.<sup>10</sup> The social and cultural habits enslaved people practiced outside of work, such as dressing in individualized clothing, undoubtedly carried over into their social habits when working.

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<sup>9</sup> Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), chapter 3; Helen Bradley Foster, *'New Raiments of Self': African American Clothing in the Antebellum South* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1997); Fox-Genovese, *With the Plantation Household*, 216–219; Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1998); White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 143.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013), 9.

Because most historians of the Old South lack an understanding of textiles and clothing, their assertions make assumptions that fail to historicize the experiences of all nineteenth-century Americans as related to clothing and how slaves' clothing fits into the overall narrative. In his groundbreaking 1974 book *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, Eugene Genovese includes several pages concerning the clothing of slaves. Genovese makes assumptions about the standard wardrobe of antebellum Americans based on his own twentieth-century expectations about the amount and quality of clothing one should own. He notes, "Even the most generous allotments" of clothing distributed by slaveholders "left the slaves little opportunity to wash and change their clothes more than once a week."<sup>11</sup> While wearing a single outfit for an entire week would indicate an extremely limited wardrobe for someone living in the twentieth-century United States such as Genovese, it was not that uncommon for people of the antebellum United States to have only a few changes of clothing. This is not to say that enslaved people had a typical amount of clothing for the time; most slaves had one, two, or even no changes of clothing. However, Genovese's statement fails to include analysis of the amount or quality of clothing slaves had compared with other antebellum Americans, particularly free laborers.<sup>12</sup>

Genovese's work marked an early effort at understanding slave culture; the research in this study builds upon a long list of excellent work that has come after

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<sup>11</sup> Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 551.

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed history of cleanliness and hygiene see Kathleen M. Brown, *Foul Bodies: Cleanliness in Early America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), especially chapters 10 and 12.

Genovese.<sup>13</sup> Yet few historians of slave culture have explored clothing. Shane White and Graham White's book *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* looks at clothing worn by black Americans from slavery to the early twentieth century. White and White found that from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, slave clothing became more uniform. They also state that after the Revolutionary period more clothing was manufactured on the plantation rather than bought ready-made from Europe. The Whites assert that this allowed the slaves more control over the clothing they wore.<sup>14</sup> It seems rather contradictory to conclude that clothing became more uniform as slaves gained more control over their apparel. While home cloth production in the South did increase from the early eighteenth century to the antebellum period, there was still a significant amount of cloth imported into the South for use by slaves, and the industrialization of textile manufacturing meant there was also more factory cloth being produced. While the information in the book is useful, only two chapters are devoted to slavery. The chapter on slave clothing uses runaway slave advertisements for the eighteenth century and then switches to the WPA narratives for the nineteenth century. By expanding the source base to include other written documents and the clothing itself, the present study will complicate the findings of White and White.

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<sup>13</sup> Examples of work on slave culture and community include John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Camp, *Closer to Freedom*; Sharla M. Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Dylan C. Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 200e).

<sup>14</sup> White and White, *Stylin'*.

In her book *“New Raiments of Self”: African American Clothing in the Antebellum South*, folklorist Helen Bradley Foster uses the WPA narratives to discuss slave clothing of the same period this study focuses on. Because the book uses folklore methodologies, it provides a wonderful collection of sources but limited historical analysis.<sup>15</sup> While Foster’s work is a step forward in understanding antebellum slave clothing, historical interpretation provides a new dimension to her findings. Other scholars of dress and fashion have written articles or essays that identify the types and styles of clothing worn by enslaved people but again neglect to explain how clothing fit into the everyday experience of enslavement. Studies by Patricia K. Hunt and Gerilyn G. Tandberg focus on local regions such as Georgia and Louisiana.<sup>16</sup> Others, including Linda K. Baumgarten’s article “Plains, Plaid, and Cotton: Woolens for Slave Clothing,” explore the eighteenth century, but end by the time cotton dominated the southern economy.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Foster, *“New Raiments of Self.”* For much shorter, very similar presentations of clothing discussed in the WPA narratives see Patricia K. Hunt, “Fabric Production in the 19th-Century African American Slave Community,” *Ars Textrina* 15 (July 1991): 83-92; Barbara M. Starke, “Nineteenth-Century African-American Dress” in *Dress in American Culture*, ed. Patricia A. Cunningham and Susan Voso Lab (Bowling Green, Kent.: Bowling Green State University Press, 1993), 66–79; Barbara M. Starke, “Slave Narratives: Accounts of What They Wore,” in *African American Dress and Adornment: A Cultural Perspective*, ed. Starke, Lillian O. Holloman, and Barbara K. Nordquist (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1990), 69-81. Over half of this book is dedicated to studies of dress in the twentieth century. There are two other articles dealing with slave clothing; both focus on the eighteenth century.

<sup>16</sup> Patricia K. Hunt, “‘Round Homespun Coat & Pantaloon of the Same’: Slave Clothing as Reflected in Fugitive Slave Advertisements in Antebellum Georgia,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 83 (Winter 1999): 727–740; Patricia K. Hunt, “Osnaburg Overalls, Calico Frocks, and Homespun Suits: The Use of Nineteenth Century Georgia Newspaper Notices to Research Slave Clothing and Textiles,” *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 14 (1996): 200–203; Patricia K. Hunt, “Textile Fragments Recovered from a Slave Cemetery in South Carolina,” *Ars Textrina* 22 (1994): 87–105; Gerilyn G. Tandberg, “Field Hand Clothing in Louisiana and Mississippi during the Antebellum Period,” *Dress* 6 (1980): 89–103.

<sup>17</sup> Linda K. Baumgarten, “Plains, Plaid, and Cotton: Woolens for Slave Clothing,” *Ars Textrina* 15 (1991): 203–222; Linda K. Baumgarten, “‘Clothes for the People’: Slave Clothing in Early Virginia,” *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts* 14 (November 1988): 26–70. There has been much more work done on the material culture of eighteenth century life in the South than nineteenth century life, particularly with source bases from archaeological digs of plantation sites. The homes of many of the country’s founding fathers, including George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, have received

While historians have tended to ignore clothing, scholars who study clothing have tended to ignore slaves. In her book on theories of dress, Alison Lurie states that “to wear clothes chosen by someone else is to accept and project their donor’s image of you; in a sense, to become a ventriloquist’s doll.”<sup>18</sup> This statement becomes questionable when one thinks of slaves in the U.S. South. Most had to accept clothing provided by their masters or go without. This did not make them into “ventriloquist’s doll[s]” but created a need for—and inadvertently an avenue of—expression and resistance for many slaves.

Many fashion theorists discuss clothing and dress as forms of communication, including Lurie’s theory of clothing as a kind of language. For example, in his study *Fashion as Communication*, Malcolm Barnard states, “By means of fashion and clothing, positions of dominance and subservience are made to appear and are experienced as natural, not the result of human action.”<sup>19</sup> Barnard often draws upon how fashion is used by those in power to solidify and naturalize their domination of other groups. These concepts, when applied to the conditions of enslavement and the power dynamics in the antebellum South between different racial, class, and gender groups, can be incredibly revealing. Clothing was used to define black bodies as unfashionable through slaveholders only supplying slaves

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extensive funding toward the recovery and interpretation of slave life at Mount Vernon and Monticello. This work is important, but has left us with less information about the daily life of slaves in the antebellum period. More recent projects at historic homes and plantation sites in the Old Southwest are beginning to uncover the material culture of the later period, including at Andrew Jackson’s Tennessee plantation called the Hermitage; see Jillian E. Galle, “Designing Women: Measuring Acquisition and Access at the Hermitage Plantation,” in *Engendering African American Archaeology: A Southern Perspective*, ed. Jillian E. Galle and Amy L. Young (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> Alison Lurie, *The Language of Clothes* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000), 22.

<sup>19</sup> Barnard, *Fashion as Communication*, 95. For more on theories of fashion and dress as methods of communication see Edwards, *Fashion in Focus*; Lurie, *The Language of Clothes*; Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003). Roland Barthes is credited with originating this theory in his work *The Fashion System* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983).

with rough, cheap, and ill-fitting garments. Conceptualizing fashion as a power relationship also assists in understanding how dress became an important method of resistance against racism for enslaved and free black people in the antebellum United States.

When one thinks about slaveholders' motivations, cultural dominance cannot be separated totally from their capitalist desires to spend as little as possible in maintaining the slave population. The goal of saving money by purchasing poor quality fabrics for slaves paired well with the additional result of slaves' bodies appearing unfashionable.

A major challenge to overcome when studying slave clothing is the fact that little of it has survived. Nearly thirty pieces of clothing used by enslaved people have been located as part of this project and are listed in the table below.

Item	Owner	Location
Brogan shoe	Chicago History Museum	Chicago, IL
Child's skirt	Smithsonian-NMAAHC	Washington, DC
Child's vest and pants	Shadows on the Teche	New Iberia, LA
Cotton apron	Charleston Museum	Charleston, SC
Cotton apron w/ sleeves	Charleston Museum	Charleston, SC
Cotton skirt	Smithsonian-NMAAHC	Washington, DC
Dress	Smithsonian-NMAAHC	Washington, DC
Frock coat	Historic New Orleans Collection	New Orleans, LA
Jockey suit	Charleston Museum	Charleston, SC
Leather shoe	Chicago History Museum	Chicago, IL
Linen pants	Tennessee State Museum	Nashville, TN
Linsey-woolsey dress	Alamance County Historical Museum	Burlington, NC
Livery coat	Historic New Orleans Collection	New Orleans, LA
Madras handkerchief	Louisiana State Museum	New Orleans, LA
Madras handkerchief	Louisiana State Museum	New Orleans, LA
Madras handkerchief	Louisiana State Museum	New Orleans, LA
Madras handkerchief	Louisiana State Museum	New Orleans, LA
Pair of shoes	Chicago History Museum	Chicago, IL
Pewter slave trader button	Charleston Museum	Charleston, SC
Pewter slave trader button	Charleston Museum	Charleston, SC

Printed handkerchief	Louisiana State Museum	New Orleans, LA
Shoe	Prestwould Plantation	Clarksville, VA
Shoe	South Carolina State Museum	Columbia, SC
Silk cape and bonnet	Stephens County Historical Society	Toccoa, GA
Skirt	Henry Art Museum	Seattle, WA
Wedding dress	Witte Museum	San Antonio, TX
Wooden shoes	Museum of the Albemarle	Elizabeth City, NC

Extant objects are an important and revealing source and are examined intensively in this study. Material culture can reveal information about the past that other sources cannot. In this case, clothing and textiles reveal a colorful and diverse group of sources that complicate perceptions of slave clothing as monotone and uniform simply by their existence. The survival of these objects also speaks to the importance that antebellum Americans and their descendants placed upon clothing as evidence of their lived experiences. Objects can be challenging sources to read, with advantages and pitfalls just like any other historical source. Most of the objects on the list above have little provenance, and many were donated to the current holding institutions by white descendants of slaveholders. Dating the fabrics and styles of the garments also proves challenging with plain clothes because they did not tend to change or adhere to the most popular fashions of the time. It must be recognized that these are rare and exceptional surviving objects, and as such they are not representative of the vast majority of clothing and textiles made and used by enslaved people in the antebellum South. Nevertheless, they do hold important stories, and their survival speaks volumes about the value placed in them as special documents of the lived experience of slavery.<sup>20</sup> Visual sources including

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<sup>20</sup> An excellent resource for learning how to approach the reading and studying of material culture is Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Methodology," *Winterthur Portfolio* 17 (Spring 1982): 1–19. For more specific analysis of clothing and material

photography and paintings that depict slaves and reports from archaeological digs concerning slave life add another dimension to the project.

Evidence of the appearance of and fabrics for slave clothing is abundant in sources, including slaveholders' account books and personal papers, slave narratives, and newspaper advertisements. Slaveholders, particularly those who owned large numbers of slaves, kept careful records of food, clothing, punishment, and daily work performed on their land. Their account books, plantation record books, and personal correspondence are rich with evidence of how slaveholders approached the clothing of enslaved bodies. Advertisements for runaway slaves are also an excellent source as many give detailed descriptions of the colors, fabrics, and styles of clothing worn by escaped slaves.<sup>21</sup> Equally rich are the narratives written by those who escaped slavery and recorded their lived experiences. These sources are particularly important in determining the attitudes of the slave community and of individual slaves toward their clothing. The other main source used that comes from the voices of those who experienced enslavement is 822 of

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culture studies see Daniel Miller and Susanne Kuchler, eds., *Clothing as Material Culture* (Oxford, Eng.: Berg, 2005), especially the Introduction.

<sup>21</sup> My primary data source for newspapers was the digital archive "America's Historical Newspapers." I used the query terms "runaway" AND "negro," and limited my search to only advertisements for the period 1830–1865. Along with a few South Carolina newspapers viewed on microfilm I created a sample of 572 runaway advertisements and dozens of merchant's advertisements for textile and clothing goods. An interesting pattern occurred in researching this source base; there were more advertisements overall in the earlier decades studied, and the earlier advertisements were more likely to describe clothing than later advertisements, which focused more on physical descriptions of bodies regarding skin color and especially body abnormalities from injury and poor hygiene. Rebecca Fifield has done a close statistical analysis in her work on late-eighteenth-century runaway advertisements and women's clothing. See Fifield, "Had on When She Went Away . . .": Expanding the Usefulness of Garment Data in American Runaway Advertisements 1750–90 through Database Analysis," *Textile History* 42 (May 2011): 80–102.

the interviews in the WPA narratives that discuss clothing, including that of Gus Feaster told at the beginning of this introduction.<sup>22</sup>

This study opens with a chapter on the visual and print culture of the antebellum United States, particularly the paintings, engravings, and sentimental writings disseminated around the country, and across the Atlantic, purporting to depict authentic portrayals of slave life in the South. The most popular representations of black Americans in the antebellum years were experienced through the growing popularity of minstrel shows and the pronouncements of the anti-slavery and abolitionist movements. Antebellum popular culture obscured the realities of not only the material lives of enslaved people but also their physical and emotional lives. Caricatures and stereotypes were refuted by people who used their authentic lived experiences as slaves in attempts to correct these inaccuracies through visual and literary sources of their own creation. The examples chosen for this chapter include some of the most widely distributed visual and literary sources, images and words that would be familiar to antebellum Americans in the North and the South.

The second chapter is about the textiles commonly used for slave clothing and where they came from. This chapter, like the first, goes beyond the geography

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<sup>22</sup> There have been many arguments for and against the use of the WPA narratives as a reliable source given that the people interviewed were far removed from the time of enslavement, most were children during slavery, and many were interviewed in the rural South by white interviewers in the midst of Jim Crow segregation and racial violence. I have chosen to rely upon these sources as valid because of the commonalities across so many interviews and the agreements of the statements with other kinds of sources that date more closely to the antebellum period. For other views regarding the WPA narratives as a source see Edward E. Baptist, "'Stol' and Fetched Here': Enslaved Migration, Ex-Slave Narratives, and Vernacular History," in Baptist and Stephanie M. H. Camp, eds., *New Studies in the History of American Slavery* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 243–74; Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 8; Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 9–11, 226n24; and C. Vann Woodward, "History from Slave Sources: A Review Article," *American Historical Review* 79 (April 1974): 470–81. The amount and quality of clothing of slaves was a standard question on the list given to interviewers, though some did not stick to this script.

of the South in looking at the beginnings of the textile industry in both Britain and the northern United States. However, textiles were also produced within the South; the fabrics used for slave clothing were among the first to be produced in an industrial factory setting, but this was a process over the period studied that was not beginning to solidify until the outbreak of the Civil War. Particularly important is the growth of the “Negro cloth” industry explored in this chapter. The textile industry is a component of the story because it reflects the changing nature of cultural conceptions regarding race and slavery through the marketing of specific goods for plantation use. Creating and marketing raced products like Negro cloth deeply connected capitalism to the slave South and made consumer goods into a method for further defining and solidifying race. The physical movement of the cloth used to make slave clothing across an increasingly global industry is a key element in understanding how connected enslaved people in the antebellum South were to the global market.<sup>23</sup> For those unfamiliar with textile terminology a glossary of historic textile and fashion terms as used in the antebellum United States appears in the backmatter for reference.

The third chapter concerns the styles of clothing worn by slaves for their everyday workwear—the clothing they spent most of their lives living in. In addition to identifying the styles commonly worn by slaves, this chapter also begins to uncover the relationship enslaved people had with this clothing. Evidence suggests that slaves attempted to individualize their appearance while laboring, not just when

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<sup>23</sup> Walter Johnson notes the connection between “the rate of exploitation of slaves in a field in Mississippi” to “the standards of the Exchange in Liverpool and the labor of the mill-hands in Manchester,” yet he does not fully explore how enslaved people understood themselves as a part of this far-reaching economy. See Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 12.

dressing up.<sup>24</sup> Also explored are the attitudes of slaveholders in determining the clothing for their human property, and their expectations for cleanliness and upkeep. Masters and slaves used work clothing in negotiating power dynamics. In the case of the individualization of appearance, enslaved people were successful in resisting total dominance through persistent and collective action. This chapter also compares the everyday clothing of enslaved people with that of free laborers to discern how those in power attempted to use a race-based fashion system to differentiate the bodies of enslaved people from free people.

Perhaps one of the most overlooked aspects of slavery in the antebellum South is the daily labor of slaves not related to the production of a cash crop. This work, the topic of chapter four, is particularly important in exploring slaves' experiences with cloth and clothing during the antebellum years because that cash crop was often cotton. Historians have examined the labor of slaves on large cotton plantations in terms of the planting, growing, and harvesting of the crop.<sup>25</sup> But the story usually ends there. Left out are the many hours of labor enslaved people spent in cleaning, carding, spinning, weaving, and sewing cloth. The work of textile production was largely that of women and children, so this means that their labor is disregarded, even though it contributed to the overall success of the plantation

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<sup>24</sup> Patricia K. Hunt also concludes that slaves sought to individualize their appearance, though her essay is limited to women. See Hunt, "The Struggle to Achieve Individual Expression Through Clothing and Adornment: African American Women Under and After Slavery," in *Discovering the Women in Slavery*, ed. Patricia Morton (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 227–40.

<sup>25</sup> Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan, *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993); Mark Fiege, "King Cotton: The Cotton Plant and Southern Slavery," in *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), 100–155; Walter Johnson, "Chapter 6: Dominion," *River of Dark Dreams*, 151–175; John Hebron Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest: Mississippi, 1770–1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988).

economy.<sup>26</sup> Men also spent time raising livestock such as sheep, which were sheared for their wool, and cattle, which were tanned for their hides. All enslaved people, especially women and children and those on cotton plantations, had a deep connection to the clothing they wore. Even as they complained of its poor quality and rough texture, they recognized the extensive labor involved in creating it and respected their own labor in that process. Enslaved people, particularly women, used their role as makers of cloth and clothing to fashion their identities. Whites denied that African Americans were creators or participators in American fashion, but enslaved laborers impacted the fashion system at some level through the textiles they produced and the clothing they stitched.

The inclusion of men in apparel production is most evident in the fifth chapter, which examines footwear. Men were almost exclusively employed as the tanners and cobblers who processed hides and fashioned shoes across the South. The North comes back into this chapter briefly as the factories there began to make cheap shoes specifically for the plantation market. There is almost universal agreement among the voices of enslaved people that their shoes, when they had any, were incredibly uncomfortable and hardly functioned as protective gear for their feet. Footwear and its absence made black feet ugly, smelly, damaged, and uncivilized. The disregard of owners for the feet of their human property, arguably second in importance only to the hands of a laborer, had much to do with the price of shoes, but toughened and gnarled feet had the added benefit of confirming white

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<sup>26</sup> Deborah Gray White includes a brief description of the work of textile production in *Ar'n't I a Woman?* on page 52. Textile scholar Patricia K. Hunt has also published an article-length study on this topic; see Hunt, "Fabric Production in the 19th-century African American Slave Community," *Ars Textrina* 15 (1991): 83–92. Many historians of slavery have also noted the pride expressed by enslaved people in their labor. For example, see Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 164–165, 459n36.

ideas about black bodies as animal-like, which perpetuated neglect and fueled racism.

The sixth chapter turns to the fine clothing of enslaved people, particularly to their motivations for dressing up in fashionable Euro-American clothing. This chapter also looks at the reactions of slaveholders and other white people toward the fashionable clothing of both enslaved and free blacks and the ways they used skin color to understand black bodies as unfashionable even when those bodies were dressed for pleasurable activities. Most previous studies that have turned their attention to dressing up have focused on the Sunday finery of enslaved people, but another important aspect in understanding how black people used clothing to challenge race-based slavery can be seen in their use of it to “pass” as white or of another gender when attempting escape. Slaveholders used nice clothing to try and maintain control over enslaved people through gifting special garments or cast-off items, reasoning that black skin would always be part of any outfit a slave wore so these gifts did not undermine race-based fashion. The final element of this chapter includes a brief exploration of the topic of Africanisms in American culture and how this method of analysis has been used by scholars in previous studies to misrepresent the sources of inspiration for the fashionable dress choices of African Americans and Euro-Americans.<sup>27</sup> This chapter suggests that scholars consider

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<sup>27</sup> There is a massive amount of scholarship dealing with retentions of African culture among people brought to the Americas during the slave trade. More recent examples include Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) and James Sidbury, *Becoming African in America: Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). The concept of black people retaining cultural knowledge through the middle passage was first argued in Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1941). This project seeks to further refine this ongoing debate by considering clothing and

African influences as central rather than peripheral to the development of a uniquely American culture.

Next, enslaved children's clothing is explored. Children, male and female, black and white, were dressed in unisex short frocks throughout the antebellum period. As enslaved children matured and their owners began to see potential in them as laborers and reproducers of the overall slave population, children began to receive clothing that identified their gender. Particularly revealing is the rewarding of pants to male children. Gus Feaster noted that his first pair of pants were a significant event in his childhood. But the trappings of masculinity in the Old South came with power, and there was clearly a struggle in the minds of white male slaveholders who wanted to take advantage of the reproductive potential of their male slaves without compromising their own power as white men. This chapter examines how the breeching, or awarding of pants, to enslaved boys fit into definitions of black masculinity and the larger gendered power dimensions of the Old South. Women's clothing changes from childhood to adulthood are also examined, including similar connections of their aging physical bodies to productive and reproductive labor. The sexual and physical potential of young slave bodies always determined how slaveholders dressed them. For male and female slave children, understandings of gender difference were gained through sexed clothing as they got older, but the increasingly different ways they were dressed compared with white children of the same age facilitated the process of comprehending racial difference and slave status.

The final chapter of this study examines the years of the Civil War and the impact of that time on slaves as related to clothing. War created shortages, disrupted labor, and destroyed crops and land across the South. For all the complications of living life enslaved in the South, it was the home of millions of black slaves just as of their white owners. While enslaved people did not feel the same political motivations for preserving the southern way of life, they certainly experienced the extreme loss and hardship that comes with war fought on one's homeland. This chapter uses clothing, particularly the shortage of it during the war, to begin exploring the experiences of enslaved people who lived through the fighting. It also examines the opportunities afforded to black men who used Union military uniforms as a new way of dressing up and performing freedom. In many ways, the Civil War disrupted the race-based fashion system of the Old South—shortages meant that whites dressed in poor quality textiles and unstylish clothing, and abandoned plantations became places for enslaved people to obtain nice clothing. In other words, fashion was part of the chaos of war.

The epilogue returns to the usefulness of visual culture in understanding and remembering slavery, this time in the postbellum period. Photography taken during the Civil War as well as in the decades after is often used to represent a visual portrayal of slave life, when in fact the people photographed are free. The same is true of some of the most famous paintings of the Old South, done by artists who had not seen the South before the Civil War. White people in the North and the South sought to regain stability and control, so they reached back to the antebellum visual cues of the fashion system, attempting to retain racial exclusion in American culture

through race-based fashion. The epilogue includes a brief exploration of the importance of clothing to newly emancipated people in countering these renewed efforts. Fashionable and fine clothing became an important marker of success for the growing black middle class in the pursuit of racial uplift. But as this study indicates, the relationship of freedpeople toward clothing was something of a continuation of their life in slavery.

This study is meant to be as comprehensive and definitive as the available evidence allows. The following chapters will perhaps help with identifying and locating additional sources and surviving clothing. Much more work needs to be done, particularly regarding regional and chronological variations of clothing among enslaved people in the U.S. South. This study focuses on the relationship between slaveholders and enslaved people. The dynamics of clothing and fashion within the slave community, as well as further analysis of the overall white population in the South as related to fashionability, are also important topics. It should be noted that most white people in the antebellum South did not own slaves, and even fewer defined themselves primarily as planters of vast estates.<sup>28</sup> Conversely, most black people were enslaved, and the majority of slaves lived on large rural plantations. In addition, the slave community must not be understood as a completely homogenous social space. Enslaved people were individuals who experienced life in different ways and through different conditions. Like all communities of people, slaves

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<sup>28</sup> This group of southerners has been explored in Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850–1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Lacy K. Ford Jr., *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Timothy James Lockley, *Lines in the Sand: Race and Class in Lowcountry Georgia, 1750–1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001); and Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

expressed love, jealousy, and hatred toward each other, and clothing served as a marker of difference within the slave community.<sup>29</sup> Aspects of dress other than clothing also need further examination. This study is limited only to items that were worn as apparel including garments, outerwear, foundationwear, head coverings such as hats and headwraps, and footwear; it does not discuss hairstyles, jewelry, religious amulets, or body modifications such as tattoos or scarification.<sup>30</sup>

This study assumes that race is a social construct—an ideology that has no real truth, but functions in a very real way in American culture to exclude and oppress certain people.<sup>31</sup> Numerous examples exist in history of enslaved people taking advantage of the permeability of race as a visual cue to undermine racism.<sup>32</sup>

Because American fashion was race-based, enslaved people relied upon white

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<sup>29</sup> Examples of work on internal relations in the slave community include Sharla M. Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Peter Kolchin, "Reevaluating the Antebellum Slave Community: A Comparative Perspective," *Journal of American History* 70 (December 1983): 579–601; Dylan C. Penningroth, *Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); and Lawrence T. McDonnell, "Money Knows No Master: Market Relations and the American Slave Community," in *Developing Dixie: Modernization in a Traditional Society*, ed. Winfred B. Moore, Jr., Joseph F. Tripp, and Lyon G. Tyler (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1988), 31–44.

<sup>30</sup> For scholarship on these topics see Ayana Byrd, *Hairstory: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001); Foster, "New Raiments of Self", chapter 5; Diana DiPaola Loren, *The Archaeology of Clothing and Bodily Adornment in Colonial America* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010); Barbara M. Starke, Lillian O. Holloman, and Barbara K. Nordquist, eds., *African American Dress and Adornment: A Cultural Perspective* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1990); and White and White, *Stylin'*, chapter 2.

<sup>31</sup> Barbara J. Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 143–177. Edward E. Baptist and Stephanie M. H. Camp provide a succinct statement regarding the making of race: "[T]here is nothing static or natural about race: it did not exist until it was made—almost by accident—out of anxieties about gender, civility, and savagery" (Baptist and Camp, *New Studies in the History of Slavery* [Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006], 9). Fields is credited with providing a launching point for future histories of slavery and race, though she was synthesizing and explicating previous scholarship that explored race as a social construct, including Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967, New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1982); Winthrop Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); and Ashley Mantagu, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942).

<sup>32</sup> Ariela J. Gross provides an excellent case study of an enslaved woman who successfully sued for freedom by playing upon the permeability of race; see Gross, *What Blood Won't Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008).

assumptions about darker-skinned bodies as unfashionable to disguise themselves as white through both dress and light skin, such as the example of Ellen Craft detailed in chapter 6 of this study. While we understand today that race has no solid foundation, it must be remembered that the people of the antebellum period, particularly slaveholders and other white racists, truly believed in the power and reality of racial difference and relied upon it to order their society.

Clarification must also be made about the use of the word *resistance* throughout this work. Resistance is a major aspect of the main argument presented here, but it is an incredibly fraught and complicated topic in its own right. All of the resistance discussed in these pages is what scholars have termed *passive* or *day-to-day resistance*.<sup>33</sup> Unlike outright organized rebellion or permanently running away, enslaved people used dress to resist their conditions in nonviolent ways on a daily basis. This resistance happened at both an individual and a collective level. The practice of individualizing work clothing and obtaining and dressing in fine clothing were both ongoing practices in the slave community; by the antebellum period, individual and collective resistance against monotonizing the work force had resulted in a small degree of power of the enslaved over slaveholders. Masters had essentially given in to the desires of enslaved laborers in personalizing clothing. While this was an example of successful resistance, it was undermined by the failure of antebellum African Americans, enslaved and free, to destroy the race-based

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<sup>33</sup> Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619–1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 163. Kolchin also rightly draws attention to the fact that all slave resistance “operated within the confines of the political, economic, and social hegemony of white slave owners” (166–167). This sentiment is echoed and further analyzed in Johnson, “On Agency.” The introduction by editors Baptist and Camp in *New Studies in the History of Slavery*, 1–18, provides an excellent overview of the historiography of slavery studies and the approaches by historians to the topics of resistance and agency; see especially pages 1–3.

fashion system. Slaveholders may have acceded to individualization, but they continued to view all black bodies as unfashionable. In sum, slave resistance through fashion ultimately failed.

Finally, a note must be made regarding terminology. Scholars have debated the definitions of the words *fashion*, *dress*, *style*, and *costume*. In the following pages the first three of these terms are used interchangeably, though the term *fashion* is usually used in reference to a set of accepted cultural norms regarding proper clothing. The final term, *costume*, rarely appears in this study, and is used only to refer to someone who is dressing in a way that is highly performative, often to disguise the wearer's true identity.

This study brings together previous work by scholars of slavery, of the antebellum South, of fashion, and of material culture. Though relatively few garments survive today to tell the story, the voices of enslaved people and the records of their oppressors provide a rich narrative that helps deconstruct the many ways slaves encountered clothing. Gus Feaster's tale of a trip to the local dry goods store is one of many examples explored in this study that reveals that clothing played an integral part in the daily life of enslaved African Americans in the antebellum South. More broadly, a race-based fashion system is revealed and explained through the power dynamics between masters and slaves. By combining written, visual, and material sources, this study demonstrates the imperative that dress be a central part of the analysis as scholars continue to explore the history of race and slavery in the United States.

## *Chapter One*

### Sam's Hat and Eliza's Escape:

#### Imagining the Authentic Slave in Antebellum Culture

In one of the most iconic scenes in American literature, a young mother clutches her child to her as she runs across the partially frozen Ohio River to freedom. This dramatic and memorable scene from Harriet Beecher Stowe's anti-slavery sentimental novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin: or, Life Among the Lowly* (1852) is one of many in the book where clothing plays a crucial role in the plot. The story begins with the supposedly kind slave owner Mr. Shelby forced to sell two slaves to pay his debts. The slave trader decides upon Uncle Tom, the head driver and a capable hand, and Harry, the young child of Shelby's wife's favorite slave and personal maid, Eliza. When Eliza overhears that her son is to be sold, she hastily gathers up Harry and some of her belongings and flees the plantation.

The next morning when it is discovered Eliza and Harry are missing, Black Sam and Andy, two slaves of Mr. Shelby, are told to help the slave trader find Eliza and Harry. Sam and Andy appear only in this one scene, but the machinations of Sam and his one-of-a-kind headgear prove to be the key to Eliza's escape. In describing his hat Stowe writes, "Sam's palm-leaf had been ingeniously disentangled from all pretensions to braid, as respects its brim; and the slivers starting apart, and standing upright, gave it a blazing air of freedom and defiance, quite equal to that of any Fejee chief; while the whole brim of Andy's being departed bodily, he rapped the crown on his head with a dexterous thump, and looked about well pleased, as if to

say, 'Who says I haven't got a hat?'"<sup>1</sup> Sam uses the hat to scare the tracking party's horses so that they run off, waves it in their faces whenever they get close, and even upsets the slave trader's horse by suddenly pushing his hat toward the animal's face while feigning to catch the reins. After much chasing, running, and sweating, the horses are caught. Then the horses and the men must be rested and fed from their exertions before the party can start off, giving Eliza another half day's head start. The men finally get on their way and come to the town where Eliza stopped to wait for safe passage across the river. When Sam sees her through a tavern window he "contrived to have his hat blown off, and uttered a loud and characteristic ejaculation, which started her at once."<sup>2</sup> Alerted to the danger by his familiar voice, Eliza slips out a side door and makes her dramatic escape across the icy river while Sam, Andy, and the slave trader look on in amazement. When Sam and Andy return to Shelby's plantation, they are rewarded with a bountiful feast because Mrs. Shelby had wanted Eliza to escape successfully. "Sam, as monarch of all he surveyed, sat with his palm-leaf cocked rejoicingly to one side" and told the assembled slaves of Eliza's daring escape and his attempts to help her along the way.<sup>3</sup>

The dissemination of print culture such as Stowe's judiciously illustrated novel combined with the spread of visual culture such as the minstrel show to create an image of slavery and enslaved people that Americans around the country came to view as authentic and true. While Stowe's original characters were often more complex than the minstrel ones, the author's vivid initial descriptions reveal that she

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<sup>1</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly* (1852, New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 100.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

relied upon the visual imagery circulated by minstrel show advertisements to describe their outward physical appearance, including the use of certain items of clothing as markers of African Americans as different, absurd, or un-American.<sup>4</sup> Genre painters such as Eastman Johnson, who portrayed romanticized vignettes of uniquely American lifestyles, furthered these assumptions. Popular culture worked to exclude African Americans even as they were the central topic. Meanwhile, African Americans sought to counter imposed visualizations of themselves through photographs and literature, claiming both blackness and lived experience as markers of true authenticity.

At first glance, Stowe's character of Sam appears to be a doting slave desiring to please his mistress and play the trickster. While he certainly succeeds in these aspects, his motivations run deeper. Sam knows that the sale of Tom will open the way for another male slave to take the place of head driver, and Sam wants that job for himself. Hoping to prove his loyalty, he pretends to be inept at catching the horses and finding the correct road to town, much to the consternation of the slave trader, who berates Sam as a worthless fool. Playing dumb was a method of resistance for enslaved people who did not want to excite suspicion or incur additional work for appearing too intelligent. Sam uses it to the opposite effect, knowing that if he tricks the slave trader into thinking all of his mistakes are due to his stupidity and not planned actions to help Eliza succeed, he will be in the favor of Mrs. Shelby.

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<sup>4</sup> Jo-Ann Morgan, *Uncle Tom's Cabin as Visual Culture* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007).



1.1 "Sam" in *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly*. By Harriet Beecher Stowe. A New Edition, with Illustrations, and a Bibliography of the work by George Bullen. Boston: Houston, Mifflin, and Company, 1888. Image courtesy of the Clifton Waller Barrett Collection, Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.



1.2 "Sam" in *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly*. By Harriet Beecher Stowe. Illustrated Edition. Complete in One Volume. Original Designs by Billings; Engraved by Baker and Smith. Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1853. Image courtesy of the Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

The illustrations from early editions of Stowe's novel were an important part of the reading experience, particularly for those who had not lived in a slave society. Above is an image of Sam first published in the 1853 London edition of the novel. Directly below the London edition image is a drawing from the first illustrated edition, also called the "splendid edition," published in 1853 in the United States. What is compelling here is the difference in how Sam is visualized by a London versus an American artist, which informs the readers how to think of Sam. In the London version, Sam's half-portrait is presented. He is not grinning wildly, but his finger

placed on his forehead makes it look as though he is thinking very carefully underneath that ramshackle hat. In the U.S. version, Sam is in the midst of pretending to catch a horse by waving his hat in its face. His facial features are less discernible and his person less distinguishable from the other black figures in the sketch. But he is not static in this portrayal; he is acting upon his quick thinking and leading the efforts to delay the trader. Both of these images rely upon racial stereotypes that were shared by England and the United States. The portrait of Sam from the London edition presents him with exaggerated nose and ears and very thick, protruding lips. In the U.S. edition, Sam looks more like an overgrown child playing a game of chase with other indistinguishable black figures than like a man bent on helping another enslaved person escape to freedom. In both images, Sam's hat is a prominent feature, diminishing his person in many ways as wholly defined by this inanimate and unfashionable object.<sup>5</sup>

The state of Sam's hat, along with his habit of hitching up his pants and "adroitly substituting a long nail in place of a missing suspender button" are memorable characteristics of this comedic player in Stowe's drama.<sup>6</sup> Sam's improvised and dilapidated outfit is reminiscent of the popular minstrel character Jim Crow.

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<sup>5</sup> For more on the connections between English and American interpretations of Stowe's characters see Sarah Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania: Slavery, Minstrelsy, and Transatlantic Culture in the 1850s* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 65.



1.3. Unknown artist. *Mr. T. D. Rice as the Original Jim Crow*. c. 1832. Ink on paper. The Library Company of Philadelphia, P.9369.

By the time Stowe's novel appeared in 1852, Americans were very familiar with the Jim Crow stereotype and other racist portrayals of black people popularized by bawdy and raucous traveling minstrel troupes. The characters were often played by white men in black-face (who also cross-dressed as females in some cases). Minstrel shows played mostly to working-class audiences in the North and the West, though they did travel around the South, and upper- and middle-class men were known to attend the shows. A middle-class, married, religious woman such as Stowe likely did not see any minstrel shows herself, but because illustrated advertisements in newspapers and on broadsides were spread around towns and cities, she most certainly knew something of these theatrical characters.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Jim Crow is one of the best known of the minstrel characters. T. D. “Daddy” Rice, a popular actor and singer, is credited with inventing Jim Crow and first playing the character to audiences in 1830. Jim Crow’s clothing is an important part of defining his persona. He wears tattered and patched clothing, shoes with holes in them, and a hat very reminiscent of Sam’s palmetto leaf contraption. According to a story published in the November 1867 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*, Rice had first heard the song “Jump Jim Crow” sung by a black man in Cincinnati. A year later, in Pittsburgh, Rice lured a black man to come back stage and relieved him of his clothes. Rice then donned the “old coat forlornly dilapidated, with a pair of shoes composed equally of patches and places for patches on his feet, and wearing a coarse straw hat in a melancholy condition of rent and collapse over a dense black wig of matted moss,” and he walked out onto the stage to debut his new character, Jim Crow.<sup>8</sup>

According to Rice, the novelty of the costume, combined with his own comedic skills, were an instant smashing hit. In fact, the crowd was so enthusiastic that Rice did not hear the black man, Cuff, calling repeatedly for his clothing back. Cuff wanted to leave so that he could meet a ship coming in as he made money as a porter. Eventually, Cuff is driven to jump onto the stage in a state of undress or nakedness to get Rice’s attention. In Rice’s telling, this only added to the hilarity of the show.<sup>9</sup> For Cuff, the entire experience of a white man forcing him backstage, stealing his clothing, and then having to beg for them back in front of a bawdy audience was likely a humiliating, degrading, and ultimately enraging one. In fact, it

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<sup>8</sup> Anonymous, “Stephen C. Foster and Negro Minstrelcy” *Atlantic Monthly* 20 (November 1867): 609.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

is unclear from the story in the *Atlantic* if Rice ever returned the clothes, or provided any kind of compensation to the man at all.

Rice used this story to claim that Jim Crow was an authentic portrayal of slavery because the actor was clothed in the garb of a real black man and had heard the song sung by a real black man, and in antebellum America blackness was equated with enslavement. Rice's desire to advertise his exaggerated, wholly fictional character of a happy-go-lucky, simple-minded enslaved black man fed into notions of respectability and presentation of the real and authentic self popular in antebellum culture. Because most minstrel shows played to audiences in the North and West, the vast majority of people who experienced Jim Crow live did not know, nor would they ever encounter, a person who could testify to the truth of slavery versus the fabricated Jim Crow.

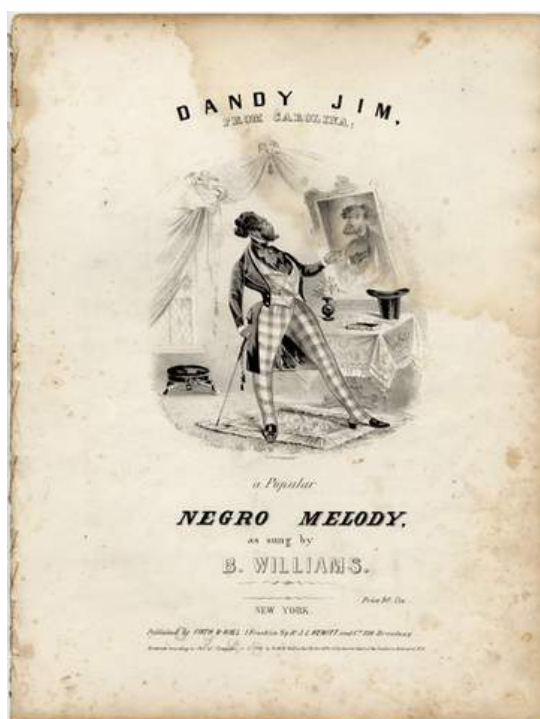
Many scholars have debated the connections between Stowe's anti-slavery novel and minstrel shows, noting that her characters, including one as minor as Sam, played off these stereotypes while simultaneously refuting or complicating them.<sup>10</sup> Though Stowe's book was second in sales only to the Christian Bible, most people who knew the story of Uncle Tom, Eliza, and the other characters learned them from the theater and not from reading Stowe's original text. In making and remaking the story for the stage, the characters became more similar to the exaggerated simplistic ones of the minstrel genre.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas F. Gossett, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985); Lott, *Love and Theft*, 212–233; Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania*; Morgan, *Uncle Tom's Cabin as Visual Culture*; Julia Thomas, "Picturing Slavery: Uncle Tom's Cabin and Its Early Illustrations," in *Pictorial Victorians: The Inscription of Values in Word and Image* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004), 21–52.

<sup>11</sup> Morgan, *Uncle Tom's Cabin as Visual Culture*.

The other character in Stowe's novel with striking similarities to the physical characteristics of a minstrel type is Adolph, who is introduced to readers as "a highly-dressed young mulatto man, a very *distingué* personage, attired in the ultra extreme of the mode, and gracefully waving a scented cambric handkerchief."<sup>12</sup> Adolph's nonchalance toward the other slaves, his pompous air toward his master, and his overattention to his dress are all characteristics of a man known as a dandy. In minstrel shows, this character appeared often as a foil to the lowly and ragged state of Jim Crow and was alternately known as Zip Coon or Dandy Jim.



1.4 Unknown artist. *Dandy Jim from Carolina*. c. 1843. Ink on paper. Rubenstein Library and University Archives, Duke University, Music A-7418.

Upper- and middle-class white men were often accused of dandyism if they seemed to be overly concerned with fashion and appearance and were sometimes characterized as effeminate because of these interests. The minstrel dandy, by adding the black skin color of its characters, only heightened the ridiculousness to

<sup>12</sup> Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 254.

American audiences of a man dressed in frippery and finery prancing about and believing himself the envy of all others.<sup>13</sup> In the first few moments readers encounter Adolph, he is decked out in a “satin vest, gold guard-chain, and white pants,” and he examines the newcomer, Uncle Tom, “through an opera-glass, with an air that would have done credit to any dandy living.”<sup>14</sup> Adolph’s unhealthy love of fine clothing and his manner toward the other slaves are blamed upon the overindulgence of his master, a man also characterized as weak and vain. Upon finding that Adolph is wearing one of his silk vests, the master merely chides him for it with an amused tone and “restrict[s] him to one dozen of my cambric handkerchiefs.”<sup>15</sup> Black dandies such as Adolph, Dandy Jim, and Zip Coon were characterized in popular American culture then as imitating the worst kind of white men.<sup>16</sup>

Minstrel shows and popular literature were not the only places Americans encountered representations of supposedly authentic slaves. In the 1840s and 1850s, the genre painting became popular among both the general public and artist’s circles. Paintings depicting scenes of everyday life, particularly those that were thought to be uniquely American, became widely exhibited and highly collectible.<sup>17</sup> One of the most successful of these genre painters was Eastman Johnson, whose reputation was solidified with his 1859 piece *Negro Life at the*

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<sup>13</sup> For a deeper history of dandyism and black men, particularly in the postbellum period and the twentieth century see Monica L. Miller, *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, 255 and 256.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.

<sup>16</sup> Miller, *Slaves to Fashion*, 112; Richard J. Powell, *Cutting a Figure: Fashioning Black Portraiture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 63 and 71; Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 180.

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Johns, *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); H. Barbara Weinberg and Carrie Rebora Barrett, *American Stories: Paintings of Everyday Life: 1765–1915* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

*South*. Like Stowe's characters and the minstrel shows, Johnson's painting was a familiar and very popular dramatic portrayal of slavery.



1.5 Eastman Johnson. *Negro Life at the South*. 1859. Oil on linen. The New-York Historical Society, The Robert L. Stuart Collection, S-225.

His diverse tableau, presenting African Americans of all ages engaged in leisure activities in front of a dilapidated outbuilding, was hailed as the most natural presentation of black life yet to be created. At the time of its debut, both pro-slavery and anti-slavery proponents used the painting to argue their views on racial difference and the slave system. Critics and patrons differed in their interpretations of these slaves as happy-go-lucky and indifferent to their poor condition, or as human beings struggling against oppression and poverty to find enjoyment in music, dancing, and family.

Genre paintings like *Negro Life at the South* were meant to be authentic portrayals that captured images of lowly people and how they lived. People took Johnson's scene as a true moment, though he had imagined it. Unpacking the truthfulness of Johnson's painting as observed from life is more complicated. Unlike many other artists who drew slaves for newspapers, cartoons, and illustrated magazines, Johnson had lived around enslaved Americans. Though born and bred in New England, he spent some time in Washington, D.C., where he apparently painted the backdrop scenery of *Negro Life at the South* from observation—the run-down building was the barely standing slave quarters behind his own father's house.<sup>18</sup> The figures of his painting were creations he added in 1858 and 1859 while living in New York. It is unknown if he painted any of the people from models or observation, or if he recalled plausible activities and individual bodies from memory.<sup>19</sup> A hint into his sources comes from the dress worn by the young white woman at the far right of the scene who is invading the space of the back lot. Her evening dress is remarkably similar to, and likely copied from, the fashion plate from *Godey's Lady's Book* pictured below, showing that Johnson himself found other popular visuals as resources for his own interpretations.

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<sup>18</sup> Teresa A. Carbone and Patricia Hill, *Eastman Johnson: Painting America* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1999); see especially the first three chapters.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 126–131.



1.6 Steel fashion plate from *Godey's Lady's Book*. October 1855. Image courtesy of Unlimited Priorities/Accessible Archives.

Johnson also used familiar tropes already popular in American culture, including the old banjo player in the center and the dancing child in front of him. A light-skinned young woman flirts with a man in the far left corner, evoking thoughts of fancy girls sold as sex slaves in the New Orleans and Charelston markets. And a figure reminiscent of a mammy character peers out of the window of the second floor. Yet there is something more to Johnson's figures. They are both familiar characters and unique individuals. The banjo player is not grinning from ear to ear as in many portrayals of African American musicians; instead, he looks rather pensive. The young woman is certainly flirting, but by glancing demurely at a young man about her own age who returns her attentions, she brings to mind scenes of young love and marriage rather than licentiousness. And the older women in the painting, both the one at the upper window and the one in the lower center, have highly unique facial features and express a motherly care toward their children.

One important way Johnson gives his figures a sense of individualism is through their clothing. Different styles, colors, and patterns abound throughout the

scene. While some of these color choices were likely conscious efforts by the artist to move the eye across the painting, it is interesting that the people in the painting are clothed in unique ensembles that help to set them apart from the others in the picture. Another important feature of Johnson's choice of clothing for his figures is the relatively good condition of the garments. Unlike minstrel characters, who were either decked out in rags or in exaggerated high style, Johnson's characters are dressed in clothing of the antebellum working classes, functional but not monotone.

Coming just two years before the outbreak of the Civil War, Johnson's painting entered an American culture familiar with race and slavery. This painting catapulted him into the position of the best genre painter of authentic American life. Though his personal views on slavery remain unknown, art scholars have pointed to his working relationships with several anti-slavery and abolitionist persons. In 1853, while living and training in Europe, Johnson had also exhibited a painting, now lost, called *Uncle Tom and Evangeline*, depicting two of the characters from Stowe's international bestseller. While it seems Johnson leaned toward the anti-slavery crowd, he was also a businessman. He needed to make money by exhibiting and selling his paintings, something that also motivated his choice of subjects and how he portrayed them.<sup>20</sup>

Ultimately, *Negro Life at the South* both reinforced and refuted popular notions of slaves among northerners. As with Stowe's novel, Johnson's painting became used, reused, and redefined by a variety of people to advance their own agendas. By 1867 the painting was being exhibited as *Old Kentucky Home*, evoking Stephen Foster's popular song and an early expression of romanticizing

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<sup>20</sup> Carbone and Hill, *Eastman Johnson*, see especially chapter 3.

reconciliation after the Civil War. By that time Johnson himself had moved on to painting other subjects.<sup>21</sup>

Of course, none of these depictions by white northerners who knew little or nothing about the real experiences of enslaved Americans went without notice by the African American community. The dissemination of popular literature and theater throughout the country also meant that southern blacks, free and enslaved, encountered these supposedly authentic portrayals of themselves.<sup>22</sup> From the beginning, black people attempted through a variety of means to offer a counternarrative to these racist, one-dimensional depictions.

A growing body of literature regarding the usefulness of photography for antebellum African American people points to early efforts by African Americans to present real or authentic selves in visual sources.<sup>23</sup> Frederick Douglass had his portrait taken several times throughout his life in an attempt to give a face and a name to the story of slavery, freedom, and the black experience, as well as to counter the other visual culture that circulated around the country in the mid-1800s. In the photograph below, taken between 1847 and 1852, Douglass exhibits all the visual cues of a successful, middle-class American man in his dress, posture, and attitude. But unlike most daguerreotype subjects of this period whose faces were

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>22</sup> For more on race and art see David Bindman, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*. 4 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010, 2011, 2012); Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990); Guy C. McElroy and Christopher C. French, *Facing History: The Black Image in American Art, 1710–1940* (San Francisco: Bedford Arts, 1990); Powell, *Cutting a Figure*; Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, *Portraits of a People: Picturing African Americans in the Nineteenth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith, eds., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Deborah Willis and Barbara Krauthamer, eds., *Envisioning Emancipation: Black Americans and the End of Slavery* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012).

blank and eyes rather dull, Douglass focuses a piercing, intense gaze at the lens, providing a deep level of humanity and individuality to this image.



1.7 Samuel J. Miller. *Frederick Douglass*. 1847–1852. Cased half-plate daguerreotype. The Art Institute of Chicago, Major Acquisitions Centennial Endowment, 1996.433.

Douglass recognized the power of photography, a new format for visual representation in the antebellum period, and used it to great effect.<sup>24</sup> But he also published work on his own life and as editor of the anti-slavery newspaper the *North Star*. And he used his own body as a place to display African Americanness through his many public speaking appearances throughout the United States and in Europe. By invading the spaces of popular visual and literary culture, Douglass sought to present a truly authentic portrayal of black life in America not through representation, but through lived experience.

<sup>24</sup> For more on Douglass and photography see Laura Wexler, “‘A More Perfect Likeness’: Frederick Douglass and the Image of the Nation” and Ginger Hill, “‘Rightly Viewed’: Theorizations of Self in Frederick Douglass’s Lectures on Pictures” in Wallace and Smith, eds., *Pictures and Progress*, 18–40 and 41–82.

Sojourner Truth, a woman with a background similar to Douglass's, used many of the same techniques he did. Truth had her photograph taken wearing a simple but stylish dress, a nice shawl, and a tightly wrapped head scarf, and she posed with her knitting, a book, and a vase of flowers, clothing and accessories indicative of middle-class womanhood.



1.8 Unknown photographer. *Sojourner Truth*. c. 1864. Albumen silver print. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, NPG.79.209.

Like Douglass, she evokes the visual cues of American culture to assert herself as someone who belongs to that society while maintaining her individuality.<sup>25</sup> Truth also traveled throughout the country speaking about her experiences as a slave and arguing for abolition and women's rights. In one public appearance, she opened her bodice to reveal her bare breast when her sexuality was challenged, shocking the mostly male audience by this open assertion of her body as female. She literally used her body to convey an authentic self by asking her audience to be part of the

<sup>25</sup> For more on Truth's use of photography see chapter 20, "Truth in Photographs" in Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 185–199.

lived experience of witnessing her body. Demanding that they recognize her as female, she also claimed the right to be considered as a woman and a mother.<sup>26</sup> In removing her dress, she disgarded the cloth of respectability in order to claim that very thing.

African Americans also used literature to assert control over perceptions of their authentic experiences. Both Douglass and Truth published their own stories, forming part of a uniquely American genre of literature known as slave narratives. Solomon Northup's 1853 autobiography *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853* was another of these stories that was wildly successful in the wake of Stowe's fictionalized South in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Northup's story and his commentary are quite insightful because of his outsider status as a free northern black man from New York plunged into the world of southern slavery in Louisiana. Northup uses clothing throughout his narrative to paint a picture of the character of people he encounters, the first being that of one of his kidnappers, who was "dressed in a snuff-colored coat, with glossy hat, and vest of elegant pattern. His whole apparel was in the extreme of fashion. His appearance was somewhat effeminate, but prepossessing and there was about him an easy air, that showed he had mingled with the world."<sup>27</sup> Northup's description characterizes the kidnapper as a dandy and a confidence man, someone Northup should not have trusted.

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<sup>26</sup> Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 138–142. See also Alison Piepmeier, "Chapter 3: As Strong as Any Man: Sojourner Truth's Tall-Tale Embodiment," in *Out in Public: Configurations of Women's Bodies in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 92–128.

<sup>27</sup> Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853* (Auburn, New York: Derby and Miller, 1853), 29.

Upon Northup's arrival for sale in the New Orleans market, he remarks upon the event of all of the slaves being "furnished with a new suit each, cheap, but clean. The men had hat, coat, shirt, pants and shoes; the women frocks of calico, and handkerchiefs to bind about their heads."<sup>28</sup> This clothing was meant to attract buyers by presenting the slaves as products dressed in the same uniform clothing, distinguishable only upon close inspection of individual bodies.<sup>29</sup> Northup had been visually transformed from a free man into a slave. What is further compelling about this moment in the story, which is mentioned by Northup in passing as he describes his overall experience of the New Orleans slave market, is that it serves as the frontispiece to his published narrative.



1.9 "Solomon in His Plantation Suit" in *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853*. Auburn, New York: Derby and Miller, 1853. Image courtesy of the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>29</sup> For more on slaves' clothing during sales in markets in New Orleans and Richmond, respectively, see Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999) and Maurie D. McNinnis, *Slaves Waiting for Sale: Abolitionist Art and the American Slave Trade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

The drawing presents an image of Northup not as a man, but as a character dressed in the poor clothing of a slave. Yet throughout his narrative, Northup's words continually assert that his experiences and emotional reactions were those of a man whose intimate knowledge of freedom made him more aware and in some ways better able to expose the reality of American slavery than a person born enslaved. Northup in his plantation suit is a visual presentation not of his authentic self, but that of the lie he was forced to commit when enslaved. Unlike Douglass and Truth, Northup was represented in his narrative as a character dressed in the garb of pro-slavery fantasy, not as a free person with the dress of respectability upon his body.<sup>30</sup> It is not known who made the decision of the ordering of the illustrations in Northup's narrative, though it was likely the publisher and not Northup himself. The only image of Northup that shows his true identity as a free man is the final one, in which he is reunited with his wife and daughters, all of them dressed in fashionable middle-class clothing and embracing in a parlor.

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<sup>30</sup> A photograph of Northup is not known to survive if he did have one taken. He may have chosen not to, having suffered smallpox during his time in New Orleans, which left scars on his face. Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 82–84.



1.10 "Arrival Home, and First Meeting with His Wife and Children" in *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853*. Auburn, New York: Derby and Miller, 1853. Image courtesy of the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

But Northup's wife has knocked his hat to the floor in the passion of her embrace, and his stylish coat and trousers cannot completely obscure the powerful muscles of a laboring man.

Relying upon visual and literary culture as a testament to true representations of slave life, including their experiences with clothing, requires careful scrutiny. Whether the creator of a source from popular culture was a radical abolitionist or a theater owner selling a minstrel show greatly impacted how that person represented and understood enslaved people. And even sources created by those who experienced enslavement must be read with the knowledge that they recorded their stories and circulated their portraits with the agenda of exposing the horrificity of American slavery through their individual experiences.<sup>31</sup> The battle over

<sup>31</sup> Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, eds., *The Slave's Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 9–11; McInnis, *Slaves Waiting for Sale*, 9; C. Vann Woodward, "History from Slave Sources: A Review Article," *American Historical Review* 79 (April 1974): 470–81.

representing the authentic slave experience continued in the early years of freedom after the Civil War. Recognizing that some of the Lost Cause misperceptions were circulated and popularized at the height of slavery in the Cotton South is a first step in breaking down stereotypes, exaggerations, and blatant lies about life during slavery. Depictions of enslaved people as either dressed in rags and not caring a fig about their appearance, or dressed to the nines and caring too much about fashion were products of antebellum visual and literary culture that served to exclude all African Americans from the fashion system. Tearing apart and complicating the real relationship enslaved people had with the clothing they wore demystifies one aspect of life during slavery.

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## Chapter Two

### Negro Cloth: Fabricating Textiles for the Slave Market

“I have a vivid recollection of the linsey-woolsey dress given me every winter by Mrs. Flint. How I hated it! It was one of the badges of slavery.”<sup>1</sup> Harriet Jacobs wrote this line in her autobiography describing her life as an enslaved woman in the antebellum South. Jacobs’s labeling of her dress as a badge, a marker or indicator of belonging, is often pointed out as a description of slave clothing by historians of slavery or of the South. That Jacobs was a seamstress is cited as giving her the authority to sum up the experiences all enslaved people had with their clothing. It is telling that Jacobs remembered her clothing as one of the distinctive markers of slave life.

Much has been made of a fabric termed *Negro cloth* that was advertised by textile factories for sale specifically to clothe slaves. The characteristics of Negro cloth as plain woven, coarse, and undyed or brown in color contribute to a visual landscape of undefined slave bodies working without individuality in the fields. In fact, slaves in the antebellum South wore a variety of clothing styles made out of several different materials. Most summer clothing was made from cheap cotton, while winter clothing was usually made from wool. Other materials included linen, hemp, and various mixtures of fibers. All of these materials were referred to with terminology that was both global and colloquial, making it difficult to determine exactly what fabric is being described in the written sources. This variety of materials looked different, felt different, and had different functions such as warmth, coolness,

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<sup>1</sup> Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 11.

and durability. Most of these fabrics, with the definite exceptions of sacking and bagging, were also worn as clothing by white laborers. When antebellum Americans encountered a stranger wearing cheap fabrics, skin color became the ultimate determinant of observing that person as enslaved or free. This chapter provides definitions to some of the most commonly used fabrics for slave clothing, and ties the creation and dissemination of Negro cloth as an international product to its function at the forefront of the process of excluding enslaved people from American culture through unfashionable textiles.

People interviewed in the WPA narratives most often used the term *osnaburg* to describe their summer clothing. This word also appears in advertisements of dry goods merchants, runaway advertisements, and plantation account books. Spellings vary from *ausenbric* to the more similar *oznaberg*. Like most other textile terms of nineteenth-century America, particularly those for utilitarian fabrics, osnaburg had a long history. The fabric originated in a town called Osnabrück, Germany, in the early eighteenth century as a durable, cheap linen suitable for work clothing.<sup>2</sup> Osnabrück is approximately 150 miles east of the major trading city of Amsterdam, making it easy to understand how a fabric originally made for local consumption quickly circulated around the eighteenth-century world on the ships of Dutch traders. Over time, the term came to refer to many plain woven, heavyweight tow or linen fabrics manufactured in Europe and the United States. By the 1830s, the term *osnaburg* was also used to describe similarly plain woven, heavyweight fabrics made of linen

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<sup>2</sup> All definitions and histories for textile terms come from Florence M. Montgomery, *Textiles in America, 1650-1870* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007) and Phyllis G. Tortora and Robert S. Merkel, *Fairchild's Dictionary of Textiles* (7th edition; New York: Fairchild Publications, 2007) unless otherwise noted.

and cotton blends or of all cotton. In the colloquial usage of antebellum southerners, osnaburg could be a cloth made in a factory, or one of home manufacture like the yardage pictured below.



2.1 Unknown enslaved maker(s). *Osnaburg*. 1861–1865. Cotton and wool. The Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia, 0985.10.85.



2.2 Detail of 2.1.

Osnaburg was among the cheapest fabrics available and was sometimes also used as sacking or bagging. For an example of cost comparison, in 1833 a customer purchased 294 yards of osnaburg at a total of \$32.34, or roughly \$0.09 cents per

yard. In the same transaction he also bought 6 1/2 yards of Paris muslin for a total of \$6.50, or \$1.00 per yard.<sup>3</sup> It cost him \$.60 to clothe one enslaved woman in an osnaburg dress, or less than one-tenth the cost of a fine dress for a white woman. This vast difference in cost demonstrates the wide range of fabrics available to the nineteenth-century consumer.

Fabrics like osnaburg were made to be worn to rags and then replaced, but they were often extremely durable and could last for months or even years with proper care. Slaves usually received one or two complete outfits per year, making the durability of the cloth an important characteristic. Annie Osborne said her master took advantage of this quality, stating he “made us wear our old lowell clothes till they most fell off us.”<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, the coarseness that made the fabric so durable was also very uncomfortable. Annie Hawkins noted: “Our dresses was made out of coarse cloth like cotton sacking and it sho’ lasted a long time. It ort to be called mule-hide for it was about that tough.”<sup>5</sup>

Osbourne and Hawkins used different terms to describe their clothing. Osbourne referred to her clothing as being made from *lowells*. This word originally referred to cloth made at the Lowell factory in Massachusetts, described by Adline

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<sup>3</sup> Bill for A. North Jr. from David Hopkins, May 2, 1833, Hopkins Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society. French muslin purchased in 1833 was a thin, almost gauze, fabric of high-quality cotton from India that was bleached white and sometimes printed or embroidered with small floral decorations. Six or seven yards would be enough to make a woman’s gown. Likely, this purchaser bought the muslin as a gift for a wife or daughter when he placed his seasonal order of clothing for the plantation slaves. For another example of a detailed price list of different items for clothing, including several fabrics, buttons, needles, thread, etc. see the entry titled “Plantation Expenses” in the Weehaw Plantation Journal, 1855–1861, Henry A. Middleton Jr. Papers, South Carolina Historical Society.

<sup>4</sup> George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* (1941, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Company, reprint ed., 1972), S2-8: 2991.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.1: 132.

Marshall as “de same kind of stuff what dey made de picking sacks of.”<sup>6</sup> Picking sacks were large bags used to hold cotton bolls as they were gathered from the plants and hence were of an extremely coarse and durable fabric. Slaves also described lowells as being homemade, using a term likely designated by northern factory owners to market their goods to describe a locally made fabric of similar character.<sup>7</sup>

The nature of textile terms as ever-changing makes it difficult to distinguish any differences in written sources between fabrics actually made in Lowell versus that made locally and referred to with the same word. Osnaburgs, sacking, and lowells shared either weave structure, fibers, coloring and patterning, a mixture of these, or all of them. Further complicating the definitions and relationships of textile terminology are localized terms such as *nits and lice*. Clara Walker described this as a “kind of corse cloth de used for clothes like overalls. It was sort of speckeldy all over—dat’s why dey called it nits and lice.”<sup>8</sup> The term does not appear in any other written sources and was probably a phrase used only in the immediate area where she lived.

It is likely that osnaburg, lowells, and nits and lice, along with other similar fabrics including cassinet, royals, crocus, ducking, drilling, and jean, shared many characteristics and were sometimes used interchangeably.<sup>9</sup> Textile production during the first half of the nineteenth century was still coalescing in the northern

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., S2-7: 2578.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., S1-6.1: 249.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 11.7: 22.

<sup>9</sup> For more specific definitions of these terms see the Glossary of Textile and Clothing Terms in the appendix.

United States and in Europe.<sup>10</sup> A system of production and consumption of these new factory goods was being redefined in the antebellum period, which partly accounts for the confusion of terminology—old and new. Increased cotton usage in this period meant some fabrics that were previously of linen or wool now contained cotton, but the names were not changed. Further complicating matters, the same words were used for different goods in other places. For example, in the United States, calico refers to a plain woven cotton with a colorful print, but in England calico is a plain woven cotton without any design or added coloring. Each of these fabrics had instigated its own naming at one point, and likely some of these terms retained distinguishing qualities. For example, drilling and jean were both twill woven linen, cotton, or mixed fabrics. Drilling was a heavy-weight fabric, while jean was thick and tightly woven, but of a lighter weight than drilling. Jean was also a kind of fustian, which meant that the fibers of the cloth were fulled or napped after weaving. Napping involves agitating the woven fibers with wire picks to create a slightly raised, fuzzy surface that obscures the visibility of the weave of the fabric and makes the finished fabric warmer and more water resistant. Drilling did not go through a fulling or napping process, leaving the weave structure cleanly visible to the eye.

Linsey-woolsey, a mid-weight fabric, has a similar history to osnaburg. It originated in a village in Suffolk, England, called Linsey and was made of linen and wool and usually very coarse. The term *linsey-woolsey* appeared quite often in colonial records as being made locally by the colonists for work clothing.<sup>11</sup> As cotton

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<sup>10</sup> Barbara M. Tucker, *Industrializing Antebellum America: The Rise of Manufacturing Entrepreneurs in the Early Republic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> The term homespun, prevalent during the American Revolution, probably refers to locally made linsey-woolsey.

replaced both wool and linen in the early nineteenth century, the term *linsey-woolsey* came to define a fabric that was still quite utilitarian, usually plain woven, but of wool and cotton.

The term *cassinet* referred to fabrics of different qualities in England and America. To southerners in the United States, cassinet made in the North was a lightweight twill woven fabric of cotton, sometimes cotton mixed with wool. In England, *cassinet* referred to fabric that was also cotton but sometimes mixed with very fine quality wool or a blend of wool and silk. It was a higher quality fabric than the cassinet made in the United States and likely served a middling class of people in England rather than lower classes as it did in the United States. The word *cassinet* actually comes from combining terms for two other types of cloth—cassimere and satinet. Cassimere was usually a twill woven wool fabric, while satinet was a satin woven fabric usually made of cotton and wool mixed. Cassinet took the weave structure of cassimere and the fiber content of satinet to make a fabric extremely suitable for clothing people who performed extensive heavy labor in a hot climate.

Despite the growing prevalence of cotton in the South as both crop and cloth, wool and wool blends were still very common throughout the antebellum and war years. Wool is most known today for its warmth, but other qualities, particularly its cost, durability, and water repellence, made it an attractive choice for a variety of textile uses in the antebellum United States. Jenny Proctor noted the practicality of wool clothing in winter, recalling that she “had red flannel for winter under clothes,”

and that the mistress believed a slave who fell ill “cost more den de flannel.”<sup>12</sup> Again, there are a great variety of terms in the records including *plains*, *kersey*, *woolens*, and *cloth*. The last of these, *cloth*, seems quite vague. It is usually used to describe the jacket or coat of a male slave in runaway advertisements, such as those for Bill Brown, who wore a “drab cloth sack coat,” William B. Hopkins, who wore a “grey cloth frock coat,” and Ross Thomas, who had on a “green cloth frock coat.”<sup>13</sup>

Outerwear garments for all classes of men and women in the antebellum period were often made from heavily fulled wools, so in this case the term *cloth* refers to a wool fabric that was fulled until it appeared like felt.<sup>14</sup> Kersey was a type of fulled wool and likely used interchangeably with the term *cloth* in describing outerwear. *Woolens*, like *cloth*, seems an imprecise term, but it refers to the processing of wool from fiber into cloth. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, almost all wool fabrics could be split into two groups: woolen and worsted. Worsted wools were made from fibers long in length that were further strengthened and lengthened by a process called combing before being spun. Worsted was generally of a fine quality and had a lustrous appearance because of the long fibers. Woolen fabrics could be of fine quality, but most low quality wool fabrics were woolens. These fabrics were made from short wool fibers that were carded, or separated and cleaned, but were not combed, so did not have the additional lengthening of worsted fibers. They were almost always fulled after weaving to create a dense fabric. Kersey was a middling or lower quality type of woolen. The term *woolen* was often used with *plains* when

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<sup>12</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 5.3: 211.

<sup>13</sup> Advertisement, *Baltimore Sun*, March 16, 1863; Advertisement, *Easton Gazette*, February 15, 1840; Advertisement, *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, January 1, 1830.

<sup>14</sup> While napping and fulling are quite similar, fulling wool also involves heating and pressing the fabric.

describing slave clothing, as in *woolen plains*. Plain cloth was simply a fabric with a plain weave structure.

The term used in descriptions of slave clothing that remains most unclear in definition is *Negro cloth*. The Oxford English Dictionary gives a definition under the heading for the word *Negro*: “designating hard-wearing, durable clothes and fabrics, originally intended or designed to be worn or used by slaves, as *Negro cloth*, *Negro cotton*, *Negro shirting*.”<sup>15</sup> In her seminal work *Textiles in America, 1650-1870*, Florence Montgomery defined Negro cloth as “A coarse homespun fabric used for clothing slaves in the West Indies and the southern colonies. Inexpensive grades of cloth were also imported for the same purpose.”<sup>16</sup> Under the entry for cassinets she stated “cassinets were frequently called Negro cloths.”<sup>17</sup> *Fairchild’s Dictionary of Textiles* gives a more detailed, but still ambiguous, definition for Negro cloth: “A coarse hemp cloth, often containing cotton, which was imported from England by the American colonies during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Used to make clothes for African slaves. American mills began to make this fabric in the beginning of the nineteenth century, and coarse wool imported from Smyrna (Izmir), Turkey, sometimes was used for filling.”<sup>18</sup> The common difficulty with all of these definitions is their lack of sources. It is unclear where the dictionary authors found their information and where and when the term originated. Particularly intriguing is the very specific reference to Turkish wool imported to American mills in the third definition. These existing definitions of Negro cloth treat the bodies of enslaved

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<sup>15</sup> Oxford English Dictionary Online. [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com). Accessed March 16, 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Montgomery, *Textiles in America*, 309.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>18</sup> Tortora and Merkel, *Fairchild’s Dictionary of Textiles*, 382–383.

people as objects rather than actors, erasing the complex relationship between race-based slavery and the Industrial Revolution. The antebellum economy was strongly associated with, indeed often dependent upon, slavery through the creation of products that were raced.

The term *Negro cloth* seems to apply to a variety of fabrics that could be mixtures of cotton with wool, cotton with bast fibers, or all cotton. Weave structure is not specified, though likely the cloth was a plain or twill as these were durable weave structures common in other types of work clothing, including other textile terms used to describe slave clothing. What is clear from all of these definitions is that Negro cloth was an extremely low grade of fabric, and it was meant to be used as clothing for enslaved bodies only. Negro cloth was a consumer good, created specifically for the race-based slave system that developed in the American colonies. The term itself helped contribute to efforts by the ruling powers to define slaves as raced and to define all people of African descent as slaves.

This specific use of a product demonstrates the close connection between the economy and culture. Slaveholders and others who supported the slave labor system in the antebellum South attempted to visually differentiate enslaved people from free people through the purchase and distribution of Negro cloth for slaves. Harriet Jacobs's recognition of her clothing as a *badge* demonstrates enslaved people were well aware of efforts to define and restrict their bodies through visual displays. Their attempts to individualize their clothing or to obtain higher quality goods were more than vanity; these were people resisting a product that marked them as enslaved. The word *Negro* in the name of the fabric further solidifies its

position as a product designed to reinforce race-based slavery by equating the textile with black skin.

Negro cloth appears most often in the written record in advertisements of textile manufacturers or dry goods merchants, indicating the term was used as a sort of marketing strategy to attract slaveholding buyers to the company's products. Benjamin Whitney advertised his Whitney's Cotton Factory in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, noting "he is producing a fabric under the style and denomination of WHITNEY'S NEGRO COTTONS."<sup>19</sup> In the *Macon Weekly Telegraph* an advertisement alerted buyers to the "manufacturing near Augusta" of "first rate Negro Cloths, styled GEORGIA PLAINS, made of strong well twisted cotton warp and pure Wool filling."<sup>20</sup> The advertisement also stated that the same factory made "handsome Striped Osnaburgs," marking osnaburg as somehow different from Negro cloth.<sup>21</sup> The term rarely appears in the business or personal writings of antebellum slaveholders, runaway advertisements, or the records of the formerly enslaved. All of these sources are more likely to describe slave clothing according to the fibers used to make the cloth, or using other textile terminology explained earlier in this chapter.

The general absence of the term *Negro cloth* in colloquial speech in the antebellum period, notwithstanding its prevalence in the capitalist textile economy, suggests that it was a term used to both attract consumers who needed a very low

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<sup>19</sup> Advertisement, *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, April 3, 1839.

<sup>20</sup> Advertisement, *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, September 8, 1846.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. The wording of the advertisement is a bit unclear as it begins with the phrase of "Negro cloths," implying that more than one kind of Negro cloth was being manufactured. It may be that the factory considered osnaburg to be one of many types of Negro cloths, distinguishing it in their product line as striped, while their Georgia plains were likely solid colors. Without extant cloth samples it is impossible to say with complete certainty.

quality, cheap product for their enslaved property, and to mark that same product as undesirable for use to clothe free, white bodies. The process of racing a product such as Negro cloth slowly solidified over time. In the early years of colonial settlement, planters did use it themselves when describing the clothing of runaways in newspaper advertisements.<sup>22</sup> By the antebellum period, it was likely that both advertisers and readers of runaway advertisements assumed that slaves were wearing Negro cloth because it had been so long associated with black, enslaved bodies by that time. Negro cloth is one example of how the capitalist world economy assisted in solidifying and encouraging racism and race-based slavery by creating and marketing products meant to be used exclusively by enslaved black people.

Of course the cheap price of Negro cloth was also an attractive incentive for economizing slaveholders, particularly those who needed to clothe dozens or even hundreds of enslaved laborers. What remains unclear is how Negro cloth differed from other kinds of low-grade textiles meant for use as work clothing. If anything distinguished Negro cloth from other types of apparel fabrics of the time, it was its extremely low grade. The many references former slaves made to the quality of their clothing being similar to bagging or sacking indicates that their clothing was no better than or even the very same as these utilitarian fabrics. Sarah Laws Hill testified that the slaves on the plantation where she lived “were given discarded gunny sacks” as their only clothing.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Linda K. Baumgarten, “Plains, Plaid, and Cotton: Woolens for Slave Clothing,” *Ars Textrina* 15 (1991): 203–222; Linda K. Baumgarten, “‘Clothes for the People’: Slave Clothing in Early Virginia,” *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts* 14 (November 1988): 26–70. My thanks as well to Andrew Johnson for sharing his findings on eighteenth-century runaway advertisements in South Carolina newspapers.

<sup>23</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S2-11.6: 402.

Slaveholders conceptualized their slaves as merely property, often treated with the same bodily and emotional care as any other good that could be bought and sold. By housing the bodies of the enslaved in cloth with the same characteristics as sacks or bags used to contain inanimate products, slaveholders attempted to reinforce definitions of slaves as less than human.<sup>24</sup> This connection to sacking also suggested that white people of any class were above wearing Negro cloth as it was a type of fabric meant to be used as clothing only if that clothed body were black or enslaved. The rapid expansion of industrialization created great anxiety in American culture, so people sought to create order where they could. Merchants and other marketers of goods took advantage of peoples' fears of chaos created by the new economic system by enticing them to purchase items like Negro cloth that played on and solidified preexisting cultural norms such as racism.

Negro cloth was closely connected to the textile trade between the South and manufacturers in England and the United States.<sup>25</sup> The mechanization of spinning and weaving marked a profound and important shift in the U.S. North, which became increasingly urbanized and market-oriented in part due to the solidification and expansion of the textile industry in the mid-nineteenth century. Most of these factories made cheap household and apparel fabrics, including those used by southern slaveholders to clothe their slaves. Some manufacturers began expanding into the ready-made apparel industry, paying female workers by the piece to sew

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<sup>24</sup> Kathleen M. Brown, *Foul Bodies: Cleanliness in Early America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), chapter 12; Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, chapter 3; Joan Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress, and Modern Social Theory* (Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2000); Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013), 207.

<sup>25</sup> T. H. Breen, "Baubles of Britain" *Past and Present* 119 (1988): 73–102; T. H. Breen, "An Empire of Goods" *Journal of British Studies* 25 (October 1986); T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 12, 480n15.

garments made from the fabrics manufactured in their mills, which were then sold as finished products.<sup>26</sup> Paradoxically, while the South depended more on British manufacturers to buy their raw cotton than on northern U.S. factories, the U.S. factories made most of their finished goods specifically for the southern market, so they were more dependent on the South than the South was on the North.<sup>27</sup>

The burgeoning ready-made industry in New England and the Mid-Atlantic found one of its best markets in southern slaveholders. In an 1848 account with a Philadelphia merchant, planter John Devereux purchased “66 large size negro Blankets” for one dollar apiece.<sup>28</sup> Another planter from South Carolina listed coats ordered by size, including two frock coats, in his plantation journal.<sup>29</sup> These slaveholders reasoned that the higher cost of finished goods was worth spending

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<sup>26</sup> Tucker, *Industrializing Antebellum America*. The establishment and development of the textile industry in the United States in the late colonial and early national periods is a fascinating yet incredibly understudied topic. The most useful surveys date back several decades, including Thomas H. O'Connor, *Lords of the Loom: The Cotton Whigs and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968); Rolla Milton Tryon, *Household Manufactures in the United States, 1640–1860: A Study in Industrial History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1917); Caroline Ware, *The Early New England Cotton Manufacture: A Study in Industrial Beginnings* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966); and Harold Woodman, *King Cotton and His Retainers: Financing and Marketing the Cotton Crop of the South, 1800–1925* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968). One notable exception is Tucker, *Industrializing Antebellum America*. Economic historians have also returned to this topic in more recent years, including Sven Beckert, “Emancipation and Empire: Reconstructing the Worldwide Web of Cotton Production in the Age of the American Civil War,” *American Historical Review* 109 (December, 2004): 1405–1438; Joseph E. Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England: A Study in International Trade and Economic Development* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Giorgio Riello, *Cotton: The Fabric That Made the Modern World* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2013). However, these works take a global focus that often neglects the U.S. textile industry in the nineteenth century for the dominant manufacturing powerhouses in Britain. Theodore Steinberg provides an environmental history of the impact of industrialization on waterways and water usage, including the textile mills in New England; see Steinberg, *Nature Incorporated: Industrialization and the Waters of New England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991). For a good case study of one manufactory in Rhode Island see Susan Oba, “‘Mostly Made, Especially for This Purpose, in Providence, R.I.’: The Rhode Island Negro Cloth Industry,” Bachelor's Thesis, Brown University, 2006.

<sup>27</sup> Walter Johnson notes that 15 percent of southern cotton was sold to northern factories; the remaining 85 percent went to Liverpool, England. Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 257.

<sup>28</sup> John Devereux in account with M. Furrall, September 4, 1848, Devereux Family Papers, Duke University Special Collections.

<sup>29</sup> Blanket List for 1853, Slave Blanket Book 1853-1860, South Carolina Historical Society.

because it saved them the extra labor of slaves who would have otherwise made these items.

While most cotton manufacturing took place outside the South, there were a significant number of textile mills in the southern states before the Civil War. In supporting a southern mill, buyers could make a political statement. When George Schley advertised his “Negro Cloths, styled as GEORGIA PLAINS,” he made sure to point out that they would “last longer than any Goods made North” and that his were “wider, heavier and made of better materials than the Northern goods, and can be afforded as low to the Planter,” making it doubly clear that his product was both superior in quality and more affordable than similar northern goods.<sup>30</sup> By 1850 the state of Georgia alone had over two dozen cotton mills.<sup>31</sup> These mills marketed to the needs of the immediate surrounding area, producing primarily rough cloth for other kinds of household use as well as the Negro cloth for clothing slaves.<sup>32</sup> They

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<sup>30</sup> Advertisement, *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, September 8, 1846.

<sup>31</sup> For work on the early southern textile industry see Tom Downey, *Planting a Capitalist South: Masters, Merchants, and Manufacturers in the Southern Interior, 1790–1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009); Michele Gillespie, “Building Networks of Knowledge: Henry Merrell and Textile Manufacturing in the Antebellum South,” in *Technology, Innovation, and Southern Industrialization: From the Antebellum Era to the Computer Age*, Susanna Delfino and Michele Gillespie, eds., (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 97–124; Michele Gillespie, “To Harden a Lady’s Hand: Gender Politics Racial Realities, and Women Millworkers in Antebellum Georgia” in *Neither Lady Nor Slave: Working Women of the Old South*, ed. Susanna Delfino and Michele Gillespie (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 261–284; Bess Beatty, “I Can’t Get My Bored on Them Old Lomes: Female Textile Workers in the Antebellum South” in *Ibid.*, 249–260; John Killick, “The Cotton Operations of Alexander Brown and Sons in the Deep South,” *Journal of Southern History* 43 (May 1977): 169–194; Michael Shirley, *From Congregation Town to Industrial City: Culture and Social Change in a Southern Community* (New York: New York University Press, 1994). It should be remembered that textile production included other kinds of mechanization such as ginning factories, and in large measure the making and selling of gins. Angela Lakwete points to this aspect of antebellum southern industrialization in chapter five, “The Saw Gin Industry, 1830–1865,” of *Inventing the Cotton Gin: Machine and Myth in Antebellum America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, historians of the Piedmont and northern Georgia have noted a decline in home textile production during the 1840s and especially the 1850s. This decline coincides with the rapid rise in the number of small textile mills that sprouted up in these same regions. More research needs to be done in areas of the South that did not see concentrations of textile factories in order to determine how much correlation there is between locally available cheap textiles as replacements for homemade

were relatively small mills that sometimes only operated seasonally, shutting down or reducing output during the summer months. The Eagle Factory in Madison County, Virginia, placed an advertisement in the *Richmond Enquirer* noting that their cloth, made for use as “servants’ wear,” would “be exchanged for wool at the current market price” instead of being sold for cash.<sup>33</sup> The advertisement also warned that false agents were attempting to sell cloth that was not made from this factory and that was of inferior quality. As a final counter to any rumors that their product was a bad bargain, the advertisement included a testimonial from customer Joseph Royal, who stated, “I traded my wool with him last year—his cloth gave entire satisfaction in price, and I never had my negro clothing to last so well before.”<sup>34</sup>

Mahala Jewel remembered her master taking a train to Augusta, Georgia, to purchase cloth instead of buying from the nearer town stores: “Dere was new dresses for de gals and clothes for de boys too, and us felt mighty proud when us dressed up in dem store bought clothes f’um ‘Gusty.”<sup>35</sup> Jewel also noted that most clothing was woven on the plantation, so there was something special about the quality of the Augusta cloth that made it more valuable to the slaves. Ellen Claibourn, a house slave, said “marster uster buy us cloth from the ‘Gusta Fact’ry in checks and plaids for our dresses, but all the fiel’-hands clothes was made out of

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goods. See Lacy K. Ford Jr., *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Steven C. Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850–1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); and Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>33</sup> Advertisement, *Richmond Enquirer*, May 19, 1848.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 12.2: 317.

cloth what was wove on mistis' own loom."<sup>36</sup> The descriptions from Jewel and Claibourn suggest that while Negro cloth was not of excellent quality, it was still better than anything manufactured by hand.<sup>37</sup>

An Alabama slaveholder noted at the end of his slave clothing distribution list for 1854, "Clothing this year has been entirely of woolen goods. The men and women [made] of the Pine knot plains manufactured at the Eagle Factory in [C]olumbus Ga. that for the men cost 30 cents. women 28 cents. The children are of northern satinets, cost 25 cents."<sup>38</sup> Rather than produce finished cloth from raw goods raised on his plantation, this man purchased it from both northern and southern manufacturers in the United States for his enslaved work force.<sup>39</sup> Some lower quality clothing, as well as all high quality fabrics, was still imported from Europe during the antebellum period.

Other planters purchased tools for carding, spinning, and weaving cloth, and some plantations had loom houses.<sup>40</sup> Along with the rising number of mills in the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 12.1: 186–87. These connections of store-bought cloth, advertised as Negro cloth, as fabric of better quality than homespun counter Montgomery's definition of Negro cloth as homespun.

<sup>37</sup> The view that factory-made goods were better-quality than homemade goods is probably partially a reflection of the cultural assumptions of the Great Depression since Jewel and Claibourn were both interviewed about their experiences in slavery in the late 1930s. However, similar views are expressed in records that do date to the antebellum period, indicating that there was a shift occurring in the valuation of factory goods as more prestigious than handmade items.

<sup>38</sup> Clothing List Fall of 1854, John Horry Dent Farm Journals and Account Books, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

<sup>39</sup> For work on the ready-made industry see Downey, *Planting a Capitalist South*; Gillespie, "Building Networks of Knowledge"; Anne Hollander, *Sex and Suits* (New York: Knopf, 1994); Tyler Rudd Putman, "The Slop Shop and the Almshouse: Ready-Made Menswear in Philadelphia, 1780-1820," Master's thesis, University of Delaware Winterthur Program in Early American Material Culture, 2011; Michael Zakim, *Ready-Made Democracy: A History of Men's Dress in the American Republic, 1760-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). Seth Rockman at Brown University is currently conducting research on the industry of goods made in the North specifically for sale to and use on southern plantations, including shoes made in Massachusetts and Negro cloth manufactured in Rhode Island.

<sup>40</sup> List of tools, Edward Dromgoole Plantation Book, 1853-1865, Duke University Special Collections.

South, many people participated in the household production of textile goods.<sup>41</sup> A part of the cotton crop, as well as any flax or wool raised on the property, would be saved aside for home use. This was the case on the plantation where Rachel Hankins lived: "We raised cotton, sold part and kept enough to make our clothes out of."<sup>42</sup> Annie Young worked on land where they "raised wheat, corn, and vegetables, not much cotton, jest enough to spin de clothes out of."<sup>43</sup> Slave women who were ill or pregnant and young children were primarily responsible for the processing of raw goods to finished cloth. Included in many plantation accounts are purchases of cards, spinning wheels, needles, pins, and shears. These tools were either distributed to all the slaves to assist in production, or used by a small group of slaves to produce finished goods for all.

Rosa Washington recalled that the slaves on the plantation where she lived "got wool clothes in winter, good clothes woven on de place. Marsa had black sheep and white sheep. He bought ouah [our] summer cloes in New O'leans."<sup>44</sup> It was quite common for slaveholders to combine purchased and homemade cloth to fill out their slaves' wardrobe. To them enslaved people were property that had to be maintained at the lowest cost possible, which meant that sources for cloth were determined by the careful calculations of economizing masters.<sup>45</sup> The cloth made at home was used primarily to clothe the slaves, though some people recalled the slaveholder's family wearing it as everyday work clothes as well, including Zek Brown, who

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<sup>41</sup> The labor of slaves regarding textile and clothing production is discussed extensively in chapter 4.

<sup>42</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 9.3: 155.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.1: 359.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, S2-10.9: 3981.

<sup>45</sup> In his research of slave management literature, James O. Breeden found that as a general group, planters recommended that slaves' clothing be made on the plantation because it was cheaper than buying fabric or ready-made clothing; Breeden, ed., *Advice Among Masters: The Ideal in Slave Management in the Antebellum South* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), 140, 144.

remembered that “De Marster’s family had store clothes fo’ de nice dress but home spun fo’ everyday.”<sup>46</sup> William Paxton said that everyone on the plantation where he lived, white and black, wore clothing made of homemade fabric. To mark the slaves’ clothing as separate, it was dyed brown, “[b]ut de clothes for de white folks don’t git dyed brown.”<sup>47</sup>

Everett Ingram recalled that his family lived in a two-room house because his enslaved mother served as cook and weaver. He also noted that “Dey made dey own silk den too and raised de silk worms, cause us used ter get mulberry leaves to feed de silk worms wid.”<sup>48</sup> The bonnet and cape pictured below, both silk, were supposedly made from fabric raised, spun, woven, dyed, and sewn by enslaved women in northeastern Georgia.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., S2-2.1: 497.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., S2-8: 3027. Brown was a practical and common choice for work clothing because it did not show stains or dirt very easily.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., S1-1.1: 204.

<sup>49</sup> Object file, Stephens County Historical Society, Toccoa, Georgia. These items came from Traveler’s Rest, an inn and plantation site owned and operated by Devereaux Jarrett. Jarrett was quite an entrepreneur, with the inn and tavern, gold mining, weaving and spinning, and various other endeavors on his vast plantation.



2.3 Unknown enslaved maker(s). *Silk bonnet and cape*. c. 1850. Silk. Stephens County Historical Society and Traveler's Rest State Historic Site, Toccoa, Georgia.

According to the provenance record, the bonnet and cape were made for the mistress of the plantation, but she gave them to one of the enslaved women after she was done with them. The growing of silk in the southern states was highly unusual, but many landowners did raise sheep, flax, and hemp for their own use.<sup>50</sup> Slaves usually only had access to silk garments when they were given as gifts, as with this bonnet and cape, or if the slave had enough money or bartering goods to purchase it.

Yeoman wives or poor white women often brought in extra income by spinning or weaving and selling or trading to area planters.<sup>51</sup> Arthur Colson recalled

<sup>50</sup> Ben Marsh, "Silk Hopes in Colonial South Carolina," *Journal of Southern History*, 78 (November 2012): 807–854. This article focuses mostly on the late-eighteenth-century coastal Lowcountry.

<sup>51</sup> Timothy James Lockley, *Lines in the Sand: Race and Class in Lowcountry Georgia, 1750–1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 12, 24, 35. Lockley states on page 35 that most of the

that “the cloth was woven by some of the colored women” for enslaved people such as himself, but “the clothes for the slaves were made by some white women who lived near the plantation. These women were widows, and, since they were poor, the master gave them work in order to help them.”<sup>52</sup> These women sometimes used raw goods grown by their family, or from planters who did not have tools or did not want to use their slaves for this work.

The plantation books of James Heyward of South Carolina provide a good example of how slave clothing appears in the written historical record. The surviving plantation books cover the years 1852 to 1858 and contain cloth and blanket distribution lists for three different plantations he owned. Heyward gave clothing out to his slaves once a year in late November or early December.<sup>53</sup> Many slaveholders gave clothing in the late spring as well as in winter, while others distributed clothing throughout the year as it was needed. Others such as Heyward only handed out clothing in the winter, reasoning that by summer the cloth would be worn enough to be thinner, but substantial enough to last until the next winter. Although the rhythm of plantation life differed slightly by the crops grown, most of the heavy work would be done in the late spring during planting and by the mid-winter after harvesting. Clothing goods would be given out at these times for a variety of reasons such as a reward for the work done during the year or as a Christmas or New Year present.

Often, as was the case with Heyward's plantations, slaves were not given completely finished clothing. For the approximately 150 enslaved people on the

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1300 white women workers in Savannah in 1860 were involved in textile and clothing production or maintenance.

<sup>52</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S1-3.1: 221.

<sup>53</sup> James Heyward plantation book, 1852-1858, James Barnwell Heyward Papers, South Carolina Historical Society.

Comingtee Plantation of the Ball family in South Carolina, an account entry titled "Cloth for 1856" lists the following items as purchased and distributed: "120 yds. Blue [fabric]; 630 yd white [fabric]; 40 Doz metal [buttons]; 40 Doz Horn [buttons]; 200 needles; 120 skeins Blue [yarn or thread]; 630 ditto White, Brown [yarn or thread]; 102 caps; 44 1st Blankets; 26 2nd [blankets]; 8 ditto [blankets] Infants; 2 Great coats."<sup>54</sup> On this plantation, enslaved people received clothing in December and again in May or June, indicating this list is probably only for winter clothing given in December of 1855 for use in 1856.

Having time to sew the yards of cloth that were doled out presented another reason for giving it at a relatively idle time in the crop cycle since slaves would then have more time to devote to making finished clothing. Heyward's lists are organized with the first column listing male and female slaves by name followed by several columns with different types of apparel. These columns are named "white cloth," "blue cloth," "shoes," "blankets," "caps," "handkerchiefs," "great coats," and "homespun." Different yardage amounts of cloth are given under the appropriate columns, with the majority of people listed receiving five and a half yards of white cloth and six yards of homespun. Only the first four people listed received blue cloth, each receiving six yards. The first person listed has the word "driver" after his name,

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<sup>54</sup> Entry for December 6, 1855, Comingtee Plantation Record Book, Duke University Special Collections. On this plantation the men received six yards of cloth and the women five yards, boys and girls listed as "second class" hands received between three-and-a-half and four yards of cloth. The number 150 for the total enslaved population comes from the individual entries for each person in this account entry, plus at least fifty children who were excluded from this list, but who numbered at least twenty-nine and whose mothers received from one to three yards per child. In 1856, the total number of children is listed at fifty-four in a separate entry. See also earlier record books for Ball family plantations, including Comingtee, at the South Carolina Historical Society; John Coming Ball Plantation Book, South Caroliniana Library at University of South Carolina; and William James Ball Plantation Book, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

indicating that this slave had a certain amount of authority over the others.<sup>55</sup> By giving slaves with higher authority or special skills different clothing goods, which were often of better quality than what the majority received, slaveholders were able to establish a visual hierarchy among the enslaved population.

In addition to marking enslaved bodies with specific types of fabric, slave traders occasionally used them as walking advertisements. The two pewter buttons pictured below, one marked “T.P.” and the other “T. Porter,” were used by Charleston slave trader Thomas Porter.



2.4 Unknown maker. “TP” and “T. Porter” buttons. 1820–1860. Pewter. The Charleston Museum, Charleston, South Carolina, 2007.061.016a,b.

Porter likely had these buttons sewn onto the clothing of the slaves he had for sale, then cut them off once the person was sold to a new owner and reused them in the next sale. Like most traders, he probably also owned slaves himself who worked around the city and wore these buttons on their livery.<sup>56</sup> The practice of using

<sup>55</sup> Heyward Plantation Book, South Carolina Historical Society. All of the numbers given here are taken from the entry for Rotterdam plantation on November 16, 1852. The number of total slaves and the yardage received by the people varies little over the six-year span of the plantation book. This is one of the most complete lists throughout the record. Not all of them include columns for entering caps, handkerchiefs, and great coats. This may be because Heyward did not give out these items every year, or it may be that he simply varied in how he kept his records. Record books were often filled out by plantation overseers rather than the owner. The changing of overseers happened more frequently than the changing of owners and may account for the discrepancy in record keeping as well.

<sup>56</sup> Object file, 2007.061.016a,b, Charleston Museum, Charleston, South Carolina. A similar example appears on the livery coat and frock coat from the Historic New Orleans Collection that are discussed

enslaved people to advertise like this equated their bodies to other consumer products, their clothing marked with the label of the trader.<sup>57</sup>

Antebellum Americans existed in a culture that increasingly defined peoples' status by the ability to accumulate consumer products. Enslaved southerners had a paradoxical position in this world as both consumed goods and consumers of goods. When they were direct consumers of clothing and textiles, they purchased the highest quality goods they could afford, disdaining the *badge* of Negro cloth Harriet Jacobs refers to in her narrative. While they did not buy themselves Negro cloth, they indirectly consumed the goods of the factories in the North and in England. The confusing status of the peculiar institution as both slave economy and capitalist economy is evident in the Negro cloth industry. "Extracting the history of industrial development," argues Walter Johnson, "from the historical context of its entanglement with slavery" produces a false narrative that ignores the reality that "there was no nineteenth-century capitalism without slavery."<sup>58</sup> Enslaved people were on the front lines of production and were the indirect consumers of Negro cloth, a product that marked the first step in making black bodies unfashionable. Slaves themselves acted as producers and consumers, though they never owned their labor

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more thoroughly in chapter 3. Both coats have buttons on them with a bird, the family crest of their owner. These buttons served as markers of ownership to that family even when the enslaved bodies wearing them were not on the master's property or in his presence.

<sup>57</sup> For more on traders dressing slaves up for sale see Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999) and Maurie D. McNinnis, *Slaves Waiting for Sale: Abolitionist Art and the American Slave Trade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

<sup>58</sup> Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 254. Johnson does an excellent job of explaining slaves' connections at an individual and collective level in terms of the plantation side of the cotton industry, but because his study is limited to the Mississippi Valley he does not continue into the role of enslaved people as consumers in this global textile economy.

or the things they purchased.<sup>59</sup> Yet their economic power as consumers within the southern economy helped to undermine their legal status as property. Though the cotton industry and the connections between the South as the source of raw goods and the North and England as sources of finished cloth grew stronger throughout the antebellum period, enslaved southerners continually used their position as consumers of goods to resist their situation as consumed goods by insisting on their own fashionability.

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<sup>59</sup> Most slaveholders did recognize slaves' property as their own, though the master could ostensibly seize it at any time as it legally belonged to him. See Dylan C. Penningroth, *Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003) and Betty Wood, *Women's Work, Men's Work: The Informal Slave Economies of Lowcountry Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995).

### Chapter Three

#### Expressions of Self and Belonging: The Language of Everyday Apparel

In addition to wearing many different fabrics, enslaved people in the antebellum period wore a variety of apparel items on a daily basis. Like the previous chapter, this one provides definitions and descriptions of the terminology used in descriptions of slaves' work clothing. Many of these items were also worn by working-class people and as simple daywear by more wealthy individuals. Enslaved people dyed and embellished cloth given as an allowance, and reused and reworked cast-off, gifted, or trashed clothing of their owners to supplement their normal clothing allowances. Sources reveal a visualization of slavery that demonstrates the everyday wear of enslaved southerners in the antebellum period was highly individualized and comprised a multitude of fabrics, colors, and styles. But no matter how much they supplemented their wardrobes or stylized their allotted clothing, the expressiveness of the enslaved through their apparel was always contained within the power dynamics of the slave system and the fashion system.<sup>1</sup> In antebellum American culture, skin color was a part of the fashion system and the black body, in effect, an unfashionable article of clothing. This irremovable apparel became a more important marker of social identity than clothing itself in differentiating enslaved people from working-class and poor white people while also effectively obscuring the existence of free black people as part of the United States.

Nearly every moment of life became a contest between master and slave in a power system as uneven as antebellum slavery in the U.S. South. The ruling class

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Johnson, "On Agency," *Journal of Social History* 37 (Fall 2003): 113–124; Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619–1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 166–167.

tried to control human property through various avenues, including the physical appearance of enslaved bodies. Masters attempted to define a visual representation of the slave body as only property, monochrome and monotonous, one person virtually indistinguishable from the next. Enslaved people resisted this process of dehumanization by individualizing their everyday appearance in subtle ways that went unnoticed or dismissed as unimportant by slaveholders.<sup>2</sup>

Often slaves were depicted working in the fields in plain clothing, dressed very similarly and melting into the landscape around them as if they are merely another element of nature.<sup>3</sup> The watercolor below depicts a field populated with dark-skinned bodies in lightly colored clothing. But even here, we see pops of color in blue skirts, a green bodice, and red head kerchiefs.

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<sup>2</sup> Patricia K. Hunt makes a similar conclusion regarding the individualized nature of enslaved women's clothing, but she does not connect this practice to resistance. See Hunt, "'Round Homespun Coat & Pantaloon of the Same': Slave Clothing as Reflected in Fugitive Slave Advertisements in Antebellum Georgia," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 83 (Winter 1999): 727–740; Patricia K. Hunt, "The Struggle to Achieve Individual Expression Through Clothing and Adornment: African American Women Under and After Slavery," in *Discovering the Women in Slavery*, ed. Patricia Morton (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 227–40. Shane White and Graham White also suggest that African American stylistic choices were a method of subversive communication in slavery and in freedom; see White and White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); see especially the first two chapters on slavery. The debate about the agency of enslaved people has been ongoing since the first history of slavery was written. For an excellent breakdown and analysis of this historiography and an idea toward a new approach see Walter Johnson, "On Agency," *Journal of Social History* 37 (Fall 2003): 113–124. Johnson also draws on his new theory of agency in his monograph *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013). See especially pages 9, 207–208, 217.

<sup>3</sup> Angela D. Mack and Stephen G. Hoffius, eds., *Landscape of Slavery: The Plantation in American Art* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008).



3.1 Unknown artist. *Cotton Plantation near Columbus, Texas*. c. 1860. Watercolor on paper. Collection of William J. Hill. Image courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Indigo was a popular crop grown across the South in the antebellum period and used locally to dye textiles. A wide array of other dyestuffs were available either cultivated or wild, including sumac, walnut hulls, red clay, and poke berries.<sup>4</sup>

Copperas was a common dyestuff in the South that could be used as a colorant or a binding agent. If it was properly processed, slaves could create a rainbow of colors, the most common being shades of yellow and brown. For brighter colors, red was the easiest to obtain in a colorfast dye from natural dyestuffs. All of these dyes, particularly those available in the wild, provided opportunities for enslaved people to personalize their clothing without incurring expenses.

Slaves who participated in the home manufacturing of cloth could also create patterns in the weave structure such as checks and stripes by dyeing threads before

<sup>4</sup> A useful table of the dyestuffs and mordants mentioned in the slave narratives is "Appendix III" in Helen Bradley Foster, *"New Raiments of Self": African American Clothing in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Berg, 1997).

weaving the cloth. This meant that the great numbers of rural plantation slaves who were outfitted in homemade cloth were not necessarily wearing unbleached fabric, or even solid colored fabric. The other option sometimes available in creating woven patterns in cloth would be to use wool or cotton that was naturally black, brown, or yellow.<sup>5</sup>

Many runaway advertisements describe clothing in a variety of patterns and colors. When fifteen-year-old Lucy Ann Brown was taken up in the Baltimore jail as a runaway, she wore “a green bonnet, a common cotton shawl, a red plaid frock, a blue and yellow plaid apron” but “no shoes or stockings.”<sup>6</sup> Tom Johnson ran away wearing “a pair of drab pantaloons, a snuff colored frock coat, a yellow, or white, fur hat, and an umbrella in his hand.”<sup>7</sup> While not particularly colorful, Johnson did take care to bring both the umbrella and possibly a watch he was recently suspected of stealing to appear to fellow travelers as a free person of color or to pass as white.

The ability of enslaved people to color their clothing depended upon the time they had from their regular labor and the willingness of those in power to allow such manipulations of their apparel. Slaveholders continued to express their desire for a monochromatic workforce by purchasing and distributing the same cloth and clothing to all of their slaves, but it seems that they had given up trying to actually enforce uniformity within the appearance of the slave population by the antebellum period.

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<sup>5</sup> Details of the labor involved in dyeing fiber and cloth is discussed in chapter 4 of this study. Printed fabrics were very popular in the antebellum period, but this work required highly specialized skills completed mostly in factories in Britain and England. Early textile printworks in the United States failed because of the large amount of capital required to fund them as well as the need to employ and pay a high number of skilled (usually male) laborers. See Linda Eaton, *Quilts in a Material World: Selections from the Winterthur Collection* (New York: Abrams, 2007) and Florence Montgomery, *Printed Textiles: English and American Cottons and Linens, 1700–1850* (New York: Viking Press, 1970).

<sup>6</sup> Advertisement, *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, June 1, 1830.

<sup>7</sup> Advertisement, *Ohio State Journal*, April 15, 1830.

Through decades, even centuries, of collective resistance, enslaved people had gained the upper hand in terms of personalizing their clothing and appearance. By the early nineteenth century, individualization of clothing was a continuation of an established pattern of resistance.<sup>8</sup> Though many records indicate that owners and managers tolerated slaves who individualized their clothing through dyeing and patterning, some people did recall a more monochromatic picture of slavery. Hanna Fambro worked as a field hand and recalled, “[d]ose Oldenburg dresses was white an’ de sunbonnets was white, an’ de fiel’ shuh was full of flappin’ ghostes wen we all dere.”<sup>9</sup>

A woman's sleeveless white cotton apron provides an example of everyday work clothing worn by most slaves in the antebellum South. The apron is open at the back but closes at the neck with a drawstring, and the hem is trimmed with five tucks ending with a picot edge.

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<sup>8</sup> Stephanie M. H. Camp describes the complicated relationship between individual and collective resistance regarding truancy, an individual act of resistance that relied upon collective assistance in obtaining food and remaining hidden; see Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 50–51.

<sup>9</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S1-5.2: 336.



3.2 Unknown maker. *Sleeveless Apron*. 1840–1860. Cotton. The Charleston Museum, Charleston, South Carolina, HT2902.

An old card that likely came with the apron when it found its home in the Charleston Museum says: “Slave apron, worn when serving.”<sup>10</sup> This brief card provides a hint as to why this apron has a fancy edging. The person who wore it likely did so while serving the white owners and their guests either in a city house or in the plantation’s Big House.

A second apron, also made of cotton, is another example of typical work clothing worn by slaves. This fabric is of a rougher, cheaper quality than the first apron. This piece also has sleeves, which probably served the important purpose of protecting the wearer’s arms.

<sup>10</sup> Object file, HT2902, Charleston Museum, Charleston, South Carolina.



3.3 Unknown maker. *Apron*. 1840–1860. Cotton. The Charleston Museum, Charleston, South Carolina, HT2903.

Like the first apron, this piece came with a small card when it entered the collection of the Charleston Museum. The cotton fabric is referred to as “osnaberg,” and the note says this apron was “worn when working.”<sup>11</sup> The placement of the sleeves in relation to the neckline and the lack of any shaping at the shoulders are intriguing, as are the reddish stains that appear all over the garment. The stains, which might be anything from remnants of foodstuffs to some sort of cleaning agent, may provide a clue as to how this apron was used. Chemical analysis could perhaps provide more conclusive answers, but like so many details of history, the specific work the apron’s wearer performed will likely remain a mystery.

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<sup>11</sup> Object file, HT2903, Charleston Museum, Charleston, South Carolina.

These two aprons look similar in appearance at first glance, but they served two very different purposes. The first higher-quality apron was worn by a woman who worked around white owners and their guests. Enslaved people who worked in the homes of slaveholders often had better-quality clothing than their field-working counterparts. In part, this was due to the use of slave bodies as a locale for displaying wealth. A healthy, clean, and well-dressed house slave was a sign to white visitors that the master had the income not only to own slaves but also to provide amply for their care. The second apron was probably used by an enslaved woman who worked out in the fields or in the kitchen of the house, away from the prying eyes of white guests. This slave's physical appearance was not as valuable to the plantation owner as her physical labor.

Aprons were only one of many garments that were cut and styled in different ways during the antebellum period. Women usually wore a simple dress referred to as a frock and a head kerchief or bonnet. Alice Battle recalled that women's "[d]resses were made very full, buttoned down the front and with belts sewed in at the waist line."<sup>12</sup> A description of the clothing Susan Garretson wore when jailed as a runaway is very typical for enslaved women's dress. Garretson had on "a blue cotton plaid dress, cotton under dress, plaid head handkerchief and fine shoes."<sup>13</sup> Many women were also described as wearing frocks instead of dresses. The term *frock* indicated a simple garment worn for work, rather than a nicer, more stylish gown. The word *dress* could be used to describe a frock or a gown, the latter term usually referring to a high-quality fashionable garment. Frocks, while not nearly as restricting

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<sup>12</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S1-3.1: 43.

<sup>13</sup> Advertisement, *Easton Gazette*, June 1, 1839.

as the corsets, tight waists, and heavy crinolines of high fashion at the time, did still inhibit enslaved women in their assigned work. They sometimes had to compromise their modesty in order to complete their labor by pinning or tucking their skirts up.<sup>14</sup>

Women wore a variety of headgear including several styles of bonnets and artistically tied kerchiefs. Hanna Fambro remembered a specific style of bonnet given to the slave women on the plantation where she worked: “Dey tied undah de chin, an’ ‘bout noonday dose sunbonnets ud make us so hot and keep off so much air dat we’d open de strings an’ tie ‘em ‘round our neck. But ef we see de ole man comin’ we’d drop ‘em in a hurry ‘cause he’d whip us ef he ketch does tales up. You see, he ‘fraid to have us get brain fever.”<sup>15</sup> Other women’s bonnets were described as having stiff brims to keep the sun from their faces. A more common head covering for enslaved women was a kerchief tied around the head. The color and pattern of the kerchief and the way it was tied were highly individualized expressive moments for enslaved women.<sup>16</sup> The two handkerchiefs pictured below belonged to a woman who was enslaved by the Beauregard family in Louisiana.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Many travelers to the South commented upon this practice, and at a time when women’s legs were highly sexualized. A woman with exposed legs or undergarments was a provocative signal. See Deborah Gray White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 32. Enslaved women were not the only ones who discarded fashion when working; see Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman’s World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 16–17.

<sup>15</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S1-5.2: 336.

<sup>16</sup> Helen Bradley Foster, “*New Raiments of Self*,” chapter 6.

<sup>17</sup> Object records for 7068.2 (printed) and 7068.1 (plaid), Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana. Both of these items were donated to the museum by the daughter-in-law of famed Confederate officer P.G.T. Beauregard, who stated that the plaid kerchief (7068.1) was “genuine madras brought from Santo Domingo in 1850 for use of slaves.”



3.4 Unknown maker. *Printed handkerchief*. c. 1850. Cotton. The Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana, 7068.2.



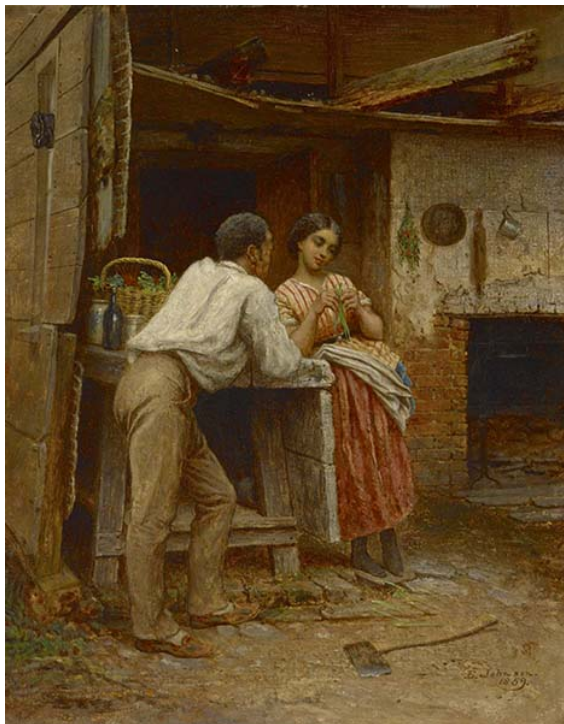
3.5 Unknown maker. *Madras handkerchief*. 1820–1870. Cotton. The Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana, 7068.1.

Laura Moore's observation that "De white folks would say, 'I wishes I could wear hances [handkerchiefs] on my head 'cause they looks so pretty'" reveals the importance enslaved women attached to their headcoverings as beautifying and stylish objects.<sup>18</sup>

Men usually wore a loose shirt and pantaloons very similar to the apparel worn by the young man in Eastman Johnson's *Southern Courtship* (1859).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S2-7: 2744–45. See chapter 6 of this study for a deeper discussion of the cultural meanings of head handkerchiefs.

<sup>19</sup> This painting is a study of one of the scenes from Johnson's larger work *Negro Life at the South* (1859) discussed in chapter 1.



3.6 Eastman Johnson. *Southern Courtship*. 1859. Oil on canvas. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, museum purchase with funds provided by the Agnes Cullen Arnold Endowment Fund, 2007.1174.

Pantaloon, sometimes referred to as pants, were tight fitting around the legs, but unlike the breeches common in the eighteenth century that ended at the knee, pantaloons reached to the calf or the ankle.<sup>20</sup> Men also had a vest, roundabout jacket, great coat, or frock coat. Roundabout jackets were short, long-sleeved coats that had a rounded bottom hem. They were also called monkey jackets because they were worn by sailors and the cut of the jacket allowed them to climb around the ship's rigging like a monkey.<sup>21</sup> Frock coats were a more formal style of outerwear than roundabouts. They were cut loosely fitted to the waist, then bloomed out into a wide skirt that ended just above the knees.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Norah Waugh, *The Cut of Men's Clothes, 1600-1900* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1964), 116.

<sup>21</sup> R. Turner Wilcox, *The Dictionary of Costume* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), 217.

<sup>22</sup> Waugh, *Cut of Men's Clothes*, 113.



3.7 Brooks Brothers. *Frock coat*. c. 1850. Wool, linen, cotton, and metal. The Historic New Orleans Collection, 2013.0138.

The frock coat pictured above belonged to a man enslaved by Dr. William Mercer in Louisiana. This coat is made from high quality fulled wool and is finely tailored; it has a label for Brooks Brothers of New York in the interior collar, a firm that was known for its men's tailored clothing. The buttons on the coat are engraved with a bird, the Mercer family crest. While the enslaved man who wore this coat clearly did important work for Mercer, the wearer's body was marked as belonging to the Mercer family through the wearing of these buttons.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Object file, 2013.0138, Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana. This coat was passed down through the white family until it was purchased by the Historic New Orleans Collection in 2013. The family identified it as a great coat, not a frock coat, and family tradition held that Dr. Mercer himself wore this coat. While the Brooks Brothers label would signal high fashion and expense to modern sensibilities, in its early years the firm catered to all classes who could purchase tailored menswear of a variety of qualities and styles. The fabrics are quite similar to those used to make 2013.0115.1, a livery coat also purchased from the Mercer family descendants by the Historic

In runaway advertisements, men's head coverings were usually described minimally as fur caps; they were probably of similar style to those depicted in prints and paintings of American frontiersmen. Charlie Hudson recalled that he wore "a cap made out of scraps of cloth dey wove in de looms right dar on our plantation to make pants for de grown folks."<sup>24</sup> Abram Sells had a homemade head covering as well, made from "long leaf pine straw" that he "pleated 'roun 'n 'roun" to make a hat big enough to "keep de sun off."<sup>25</sup>

Charles Hill and Ben Butler, two young men, wore clothing typical of adult male slaves of the antebellum South: "The said negroes had on, when committed, coarse cassinet roundabouts, pantaloons and vest of a dark color. Charles had with him blue cloth coat with a velvet collar, and pair of drab cassinett pantaloons, with sundry other summer clothing. Ben had with him old blue frock coat, drab cassinet pantaloons and some other clothing."<sup>26</sup> Because more men ran away, runaway advertisements are a better source for information on male slaves' apparel than women's. In addition, most of those who placed the advertisements for runaways were also men, so even when women did run, male slaveholders were less able to describe the details in style of female slaves' clothing.

Two stories from the WPA narratives show that slaves sometimes used clothing to conceal or hide items. Willis Winn recalled, "We et flour bread Sundays, but you darsn't git cotch with flour dough 'cept on that day. Mammy stole lots of it,

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New Orleans Collection. Both coats also have the same buttons with the bird, which leads to the conclusion that the frock coat was used by a slave who belonged to Mercer, not by Mercer himself. It would have been very strange and unfashionable for a wealthy white man to go about in a frock coat that was nearly identical to the livery coat worn by his slave.

<sup>24</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 12.2: 224.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, S2-9.8: 3488.

<sup>26</sup> Advertisement, *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, January 30, 1830.

though. She rolled it up and put it round her head and covered it with her head-rag.”<sup>27</sup> Winn’s mother succeeded many times in taking good bread for her family to eat, but Mattie Stenson’s father was not so lucky: “My pappy said he stole some sugar one day and his mistress saw him. She axed him, ‘Robert what have you in your hat?’—‘Not a thing Miss, not a thing’—With that she pressed on the top of his hat, and the sugar ran all down his face.”<sup>28</sup> Stenson does not say if her father received any further punishment for his attempted theft, but perhaps the emotional punishment of feeling a foodstuff precious enough to him to run that risk being so wasted was brutal enough.

Some plantation managers considered clothing allotments to be a privilege earned by obedient workers. Davison McDowell, who kept a journal for his plantation in South Carolina, often noted times when he withheld clothing as punishment for various infractions. After returning from a trip in the fall of 1827 he noted in his journal, “Jerry and Jackson has killed a beef. The run away Marlbro was concerned in it also...Give them no Christmas nor Summer cloths.”<sup>29</sup> Enslaved people used stealing and truancy as forms of resistance against their oppressors. In this case, two men fed themselves and another likely hiding nearby by killing one of the plantation’s cows and eating the meat.<sup>30</sup> As punishment, McDowell withheld their

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<sup>27</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 5.4: 202.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., S1-10.5: 2036–37. For a deeper analysis of slaves and stealing see Alex Lichtenstein, “That Disposition to Theft, with Which They Have Been Branded’: Moral Economy, Slave Management, and the Law” *Journal of Social History* 21 (Spring 1988): 413–440.

<sup>29</sup> Asylum Plantation Journal, August 7, 1827, Davison McDowell Plantation Journal, South Caroliniana Library at the University of South Carolina.

<sup>30</sup> For further studies regarding everyday resistance tactics of enslaved African Americans see John Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Sharon Ann Holt, “Symbol, Memory, and Service: Resistance and Family in Nineteenth-Century African America,” in *Working toward Freedom: Slave Society and Domestic Economy in the American*

clothing allowance for the entire year. Four years later, McDowell recounted the return of two truant male slaves: "This day makes 4 weeks since they went away. As they have come home themselves (agreeable to a Rule of the Plantation) they are not to be whipped! [b]ut they are to be deprived of all the comforts of the Plantation: they are to get no Summer cloth's, Christmas; and as the offence appears to [be] one of great enormity (my Crop being very grassy when they went away) I think I will give them no Winter cloth's."<sup>31</sup> These men likely relied on other slaves in the community to help them find enough clothing to keep sufficiently warm and suitably covered.

Clothing was often a key element in more violent methods of punishment. Henry Johnson, who showed a WPA interviewer scars on his head and shoulders after relating this story, remembered that the slightest offense resulted in the overseer meting out the following unusually gruesome beating:

[H]e would handcuff our feet to a whipping post, den chain the slave around de stomach to de post and strap de chin over de top of de post and place your hands in front of you. In de start de slave has been stripped naked, and lashed, often to death. Dey would be left strapped after from twenty-five to fifty lashes every two or three hours to stand dere all night. De next day, de overseer would be back with a heavy paddle full of holes that had been dipped in boiling water and beat until de whole body was full of blisters. Den he'd take a cat and nine tails dipped in hot salt water to draw out de bruised blood and would open everyone of dem blisters with dat. If de slave did not die from dat torture, he would be unfastened from de whipping post, and made go to de field just as he was. Often times he would die shortly thereafter. Dey did the women de same.<sup>32</sup>

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*South*, ed. Larry E. Hudson Jr., (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1994), 192-210; and Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984).

<sup>31</sup> Asylum Plantation Journal, August 24, 1831.

<sup>32</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 11.8: 206–07. Johnson describes a rare occasion when a slave died after a whipping. Most slaveholders tried to walk a fine line between causing death or permanent injury, thus damaging their property investment, and punishment severe enough to inflict extreme physical and psychological harm.

The first crucial step of this process was to strip the slave of all clothing. This had several purposes, one being to expose the skin completely unprotected from any barriers to the sting of the lash. A severe whipping and beating would otherwise tear and rip clothing to shreds, leaving the slave's body more vulnerable to illness and disease long after the offense was committed. Bloodied cloth would stick into the dried wounds and be difficult to remove.<sup>33</sup> While this painful extraction could be a further stage of the punishment process, it also meant that someone, usually another slave, had to take time to clean out the dirty cloth from wounds to prevent infections. After receiving a whipping of sixty lashes, Jacob D. Green recalled that his "back was raw and sore for three months; the shirt that I wore was made of rough tow linen, and when at work in the fields it would so chafe the sores that they would break and run, and the hot sun over me would bake the shirt fast to my back, and for four weeks I wore that shirt, unable to pull it off, and when I did pull it off it brought with it much of my flesh, leaving my back perfectly raw."<sup>34</sup> Green felt the physical punishment from the lash months after being whipped.

The other main reason for removing an enslaved person's clothing was psychological. In revealing the perceived savageness or inhumanity of the exposed black body, the punisher attempted to distance himself from the fact that he was savagely beating another human. Nakedness also served to further expose and humiliate the enslaved person receiving the punishment. It brought sexual tension to the experience that sometimes gave the recounting of beatings a pornographic tone.

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<sup>33</sup> For example, see Carrie Davis's interviews in Rawick, *American Slave*, 6.1: 106 and S1-1.1: 118.

<sup>34</sup> Jacob D. Green, *Narrative of the Life of J. D. Green, a Runaway Slave from Kentucky, Containing an Account of His Three Escapes, in 1839, 1846, and 1848* (1864, New York: Library of America, 2000), 958.

Finally, though the whippings slaves received were much harsher, they were similar to those given to white children, thus serving to infantilize the person being punished.<sup>35</sup>

Depriving enslaved people of clothing was one way for masters to demonstrate their ownership of slaves. Though many runaway advertisements list quite a quantity and variety of clothing worn and carried off by enslaved people, other advertisements speak to the desperate conditions of some slaves. One advertisement, which gave no name for the thirty-year-old man who ran away in the late spring of 1852, noted that “his clothes were so filthy and tattered that their color cannot be known.”<sup>36</sup> Charles Smith had on “a ragged blue coat and vest” and “an old pair of ragged drab pantaloons” when he was committed to jail as a runaway.<sup>37</sup> The jailor who took up Jacob as a runaway did not even attempt to describe Jacob’s apparel, stating simply that his “clothing [was] so much worn out that a description cannot be given.”<sup>38</sup>

Clothing could also serve as a reward. Mary Reynolds noted that at Christmas, “The highest cotton picker gets a suit of clothes and all the womens that has twins that year gets a out fittin of clothes for the twins and a double warm blanket.”<sup>39</sup> Since most slaveholders distributed a yearly or seasonal issue of clothing

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<sup>35</sup> Alec Pope’s recollection of punishments is described in a way reminiscent of a child’s beating: “I ’members dey used to make de ’omans pull up deir skirts and brushed ’em wid a horse whup or a hickory; dey done de mens de same way ’cept dey had to take off deir shirts and pull deir pants down.” Rawick, *American Slave*, 13.3: 175. The infantilization of slaves fit into ideologies of paternalist mastery and black people as permanent children who required protection and discipline. Deborah Gray White also points out the sexualized nature of such punishments; see *Ar’n’t I a Woman?*, 33. Walter Johnson refers to this elaborate kind of punishment as a “spectacle of violence.” Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 171.

<sup>36</sup> Advertisement, *Richmond Enquirer*, May 11, 1852.

<sup>37</sup> Advertisement, *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, March 30, 1831.

<sup>38</sup> Advertisement, *Richmond Enquirer*, October 25, 1836.

<sup>39</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S2-8: 3294–95.

in December or January, it is likely that the items Reynolds described were a special reward for the male slave who had worked the hardest in the field, and any female slaves who had provided the owner a double increase on his property. Gifts of clothing for enslaved mothers were quite common. Dink Walton Young recalled “every time a Negro baby was born on one of his plantations, Major Walton give the mother a calico dress and a ‘bright, shiny’ silver dollar.”<sup>40</sup> Whether these rewards were really an incentive for women to give birth is highly debatable, but it is clear that slaveholders recognized the value that enslaved women placed upon obtaining good clothing.

As clothing wore out, it would sometimes be turned into underclothes or used to patch other apparel. The quality of the cloth used for slaves’ work clothing was very poor. Better textile goods used for work clothing could last years with proper maintenance, while most slaves had thoroughly worn out their apparel in a year. This was cloth meant to be discarded and replaced, unlike other textiles of the time that were meant to be maintained and used for longer periods. Also contributing to the throwaway nature of Negro cloth was the very little time or skill available for slaves to maintain their clothing. Most could sew a patch, but a proper (ideally unnoticeable) mending job was beyond the sewing skills or time commitment available to the average slave. Patches indicated that the person could not afford to pay for proper clothing maintenance more than indicating they could not afford to buy new. Even the wealthiest plantation owners paid or enslaved professional seamstresses and tailors to mend, turn, and alter clothing so that it would last

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., S1-4.2: 667.

several years.<sup>41</sup> An advertisement for Virgil noted that he was wearing “Virginia cloth trousers, much patched” when he ran away.<sup>42</sup> Sylvia Cannon remembered that she made a “petticoat out of old dress an patch en patch till couldn’ tell which place weave.”<sup>43</sup> Cannon was not given an undergarment by her owner, but she created one for herself by repurposing an old piece of clothing and smaller rags to patch it and make it last longer. Though Callie Bracey was not born until after the end of slavery, she did know many stories from her mother, Louise Terrell’s, life during enslavement. Similar to Cannon, Terrell repurposed old clothing. Bracey said that her mother “was given two dresses a year, her old dress from last year, she wore as an underskirt.”<sup>44</sup> In some cases, slaves were provided underclothes. A few recalled a very specific undergarment known as a balmoral petticoat, Lina Hunter described them as being “some sight, but dey was show warm as hell.”<sup>45</sup> Hunter’s meaning of these petticoats as “some sight” is partially explained in the meaning of the term. Balmoral petticoats were of a heavy woolen and usually dyed red, sometimes striped with black.<sup>46</sup> They were a splash of color underneath a woman’s dress and helped to keep her legs warm in the winter months.

Historians of slavery have made much about the apparent lack of underwear enslaved women had during slavery, particularly as related to the raping of black women by white men. Evidence from the ex-slave narratives and in descriptions of

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<sup>41</sup> Beverly Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade before the Factory, 1660–1800* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan/Palgrave, 1997); Marla R. Miller, “Clothing and Consumers in Rural New England, 1760–1810,” in *The Needle’s Eye: Women and Work in the Age of Revolution* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 25–55; John Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

<sup>42</sup> Advertisement, *Austin City Gazette*, May 26, 1840.

<sup>43</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 2.1: 189.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.2: 26.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.2: 258.

<sup>46</sup> Wilcox, *Dictionary of Costume*, 16.

clothing worn by runaway female slaves indicates that many gained access to undergarments such as hoops, petticoats, and drawers either through clothing allotments or by repurposing. For example, when Ann Warfield ran away she took “her under clothing,” which was “new and made of brown muslin.”<sup>47</sup> Plantation account books also indicate that heavier wool fabrics were distributed for use during the cold winter months, and advice literature for slave management encouraged planters to distribute flannel shirts and drawers to men and women in winter to prevent illness.<sup>48</sup> Even if an enslaved woman was unable to find undergarments, the very nature of fashionable foundationwear for white women of the time negates the theory that black women’s bodies were more physically available to sexual violence because of their clothing. The style of drawers worn by white women in antebellum America were known as open drawers because they did not have a closed seam at the crotch. It was considered unseemly for a woman to wear pants, even as underwear, until the 1920s. Add to this the ungainly and increasingly larger circular hoopskirts fashionable women wore throughout the antebellum period, and it would have been quite easy to incapacitate a white lady simply by throwing her hoops up over her head. Not to mention the fact that the manual labor required of most enslaved black women made them considerably stronger than most white women, and likely many white men of leisure, of the time.<sup>49</sup> The availability of black women’s

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<sup>47</sup> Advertisement, *Baltimore Sun*, March 26, 1846.

<sup>48</sup> James O. Breeden, ed., *Advice Among Masters: The Ideal in Slave Management in the Old South* (Wesport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), 142, 167, 210.

<sup>49</sup> It is a well-established fact that white men in the slaveholding South practiced sexual violence on enslaved women at an unbelievable rate. I do not at all mean to refute that the prevalence of cross-racial rape did not happen, but that the notion of black women’s bodies as more available physically because of their clothing is inaccurate and in many ways excuses the behavior of white men and solidifies notions of black women as overtly sexual. For examples of historians who discuss sexual violence, including those who draw upon lack of underwear as a reason for perceiving black women’s

bodies was more a perceived notion than an actual fact that relied upon assumptions of true womanhood as attainable only by white females.<sup>50</sup> Joan Entwistle discusses fashion's relationship to the body in detail, including how dress is connected to sexuality: "Modern sexuality is rooted in our (sexed) body, making the things we use to decorate our bodies, potentially at least, sexually charged. Moreover, since our bodies are the location of sexual feelings, it is no surprise to find the properties of adornments, the feel of cloth or the smell of leather, linked to bodily pleasure and eroticized, even fetishized."<sup>51</sup> Black women's bodies were certainly fetishized, and the raping of black women in relation to their clothing could be a fetish for the forbidden touching of rough fabrics by elite white men in order to access the black female body.

It is likely that enslaved people turned the stigma toward patching in American fashion into a useful method of expressing individuality in their clothing. Rather than shunning obvious patches, they may have interpreted them as aesthetically pleasing. More difficult to understand is the way enslaved people could be distinguished from other poor or laboring people. Mollie Dawson recalled, "Marser

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bodies as accessible, see Edward E. Baptist, "'Cuffy,' 'Fancy Maids,' and 'One-Eyed Men': Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States," in *The Chattel Principle*, ed. Walter Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 165–202; Sharon Block, "Lines of Color, Sex, and Service: Comparative Sexual Coercion in Early America," in *Sex, Love, Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History*, ed. Martha Hodes (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 141–163; Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 41–43 and 64–65; Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 199–222; Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 195; and White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 174–177.

<sup>50</sup> Jill Fields, *An Intimate Affair: Women, Lingerie, and Sexuality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 19; Bridget T. Heneghan, *Whitewashing America: Material Culture and Race in the Antebellum Imagination* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 105. On notions of respectability in the African American community see Erica Ball, *To Live an Antislavery Life: Personal Politics and the Antebellum Black Middle Class* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012); and Martha S. Jones, *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

<sup>51</sup> Joan Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress, and Modern Social Theory* (Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2000), 181.

[N]ewman and his folks wore a little bettah clothes den de slaves did, but de clothes dat dey wore fer evey day on de farm was jest like ours.”<sup>52</sup> The master and his family probably replaced their work clothing more often than they did that of their slaves, but the only other main identifier of who was owner and who was owned had nothing to do with an item of clothing.

If masters and other white laborers sometimes wore the same work clothing as enslaved people, then skin color was the main visual identifier of who was slave and who was free. Elite whites were further separated from all poor people by their clothing, and they used the race-based fashion system to solidify their power by providing a way for white people dressed in poorer clothes to maintain a sense of separation from black people dressed in these same fabrics and styles.<sup>53</sup> Clothing separated whites by class, but because fashion was raced, it was skin color more than actual garments that spoke one’s status as enslaved or free. There were some cases of enslaved people with very light skin taking advantage of concepts of racial identity and skin tone, such as the advertisement for a “White Negro Boy” who ran

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<sup>52</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S2-4.3: 1127.

<sup>53</sup> There is a growing body of literature on the lives of non-elite white southerners, from yeomen who may have owned a few slaves to landless poor whites. These people were the majority of the white population in the Old South, yet they were largely subservient to a very small group of planters. Understanding their lived experiences, including how they used the power of whiteness, is an important part of the southern story. The most extensive exploration of poor white and slave relations is Jeff Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006). Forret argues that slaves and poor whites “successfully used the other to construct their identities and order the social universe,” which is in line with the argument of race-based fashion in this study (17). Some excellent works focused on non-elite white southerners are Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850–1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Lacy K. Ford, Jr., *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Timothy James Lockley, *Lines in the Sand: Race and Class in Lowcountry Georgia, 1750–1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001); and Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

away and would “pass for a poor white boy” in his outfit of “a black coat, checked vest, blue striped pants, straw hat and a coarse pair of shoes.”<sup>54</sup>

This calls attention to another important group of Americans—free black laborers. Runaway advertisements provide insight into how everyday clothing of the working classes still served to exclude blacks as Americans. Many notices of black people jailed as runaways in Easton, Maryland, include the statement “says he is free” or “says she is free.” Their clothing is not markedly different than that of notices describing people without a claim to free status recorded. While this source does not necessarily reveal how all free black people dressed on a daily basis, it does demonstrate the way in which race operated as a part of the fashion system in America. An unfamiliar black person dressed in common work clothing or in ragged clothing was assumed by the white community to be a runaway slave because of his or her skin color.<sup>55</sup> For example, Jacob Blunt was taken up in Richmond as a runaway slave wearing “common negro clothing, and very ragged and dirty,” despite his claim to be free and his even having free papers with him.<sup>56</sup>

Many enslaved people recalled that certain jobs warranted special clothing. As is often noted by other historians of slavery and the antebellum South, urban slaves generally had better clothing than rural slaves, and rural house slaves usually wore everyday clothing of a higher grade than slaves who worked in the fields.<sup>57</sup>

Gabe Emmanuel recalled, “Us what was a-servin in de Big House wore de Marster’s

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<sup>54</sup> Advertisement, *Daily Columbus Enquirer*, August 2, 1859. For another similar case see Ariela J. Gross, *What Blood Won't Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America*. Cambridge (Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>55</sup> The ways in which race and fashion served to exclude blacks from American culture is further explored in chapter 6.

<sup>56</sup> Advertisement, *Richmond Enquirer*, May 11, 1838.

<sup>57</sup> For an example, see the detailed lists of clothes for slaves, separated by house and field slaves, in the Exeter Plantation Book, Jacob Rhett Motte Papers, Duke University Special Collections.

old dress suits. Now dat was sumpin. Mos' o' de time dey didn' fit so good, mebbby de' pants hang a little loose an' de tails of de' coat hang a little long, but me bein' de house boy I use to look mighty sprucy when I put on my frock tail."<sup>58</sup> Willis Woodsen, describing his job as a carriage footman, remembered that his master "got me a uniform, most like a soldier's uniform, ceptin mine was red, wid black stripes down de sides.... I wore my red suit when I went to church wid de white folks, and held de horses, while dey listened to do sermon."<sup>59</sup> Woodsen's comparison of his livery to a military uniform speaks to his sense of importance when dressed in the garb of a footman.



<sup>3.8</sup> Attributed to Brooks Brothers. *Livery coat*. c. 1850. Wool, linen, cotton, and metal. The Historic New Orleans Collection, 2013.0115.1.

<sup>58</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S1-7.2: 682.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. S2-10.9: 4279. See also interviews of Lewis Jones (4.2: 238), Jerry Eubanks (S1-7.2: 688), and Josh Miles (S2-7: 2655).

Woodsen's livery coat was probably similar to the one pictured above, which was used by a man enslaved by Dr. William Mercer in Louisiana.<sup>60</sup> Livery, worn by servants both free and enslaved throughout the United States during the nineteenth century, did indeed harken back to military uniforms because both relied upon fashions that were popular in the late eighteenth century but had long since gone out of style.

Both Emmanuel and Woodsen had duties that required them to be near their white owners, but more importantly, visible to the eyes of other white people of high social standing who either visited plantation homes or encountered each other at social and religious functions. The bodies of the enslaved became sites of display for slaveholders in these instances. The better quality fabric of both men's clothing, and the eye-catching color of Woodsen's red woolen suit, signified to the white community that the person who owned that slave body had fashionable tastes and the means to display them.

Another compelling example of the specialized nature of some enslaved workers as marked by their clothing is the jockey suit pictured below.

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<sup>60</sup> Object file, 2013.0115.1, Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.



3.9 Unknown enslaved maker(s). *Jockey suit*. 1830–1850. Silk satin and leather. The Charleston Museum, Charleston, South Carolina, HT6339 a,b.

The suit was made by enslaved tailors on the plantations of William Alston in Waccamaw, South Carolina, in the early 1800s. Alston had the jacket made in brilliant red and green silk satin, complete with a white silk lining and satin-covered buttons; the pants are of very soft white buckskin with pearl buttons. This suit was meticulously stitched with great skill. Interestingly, rather than having red and green satin strips sewn together to create the stripes of the jacket, the jacket has green strips applied onto a solid red ground.<sup>61</sup> The craftsmanship of this ensemble is evidence of the work of a small but important group of enslaved artisans—male tailors.

Horseracing was a popular activity for men in the Old South, from the slaveholders who owned the racehorses and the enslaved grooms and jockeys, to working-class white men and black men both free and enslaved.

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<sup>61</sup> Object file, HT6339a,b, Charleston Museum, Charleston, South Carolina.



3.10 Edward Troye. *Richard Singleton with "Viley's Harry, Charles, and Lew."* 1834. Oil on canvas. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Paul Mellon Collection, 85.645.

The painting above is called *Richard Singleton*, after the racehorse that is the central figure in the painting. Surrounded by his caretakers, the prize-winning horse that belonged to Breckenridge Viley of Scott County, South Carolina, was so valued by his owner that Viley commemorated the horse with a full-length portrait. Richard Singleton's trainer Harry, groom Charles, and jockey Lew, from left to right, were also all owned by Viley.<sup>62</sup> They appear in the painting as background, merely attendants to Richard Singleton, the horse standing in for Viley as the master of black men. While Viley's jockey Lew was not dressed in such an elaborate uniform as Alston's red and green silk jacket, all three of the enslaved men in this painting wear clothing that speaks to their status as slaves with special skills and duties. The

<sup>62</sup> Guy C. McElroy and Christopher C. French. *Facing History: The Black Image in American Art, 1710–1940* (San Francisco: Bedford Arts, 1990), 28.

jockey suit and the painting of Richard Singleton speak to the importance of fashion in male cultural spaces for defining which men had the most power.<sup>63</sup>

People who were enslaved in towns rather than rural settings also tended to have access to a higher grade and wider array of clothing. Frank Bell, who worked as a slave in a brothel, said of his apparel, “[t]he clothes I wore was some of the masters. They have holes in them and he give them to me cause I’ve have to work where everybody that comes to masters could see me.”<sup>64</sup> This description is quite similar to that of Gabe Emmanuel while working in the house of a rural plantation. George Eason, who worked in the city and on a plantation during enslavement, told an interviewer that in the city house “[t]hey all had good clothing,” but “[c]lothing on the Ormand plantation was usually insufficient to satisfy the needs of the slave.”<sup>65</sup> Eason also recalled that women in the city wore calico dresses and the men had suits “of good grade cloth,” while men and women on the plantation wore clothing made from homespun.<sup>66</sup> The terminology Eason used to describe the textiles of urban versus rural slaves indicates that differing qualities of cloth were used to clothe slaves whose bodies were more readily on display to other whites in cities and towns than the bodies of rural field hands.

Many factors contributed to an enslaved person’s access to clothing including their status as an urban or rural slave, if they had a special skill, their ability to

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<sup>63</sup> For more on southern men and honor see Jeff Forret, “A Masculine Subculture of Violence,” in *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 157–183; Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

<sup>64</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S2-2.1: 238.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.1: 300–01.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

supplement their wardrobe with cast-offs, and the basic supply levels from owner to owner. This varied so much across the South that it is impossible to make a general statement regarding the quality and quantity of enslaved southerners' wardrobes. What is abundantly clear is that enslaved people created their own fashions through manipulating the clothing allowance given them through altering the appearance of the cloth itself in dyeing it, repurposing worn clothing as underwear or patching material, and adding additional apparel through purchases or gifts. But no matter how much an enslaved person individualized his or her appearance through altering apparel and dress, these work clothes still carried with them the badge of slavery because people could not change their skin color.

## Chapter Four

### From Seed to Sack: Enslaved Labor and Textile Production

“There are few sights more pleasant to the eye,” said Solomon Northup, “than a wide cotton field when it is in the bloom. It presents an appearance of purity, like an immaculate expanse of light, new-fallen snow.”<sup>1</sup> As a slave on a cotton plantation Northup likely had little time to stop and admire the beauty of the scenery around him, for he also stated: “Ploughing, planting, picking cotton, gathering the corn, and pulling and burning stalks, occupies the whole of the four seasons of the year. Drawing and cutting wood, pressing cotton, fattening and killing hogs, are but incidental labors.”<sup>2</sup> This chapter is about those incidental labors, specifically textile and clothing production on southern plantations, and the other sources for textiles and clothing slaveholders used to clothe enslaved bodies.<sup>3</sup> Enslaved people, especially women, had intimate connections to their clothing because of this labor. Breaking down the many steps of textile production shows that nearly every day of enslaved people’s lives was involved in textile production of some kind, whether it was plowing land that would eventually grow cotton to be manufactured in Manchester, or hand sewing the sleeves of a jacket. Despite white assumptions, slaves were producers and consumers of American textiles and contributed to American fashion through their work.

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<sup>1</sup> Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853* (Auburn, New York: Derby and Miller, 1853), 166.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 172–173.

<sup>3</sup> Previous scholarship on home textile production in the United States is limited to colonial New England, the best example being Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, “Wheels, Looms, and the Gender Division of Labor in Eighteenth-Century New England,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser., 55 (January 1998): 3–38. The work presented in this chapter is one of the only forays into home textile production of the U.S. South in either the colonial or antebellum periods.

In the antebellum South, two main types of cotton were grown: long staple or Sea Island cotton in the South Carolina and Georgia Lowcountry; and short staple cotton in the Black Belt of Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and East Texas. Both followed a similar growing cycle, with the planting of seeds occurring in mid-spring, followed by the culling of the seedlings. On all plantations, every day of a slave's life was determined by the main cash crop and where it was in the agricultural cycle. Men were usually the ones to plow the field and prepare furrowed rows, while women and children followed behind dropping several seeds into holes in the raised rows. Once several seeds had sprouted, the weaker plants were culled so that only one cotton plant grew from each planting. During the growing season from spring to late summer, constant upkeep work of weeding and pest removal was required of all of the slaves. The most intense time of the cycle was the picking, or harvesting season, which lasted from late summer through early winter and again involved every hand, including children in many cases.<sup>4</sup>

Men were usually the ones involved in preparing the harvested cotton for market, work that was done mostly between the last of the picking and the first thaws in early spring when the fields could be prepared for the next year's planting. Before being transferred to storage or to the docks, picked cotton needed to be ginned, moted, and pressed. On days with inclement weather during the harvesting season, which lasted from September to mid-December, some of this work could be completed, though most of it was done in late winter. For example, on January 25,

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<sup>4</sup> Solomon Northup includes an incredibly detailed first-hand account of the process of planting, raising, and harvesting short-staple cotton in his autobiography, 164–168, 178. See also Mark Fiege, "King Cotton: The Cotton Plant and Southern Slavery," in *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), 100–155; and Walter Johnson, "Chapter 6: Dominion," *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013), 151–175.

1848, the overseer on Rice C. Ballard's Magnolia Plantation recorded: "the women all about the house spinning and sewing & the men all about the Gin."<sup>5</sup> Most gins were worked by a crank or foot pedals, and larger gins were sometimes run by teams of mules. Someone had to keep the mechanism moving while another worker fed seed cotton into the gin.<sup>6</sup> After it was ginned, the cotton was moted, or further inspected and cleaned of any remaining seeds or other debris, and sorted by grade.<sup>7</sup> Women and children often did this work inside the same building as the gin. Once it was cleaned and sorted, the cotton had to be pressed into compact bales and wrapped tightly to prevent moisture, insects, or dirt from contaminating it. Pressing and baling were usually done by men because these tasks required great physical strength to keep tension on the press and to handle the heavy bales, which weighed between four hundred and five hundred pounds.<sup>8</sup>

Besides fieldwork, nursing, cooking, cleaning, and waiting, enslaved women were often employed in making clothing for all of the slaves.<sup>9</sup> In some cases this

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<sup>5</sup> Magnolia Plantation Record Book, 1848, Rice C. Ballard Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>6</sup> For a wonderfully nuanced history of the cotton gin in the United States see Angela Lakwete, *Inventing the Cotton Gin: Machine and Myth in Antebellum America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 250–251.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that enslaved women were not the only ones with a so-called double shift of fieldwork combined with other chores such as textile production. Solomon Northup noted the tasks of men after the day's labor of picking and weighing cotton was done: "[T]he labor of the day is not yet ended, by any means. Each one must then attend to his respective chores. One feeds the mules, another the swine—another cuts the wood, and so forth; besides, the packing is all done by candle light. Finally, at a late hour, they reach the quarters, sleepy and overcome with the long day's toil. Then a fire must be kindled in the cabin, the corn ground in the small hand-mill, and supper, and dinner for the next day in the field, prepared." Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 168. Textile production was one of many chores of enslaved people that were required to keep the place operating, but were often not recorded as labor or work by managers on plantations throughout the South. Deborah Gray White highlights the "bonds of womanhood" that were cemented through exclusively female labor such as textile production, see White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1999), 122. Walter Johnson also notes this gender divided

involved constructing apparel from cloth purchased by the owner. On other plantations, women made finished garments from the cotton and wool raised right on the land. Included in many plantation accounts are purchases of cards, spinning wheels, needles, pins, and shears. These implements were either distributed to the slaves with their cloth allotments, or used by a small group of slaves to produce finished goods for all. On cotton plantations where most slave clothing was supplied nearly finished or ready-made, slaves still had an intimate connection to these textiles because of the history of the fibers being raised by their own hands even when manufactured thousands of miles away.<sup>10</sup>

Slaves understood that plantation managers and owners defined and divided labor according to work done that directly impacted the success of a cash crop versus work done for the upkeep and maintenance of the plantation. Alice Green stated that after the “day’s work” was done the slaves “had to git busy workin’ wid cotton. Some carded bats, some spinned and some weaved cloth.”<sup>11</sup> George Womble described these divisions of labor along gendered lines: “The men worked every day in the week while the women were given Saturday afternoon off so that they might do their personal work such as the washing and the repairing of their clothing etc. The women were required to do the washing and the repairing of the single men’s clothing in addition to their own. No night work was required of any of them except during the winter when they were given three cuts of thread to card,

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labor system of slaves, stating that it “both reflected and concretely reproduced slaveholding notions of their gendered capacities.” Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 161.

<sup>10</sup> Patricia K. Hunt, “Fabric Production in the 19th-century African American Slave Community,” *Ars Textrina* 15 (July 1991): 83-92.

<sup>11</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 12.2: 33.

reel, and spin each night.”<sup>12</sup> Womble described the women’s Saturday’s as “off” because they were not doing labor related to the cash crop, while the men were still expected in the fields on that day. Yet Womble also recognized that the women’s Saturdays and evenings were not free time, but a different kind of labor.

While a male slave may have understood women’s work of spinning and laundering as labor, this type of maintenance work was often dismissed by plantation managers as inconsequential or not considered to be labor. An overseer employed on a plantation owned by Rice Ballard took notes of the work slaves performed each day. Several entries include information about cloth production. On November 23, 1848, the overseer wrote, “Wet day, nothing at all done of any importance the women engaged at the House Spinning, Sewing Thread, Karding Bats, & making Comforts.”<sup>13</sup> That the overseer considered all of this labor of no importance to the overall productivity of the plantation was a common perception of women’s work.

Slaves, especially women, were closely involved with the production of their apparel. Knowing the amount of work hours that went into making a simple shirt or chemise made the clothing that slaves received all the more valuable. On some plantations, this meant growing cotton and linen and raising sheep for wool and cows for leather. John Wells recalled working as “a shepherd boy” during slavery, and Lottie Jones said that the plantation she worked on “raised sheep of different

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 13.4: 183.

<sup>13</sup> Plantation book for Magnolia Plantation, November 23, 1848, Rice C. Ballard Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. There are several other similar entries in this plantation journal by the same overseer.

colors, dere wuz white, black and yellow, and so we didn' dye de wool."<sup>14</sup> Livestock such as sheep and cattle required care year-round just like the crops. Patsy Jane Bland noted that she did work related to the processing of both linen and wool textiles, stating that she "spun flax, cut wool off sheep, washed it, carded and spun it for stockings and underwear."<sup>15</sup>

John Boyd recalled "the winter woolens were made from the wool sheared from the sheep every May. Wool was taken to the factory at Bivensville and there made into yarn."<sup>16</sup> Sina Banks said that before the wool was taken to a factory to be processed it had to be "washed, picked apart and combed."<sup>17</sup> A plantation owner who raised sheep noted in May 1854: "Finished shearing Merino sheep, twenty two ewes and one buck that were yielded sixty one pound and two bucks that were not leashed yielded nineteen lbs."<sup>18</sup> As a child, Nicey Kinney helped with the shearing of the sheep. After the animal was tied to a scaffold, Kinney was instructed by her master to "set on de sheep's head whilst he cut off de wool."<sup>19</sup> Kinney noted that their wool was also sent off the plantation to be cleaned and prepared for spinning. Some planters also raised flax on a portion of their land, which was processed into linen for home use. In addition to sheep, Sina Banks lived on a plantation where flax was raised. Her detailed description of the plant and how it was prepared for spinning indicates she was likely involved in this labor herself:

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<sup>14</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 11.7: 85 (interview with John Wells); Ibid., S2-6.5: 2128 (interview with Lottie Jones).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., S1-5.1: 14.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 2.1: 72.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., S1-12.1: 17. Banks also said that the sheep were sheared in May. This was a common practice as it left the animals cooler during the hot summer months, but allowed enough time for them to regrow a full coat before the next winter.

<sup>18</sup> Entry for May 23, 1854, Plantation journal, James Washington Watts Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

<sup>19</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 13.3: 28.

Flax grew about two feet high and hemp about three high. The hands would go through and cut it down and let it lay there till it rotted. It was then gathered up and placed in the brakes. A brake was a frame on a stand with a slatted floor about three feet long and three or four feet high. The flax was laid across these slats and a lever pressed down to break the chaff from the coarse thread like skin. The chaff fell to the ground and the skins were placed in piles to be run through the heckles. Heckles were comb-like things made of wood with teeth like a comb or brush. The flax was combed through three or four heckles each one a little finer than the other. This product was called tow. This made coarse linen.<sup>20</sup>

On cotton plantations, some of the cash crop was set aside for home use rather than shipped to market. Rose Williams gave an abbreviated summary of the months of work that went into transforming cotton from boll to fabric.<sup>21</sup> Her recollections demonstrate the close relationship enslaved people had to their clothing through this process. Williams stated that the slaves' "clothes dat we wore was made right dar what we lives, first we picks de cotton in baskets, den feeds it ter a little ole gin. . . . Den it was carded, spinned, and den weaved and made into our clothes."<sup>22</sup>

The first steps of cotton processing were done on all plantations regardless of whether any of it was home manufactured. Seed cotton was much heavier than lint cotton, and uncleaned cotton was also susceptible to dirt, plant debris, and pests that could ruin it. Ginning, sorting, moting, and pressing were a part of slaves' lives on all cotton plantations. As noted above, much of the work of processing cotton was done indoors to keep the cotton dry, which meant the labor could be done in inclement weather or at night.

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<sup>20</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S1-12.1: 18.

<sup>21</sup> For more on home production of flax and wool see Adrienne D. Hood, *The Weaver's Craft: Cloth, Commerce, and Industry in Early Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), chapter 3.

<sup>22</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S2-10.9: 4125.

Many slaves remembered their days spent in the fields picking bolls and their evenings and nights spent cleaning them. Andrew Boone said that he and the other slaves “had a task of pickin’ de seed from cotton till we had two ounces of lint” each evening.<sup>23</sup> Though he did not recall how much work was required, Joe Hawkins also remembered that the slaves “had to pick seeds out of so much cotton befo’ going to bed.”<sup>24</sup> Willis Easter said that picking seeds from the lint was “a slow job” and he fell asleep “many a night, settin’ by de fire, pickin’ lint.”<sup>25</sup> In addition to hand picking, ginning was also done. There were several types of gins that came in a variety of sizes during the antebellum period. Saw gins were used to clean short staple cotton, while roller gins were preferred for long staple cotton; both required the work of multiple adults together. The former were very fast, ginning several pounds of cotton per day, but often the saws damaged the fibers and reduced the end price a planter could get for his crop. This was particularly important for long staple cotton, which was prized for its finer quality because of the longer fibers. Roller gins could not clear seed as fast as saw gins, but the roller did not break the fiber.<sup>26</sup>

After cotton was ginned it was usually cleaned again by hand as it was sorted into different grades. If some of the crop was to be used on the plantation for textiles, it was usually the lowest graded cotton that was set aside as it would fetch the least amount at market. This also resulted in the end product of homemade cotton textiles being of a rough quality. Cotton that was to be sent to market was then pressed into bales and stored in a dry place, or sent to a port for shipping. It likely ended up in a

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 14.1: 133.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., S1-8.3: 957.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 4.2: 1

<sup>26</sup> Lakwete, *Inventing the Cotton Gin*.

textile mill in Manchester, England, or in the northern United States, where it would be carded, spun, and woven into cloth.<sup>27</sup> It was then either sold by the yard or made into loose, unfitted ready-made garments such as men's shirts and women's chemises. In either cloth or ready-made garment form, this same cotton could potentially end up right back on the same plantation where it had been grown, clothing the same enslaved laborers who had cultivated it from seed.

The ginned and sorted cotton that was not sent to market was next carded or combed. All of the fibers discussed in this chapter received similar treatments and went through the same process from the point of carding and combing through to the end use product. Carding and combing were both methods of pulling apart and fluffing the fibers to ready them for spinning. Cards were a set of wooden paddles with wire teeth attached to one side. The fiber was placed between the teeth of the two cards, and the worker moved the cards back and forth, sliding the teeth of each paddle across each other and agitating the fibers between the teeth.<sup>28</sup> Carding could sometimes damage fibers, so combing was used when a longer fiber was desired. Combs were wooden plates with wires attached to them. Unlike carding, which involved mashing the fibers between two cards, the worker ran the fibers through a single comb to pull them apart and straighten them out.

The process of carding was becoming mechanized during the antebellum period. Some enslaved people remembered that wool was sent out to be carded

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<sup>27</sup> Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 10–12; Barbara M. Tucker, *Industrializing Antebellum America: The Rise of Manufacturing Entrepreneurs in the Early Republic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>28</sup> Jane Mickens Toombs noted that some slaves found an alternate use for these tools: “in dem times ef a nigger wanted ter git de kinks out’n dey hair, dey combed hit wide de cards.” Rawick, *American Slave*, 13.4: 36. The term *nappy*, used to refer to the coarse, tightly curled quality of the hair of people of African descent, likely came from a textile process that created a nap, or a soft fuzz, along the surface of a woven fabric.

after the sheep were sheared, and then it came back ready for spinning. An advertisement in the *Easton Gazette* in Maryland on July 21, 1838, noted a “carding machine at Fowling Creek Caroline County” that was ready to receive jobs “having undergone considerable expense by fitting her out with almost an entirely new set of cards.” The operators “expected that wool sent to the mill will be well picked and greased,” meaning clean of dirt, debris, and oils from the sheep, and would cost five cents for running it through the machine once, seven cents for twice carding it.<sup>29</sup>

The next step in the production process was to spin the fiber into thread or yarn. Spinning could be done on a wheel, or using a drop spindle. It is likely that enslaved spinners used both types of tools in the antebellum South. Wheels were more complex and thus more expensive to purchase. A drop spindle, a short stick with a weight, or whorl, at one end, was a simpler tool that could also be carried from place to place. The wheel produced thread at a faster rate than the drop spindle. Fewer workers operating wheels could arguably produce as much in one day as more workers operating drop spindles. The type of tool used depended on the plantation owner’s belief in which was more economical, on the needs of the plantation, and on the number of available workers.

Some plantations used slaves, usually older women and young children, whose primary labor was to spin. Callie Williams’ mother not only “looked after the slave babies” but “also had to spin cotton.”<sup>30</sup> Cato Carter referred to nursing mothers as the “nursling thread” because of the expectation that they spin. As a boy, Carter’s

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<sup>29</sup> Advertisement, *Easton Gazette*, July 21, 1838.

<sup>30</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S1-1.1: 452.

job was to “take them the thread and bring it back to the house when it was spun.”<sup>31</sup>

Alice Hutcheson and the other children on the plantation where she lived had to spin “six cuts of thread for a days wuk.”<sup>32</sup>

Though the records are clear that slaves were involved on an almost daily basis with textile production, it is more difficult to determine how much labor they were expected to do. For example, a “cut” of thread varied depending on the size and type of the equipment used. In one case, a cut was 300 yards, and the daily amount expected was four cuts, or 1200 yards.<sup>33</sup> On another plantation spinners were expected to produce “seven or eight cuts a day” but it remains unknown how much yardage equaled a cut in this instance.<sup>34</sup>

While overseers and planters often marked textile production as non-work in their records, it is clear that they also expected that this labor be accomplished. Cato Carter recalled that if spinners did not meet their daily quota “they would get a whuppin.”<sup>35</sup> Enslaved people used tactics similar to methods of resistance for other kinds of labor. Mollie Dawson said that the master of the plantation would examine the amount and quality of thread spun every day, and counted the skeins “to see dat each woman was doin’ what she was sposed to” do. But Dawson continued that “lots of de womens could do lots mo’ den dey was sposed to, but dey knew jest about how fast ter work ter gits what dey was tasked to do.”<sup>36</sup> By withholding their own labor, and doing so collectively so that no individual stood out as faster or slower

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., S2-2.2: 642–43.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 2.2: 285.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., S1-1.1: 452.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., S2-2.2: 643.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., S2-4.3: 1127.

than the others, these enslaved spinners got the better of their master despite his careful monitoring.

On other plantations, spinning and other textile work was considered secondary labor to the main work in the fields during the day. William Henry Towns recalled helping his mother at night as she “set an’ spin wid a spindle” so that “she could git her tas’ done.”<sup>37</sup> Towns’s mother likely spent a full day in the field where she worked in a gang labor system, but at night she was expected to complete a certain amount of spinning under the task labor system. In a farm book kept by William John Connors he often notes a few women who spun during the workday while the rest of the women hoed, weeded, picked cotton, or did other field labor.<sup>38</sup>

After the fibers were spun they were ready to be woven or knitted, both tasks done primarily by enslaved women. As with spinning, weaving and knitting could be assigned as sick work, done during inclement weather, or the exclusive task of some slaves. Acie Thomas recalled that “knitting cotton and woolen stockings” was the task of “young slave girls.”<sup>39</sup> Likewise, Annie Osborne was kept busy when a young girl; she noted she had to knit a stocking each day or the plantation mistress would “put the lash on.”<sup>40</sup>

Weavers were adult women, though children could assist with setting up the loom and throwing the shuttle. “Weaving was hard work,” according to Sina Banks, because “the whole body was in constant motion as there was five pedals to be

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 6.1: 388.

<sup>38</sup> Farm Book, 1841–1843, William John Connors, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

<sup>39</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 17.1: 330.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., S2-8: 2990.

operated and in throwing the shuttle through you had to use both feet and hands.”<sup>41</sup>

Looms ranged in size, some being large enough that two people were needed to span the width of the cloth being woven. The varying sizes again make it difficult to determine how much work was expected each day for weavers. Elsie Reece said she was required to weave four yards per day, but she does not specify how wide the cloth was.<sup>42</sup> Tildy Moody wove on a loom that produced cloth that was eighteen inches wide.<sup>43</sup>

These were not quiet machines. To achieve a tight, solid structure, the weaver had to pull the beater forcefully after every few passes of the shuttle. Combined with the heddles moving up and down, this could make for quite a lot of noise. Johnson Thompson, whose mother was weaver, recalled that she had to “work late in the night, and I hear the loom making noises while I try to sleep.”<sup>44</sup>

Textile tools such as cards, wheels, and looms were often purchased by slaveholders. During his time enslaved in Louisiana, Solomon Northup recalled making a loom so that “Sally might commence weaving cloth for the winter garments of the slaves.”<sup>45</sup> After examining another loom, Northup succeeded in constructing one that “worked so well” that he “was continued in the employment of making looms, which were taken down to the plantation on the bayou.”<sup>46</sup> Northup’s mechanical abilities speak to the importance of artisanal male slaves in making all kinds of tools on the plantation for use in working the cash crop and for other kinds of labor such as textile production.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., S1-12.1: 17.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., S2-8: 3273.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., S2-7: 2728.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., S1-12.1: 311.

<sup>45</sup> Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 102.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 103.

Enslaved people often took great time and energy to color the thread, yarn, and cloth that they produced, which began the process of individualizing their appearances. Dyeing was done either before the thread or yarn was woven in order to create colored designs such as stripes and checks, or it was done after weaving to achieve a solid colored fabric. Women were usually the ones to do the dyeing, sometimes with the assistance of children in gathering natural dyestuffs or tending fires. Of the homemade colored cloth he wore when enslaved, Ebenezer Brown remarked that it was “pretty” and “niver wore out.”<sup>47</sup>

Dyestuffs could be procured from locally available natural items, or they could be purchased.<sup>48</sup> Slaveholders and slaves procured a variety of coloring agents. Marie Askin Simpson remembered that “yarn was dyed all sorts of pretty colors, red, black, yellow, blue, brown, and purple.”<sup>49</sup> Nicey Kinney remarked, “dere didn’t nobody have no better or prettier dress dan ours, ‘cause Mistess knowed more’n anybody ‘bout dyein’ cloth. . . . Mistess could dye the prettiest sort of purple wid sweetgum bark. Cop’ras was used to keep de colors from fadin’, and she knowed so well how to handle it dat you could wash cloth what she had dyed all day long and it wouldn’t fade a speck.”<sup>50</sup>

Knowledge about dyeing and dyestuffs came from many sources. Some of it may have been passed down through generations from women who came originally from Africa. In the Benin in West Africa women were the dyers, weavers, and

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., S1-6.1: 249.

<sup>48</sup> A very detailed and complete table of the dyestuffs and mordants mentioned in the WPA narratives is “Appendix III” in Helen Bradley Foster, *New Raiments of Self: African American Clothing in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Berg, 1997).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., S1-2.4: 232.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 13.3: 26–27. Copperas was a very common mordant, or binding agent, used in the antebellum South.

spinners before and during the Atlantic slave trade.<sup>51</sup> But in areas of West and Northeast Africa where the narrow treadle loom was used (known for producing the strip cloths popular as currency in African trade routes), men were the primary weavers.<sup>52</sup> Dyeing, weaving, and spinning also all had a long history in Europe, where many English women knew how to spin, and increasingly also how to weave and dye as the network of the guild system was broken down over the eighteenth century.<sup>53</sup> Weaving and spinning were likely skills taught by women of both races to each other, though by the antebellum period these tasks were seen as below the station of elite white women.<sup>54</sup> In the North American colonies, both Europeans and Africans encountered strange new plants that contained multiple possibilities as dyestuffs. The natural dyes of the antebellum South were likely a combination of both of these Old World cultures adapting previous experience to a new environment; this was a shared knowledge of skills that created a uniquely American dye culture.

One of the most commonly used dyestuffs in the antebellum South was indigo. Marie Askin Simpson noted that indigo could make various shades of blue or purple “just according to how long or strong the dye that was used.”<sup>55</sup> Simpson used indigo purchased from a drygoods merchant by the master. Indigo was grown by

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<sup>51</sup> Colleen E. Kriger, *Cloth in West African History* (Lanham, Md.: AltaMira Press, 2006); 43 and 124.

<sup>52</sup> Kriger, *Cloth in West African History*, 70; Judith Perani and Norma Hackelman Wolff, eds. *Cloth, Dress, and Art Patronage in West Africa* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1999), 120.

<sup>53</sup> Adrienne D. Hood, *The Weaver's Craft*; Marla R. Miller, *The Needle's Eye: Women and Work in the Age of Revolution* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006); Laurel Thather Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Knopf, 2001). All three of these studies focus on the Northeast.

<sup>54</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, “Chapter Ten: If I Were Once Released: The Garb of Gender,” in *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 220-233; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

<sup>55</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S1-2.4: 232.

some other slaveholders, and the plants cultivated and harvested by enslaved laborers. Emma Tidwell gave a detailed description of how she and other slaves cultivated, harvested, and prepared indigo for use as dye:

We planted indigo an hit growed jes like wheat. When hit got ripe we gathered hit an we would put hit in a barrel an let hit soak bout er week den we would take de indigo stems out an squeeze all de juice outn dem, put de juice back in de barrel an let hit stay dere bout nother week, den we jes stirred an stirred one whole day. We let hit set three or four days den drained de water offn hit an dat left de settlings an de settlings wuz blueing jes like us have dese days. We cut our in little blocks. Den we dyed clothes wid hit. We had purty blue cloth. De way we set de color we put alum in hit. Dat make de color stay right dere.<sup>56</sup>

Indigo was a dye that had been cultivated in Asia, Africa, and the Americas for thousands of years. It was prized for its ability to bind with many different fibers and to produce a variety of shades from very pale blue to near black.<sup>57</sup>

Walnut hulls were another versatile dyestuff used by enslaved people. Marie Askin Simpson recalled using “the ripe black hulls” for dark browns and black, and the “young green hulls” for lighter shades of brown. Simpson stated the hulls were boiled for a long time and then strained from the water. Next, “the yarn was laid in the cold juice of the walnut, until it took on the shade we wanted. Then it was hung to dry without squeezing.”<sup>58</sup> Bark from oak, pine, and sumac trees was also commonly used to create shades of brown.

Brighter colors were more difficult to achieve using natural dyestuffs, though Dan Bogie recalled that his sister’s winter dress was dyed with “poke berries” and

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 10.5: 331.

<sup>57</sup> Two excellent surveys of the world history of indigo are Jenny Balfour-Paul, *Indigo: Egyptian Mummies to Blue Jeans* (London: British Museum Press, 2011); Jenny Balfour-Paul, *Indigo in the Arab World* (Surrey, Eng.: Curzon, 1997).

<sup>58</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S1-2.4: 323–33.

her summer dress was “dyed with yellow mustard seed.”<sup>59</sup> Slaveholder Mary S. Pringle’s receipt book contained a recipe for “bright yellow dye” given to her from a Clarissa Mumford, likely a friend or family member. “Make a strong decoction with the bark of the Hickory. After boiling, strain it and when cool, add a little Alum - then put in the yarn and cover the pot and leave it near the fire, to be kept warm (but not to boil) for 12 hours. After this, take out the yarn and when almost dry rinse it and, in Spring water, with a little salt in it. Shake it well and hang it out to dry.”<sup>60</sup>

If cloth, yarn, or thread was not treated properly or soaked long enough at the correct temperature, the dyeing process would fail. Store-bought dyes and mordants had to be carefully measured to ensure the desired color. If dyers were inexperienced or did not take care to properly set the dye, fabrics would bleed and fade very quickly. James Caldwell recollected a rather humorous incident related to a poor dye job: “Pants were dyed purple out of a home-made dye which if gotten wet or perspired on would ‘run.’ Once a young man put on a pair, and when he perspired the color faded and dyed his skin. He thought he was in the throes of death so he ran home very frightened and said he thought he was mortifying.”<sup>61</sup> Clearly, dyeing

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 16.2: 2.

<sup>60</sup> “1863—Bright Yellow Dye,” in Mary S. Pringle Receipt Book, Alston-Pringle Papers, South Carolina Historical Society. Both alum and salt were used as mordants. Other white women recorded recipes, especially during the Civil War, for different colors. Black was particularly popular in these years because of the increased need for mourning clothes and for its ability to hide stained or soiled fabric. For an example see Mrs. J. Deveraux Recipe Book, Devereux Family Papers. Duke University Special Collections: “Black Dye from Mrs. Turner:” “Take the parsley, roots and all and black gum bark or roots and boil it in water sufficient to work what yarn you have to dye. When all the strength is out of the bark and roots add 1/2 lb of extract of logwood and a table-spoon full of copperas. Keep the pot near the fire so as to keep the dye warm, steep the cotton in it for two or three days. Take it out and dry it in the hot sun, if not black enough (which it will not be.) put it back in the pot. Should the dye lose its strength, add some more logwood, black-gum roots and parsley, and boil down again. Take out the roots add a little more copperas and put the cotton back. The dye ought not to get cold at any rate while the cotton is in. This will dye raw cotton beautifully and then spin the thread, but it will take two months. Drying it in the sun and putting it back in the pot.”

<sup>61</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S1-11.2: 96.

required time, knowledge, and skill, but enslaved people were willing to invest in the dyeing process to achieve visual individualization.

It is after this stage in the textile production process that more enslaved people became involved in the work. On plantations where slaveholders purchased cloth yardage, fabric had many steps to go to be turned into wearable apparel. In southern textile factories, workers were primarily white women and children, though a few did use slaves.<sup>62</sup> Thus, enslaved laborers were used in the home production of textiles, but in the earliest transitions to factory production white workers were preferred, a habit that was continued in the postbellum South.

There was little ready-made clothing during this period, and most of it was relatively expensive. Some planters did purchase items ready-made, including one who bought “2 Jackson frock coats for Peter and Pompey; 2 Extra size coats for Hickory - Big Jem; 10 No. 1 coats; 8 No. 2 coats; 3 No. 3 coats for Andrew, Broughton, and Ned, Joan's son” in 1853.<sup>63</sup> The mechanization of clothing production had not yet reached a stage when large machines churned out hundreds of shirts or stockings per day. Clothing that came finished was done by hand or by human-powered treadle sewing machines. This outwork was very poorly compensated labor that was usually paid by the piece.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Michele Gillespie, “To Harden a Lady’s Hand: Gender Politics, Racial Realities, and Women Millworkers in Antebellum Georgia” in *Neither Lady Nor Slave: Working Women of the Old South*, eds. Susanna Delfino and Michele Gillespie (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 261–284; Bess Beatty, “I Can’t Get My Bored on Them Old Lomes: Female Textile Workers in the Antebellum South” in *Ibid.*, 249–260; John Killick, “The Cotton Operations of Alexander Brown and Sons in the Deep South,” *Journal of Southern History* 43 (May 1977): 169–194.

<sup>63</sup> Blanket List for 1853, Slave Blanket Book, 1853–1860. South Carolina Historical Society.

<sup>64</sup> Andrew Godley, “Homeworking and the Sewing Machine in the British Clothing Industry 1850–1905,” in *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking*, ed. Barbara Burman (Oxford, Eng.: Berg, 1995), 255–268. Godley notes that England accepted and adopted ready-made apparel earlier than U.S.; this could partly be because in the United States it was deemed clothing for poor or slaves. See Godley, 260. Anne Hollander directly contradicts Godley; see *Sex and Suits*,

Once cloth was either produced at home or purchased, it needed to be cut into pattern pieces. This task most often fell to the white plantation mistress, who did the work with her own hands or who carefully supervised enslaved women. In her plantation records, slaveholder Mary Pringle lists “work cut out and put under Celia’s care” that includes fourteen servants’ shirts along with eight shirts apiece for the master and his three sons and ten chemises for Pringle.<sup>65</sup> In this case, the plantation mistress likely did the cutting, and then gave the cut garments to the enslaved woman Celia for finishing. White women were often involved in the distribution and making of plantation clothing, but the extent differed from plantation to plantation.<sup>66</sup> The primary reason given by slaveholding women for doing the cutting themselves was their fear of enslaved women as wasteful. The plantation mistress’s involvement in clothing production was focused just as much on economy as was the work of her husband in raising a cash crop. Assumptions about slaves as negligent or careless, and the potential theft of extra cloth, meant that slaveholding women picked up their shears to save money.

Finally, after the fabric was cut into pattern pieces it was ready to be stitched into a garment. Most slaves’ clothing did not require knowledge of fine sewing skills such as those of a professional seamstress or tailor. During the antebellum period most women, even the wealthiest, knew plain sewing skills. Many enslaved women

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(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 107–108. Hollander also notes that men’s apparel transitioned as ready-made much earlier than women’s (117). See also Tyler Rudd Putman, “The Slop Shop and the Almshouse: Ready-Made Menswear in Philadelphia, 1780-1820,” Master’s thesis, University of Delaware Winterthur Program in Early American Material Culture, 2011.

<sup>65</sup> Mary Pringle record of servants, June 7, 1852, Alston-Pringle Papers, South Carolina Historical Society.

<sup>66</sup> Scholars have long debated how much actual physical labor was done by the plantation mistress. See Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 26–27; and Deborah Gray White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1999), 122–123, for examples of differing views on this issue.

were also tasked with sewing together clothing for themselves, their husbands and children, and any single men. Kisey McKimm said that her mother “took de old cloes of Mistress Mary ‘n made clothes fo’ us to wear,” demonstrating that sewing was an important part of recycled clothing in the slave community.<sup>67</sup>

Young girls were sometimes set to work constructing simpler parts of garments. Mary Childs, “had to sew seams” when she was young under the tight supervision of the mistress. Childs “would sit side of her when she was makin’ pants, and put de raw seams around de pockets, and down between de legs. She had a cowhide layin’ side of her, ‘bout as long as yo’ arm, and if it warn’t done right she’d whip me.”<sup>68</sup> Gladys Robertson also recalled that “clothes were made by the colored women under the direction and supervision of their mistress.”<sup>69</sup> Betty Cofer, who learned to sew and make coats from the mistress, claimed, “Miss Julia bossed the whole plantation.”<sup>70</sup> Cofer’s status as a young woman during slavery, along with the type of labor typical of young enslaved women, influenced her perception of who was in charge of the plantation. Cofer worked at tasks assigned almost exclusively to women and children, and generally this work was overseen by white women. It is possible that Cofer lived on the plantation of a widowed slaveholder, but it is more likely that her memories of enslavement and her association of the mistress being in charge were due to her age and gender.<sup>71</sup>

The work of textile production was reflected in the landscape of the plantation. Buildings or dry covered spaces at the least were needed for spinning, weaving,

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<sup>67</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 16.4: 64.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, S1-3.1: 200.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.2: 84.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.1: 170.

<sup>71</sup> For more on cultures of sewing and women’s work see Miller, *The Needle’s Eye*.

sewing, and laundering.<sup>72</sup> Robert Shepherd recalled that the plantation where he lived “had a great long loom house whar some of de slaves didn’t do nothin’ but weave cloth. Some cyarded bats, some done de spinnin’, and dere was more of ‘em to do de sewin’. Miss Ellen, she looked atter all dat, and she cut out most of de clothes.”<sup>73</sup> This building was a space on the plantation that was operated by a female supervisor and consisted of female adult workers and children of both sexes. These were places where white women held a great amount of power over enslaved laborers.

Mary Reynolds noted more than one space on the plantation where she lived devoted to the manufacture of cloth and clothing. In addition to a spinning house that contained “two looms and two spinnin’ wheels goin’ all the time,” the owner had a seamstress who “done fine sewin’ for the whites.” This woman, whom Reynolds remembered as “a yaller gal dressed in fine style,” lived and worked in her own “house ‘way from the quarters” that was built especially for her by the master.<sup>74</sup> This woman may have had similar experiences to Gracy, the seamstress enslaved on Andrew Jackson’s plantation in Tennessee, which he called the Hermitage. Archaeological work around the plantation site has revealed interesting information regarding the internal economy of plantations.<sup>75</sup> These were isolated, rural sites that

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<sup>72</sup> John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

<sup>73</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 13.3: 253–54.

<sup>74</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 5.3: 241. Though Reynolds does not say it, this mixed-race woman, living in an isolated place on the plantation, was likely also forced to serve as a sex worker in addition to her sewing skills.

<sup>75</sup> For a book-length study using archaeology, see Anne E. Yentsch’s work on the plantation of the Calvert family in Maryland, *A Chesapeake Family and Their Slaves: A Study in Historical Archaeology* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1994). For more on the internal economy of plantations see Dylan C. Penningroth, *Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003) and Betty

were home to hundreds of people. Researchers were able to locate the site of Gracy's living space because of the great number of sewing implements found, including pins, needles, and scissors. But they also located these same items in other areas around the plantation. They concluded that the seamstress, who did not have time to grow extra food, likely bartered with other slaves on the plantation with the tools of her trade for foodstuffs from their gardens.<sup>76</sup>

Some enslaved seamstresses used their artisanal skills to find freedom. Harriet Jacobs and Elizabeth Keckley were seamstresses while enslaved. Keckley developed a group of loyal clients over time who loaned her the money to purchase her freedom. She eventually moved to Washington, D.C., where she became one of the most influential women regarding pre-Civil War fashion in the nation's capital. She was the dressmaker of Senator Jefferson Davis's wife, Varina, among other political wives. After Davis gave up his Senate seat and became the president of the Confederate States of America, Keckley found an even more famous client in the new first lady, Mary Todd Lincoln. Keckley's list of prominent clients meant she had unprecedented access to the private conversations of leading politicians and their wives. She was also a tastemaker in the capital; women like Davis and Lincoln looked to this formerly enslaved woman for cues on the most stylish fabrics, trimmings, and accessories for their elaborate ball gowns and everyday calling ensembles.<sup>77</sup>

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Wood, *Women's Work, Men's Work: The Informal Slave Economies of Lowcountry Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995).

<sup>76</sup> Jillian E. Galle, "Designing Women: Measuring Acquisition and Access at the Hermitage Plantation," in *Engendering African American Archaeology: A Southern Perspective*, ed. Jillian E. Galle and Amy L. Young (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004).

<sup>77</sup> Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes, or, Thirty years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House* (New York: G. W. Carleton & Co., Publishers, 1868); Jennifer Fleischner, *Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs.*

Jacobs, who later wrote and published her story, escaped to the North after hiding for seven years in a small attic crawl space to ensure her children's freedom and safety. She used her sewing skills once she reached the North to continue earning money as a free woman.<sup>78</sup> In a runaway advertisement placed by the man whom she ran from, Jacobs was described as "a good seamstress" who was "accustomed to dress well" and "will probably appear, if abroad, tricked out in gay and fashionable finery." The advertisement continues that Jacobs "has a variety of very fine clothes, made in the prevailing fashion."<sup>79</sup> Jacobs's skills provided her unique access to high-quality fabrics, which she also knew how to make into fashionable and fitted garments for herself. An advertisement for another woman with sewing skills named Caroline noted that "she usually dresses well" and drew attention to her peculiar way of working, stating, "When sewing she does not generally use her forefinger on her left hand."<sup>80</sup> Caroline's unique approach to her work might get her caught if she attempted to use her skill to make money as a free person.

Clothing care and maintenance is another example of work being done, but not considered as labor. On many plantations slaves were expected to spend all or part of their evenings and Saturdays cleaning their living quarters, their belongings,

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*Keckly: The Remarkable Story of the Friendship between a First Lady and a Former Slave* (New York: Broadway Books, 2004). Keckley was active before, during, and after the Civil War in various relief organizations and her son died as a soldier early in the war, having passed as white before African Americans were allowed to serve.

<sup>78</sup> Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written by Herself*, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (1861, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>79</sup> Advertisement, *American Beacon*, July 4, 1835.

<sup>80</sup> Advertisement, *Georgia Telegraph*, September 28, 1852.

and themselves.<sup>81</sup> Tom Douglas recalled, “We had to go nice and clean. If old missus caught us dirty our hide was busted.”<sup>82</sup> Callie Williams noted that the slaves “must appear in clean clothes Monday morning to go to work, or else get punished for being dirty.”<sup>83</sup> Williams also “said the slaves did not work on Saturday afternoons; that was their time to clean up their quarters and wash their clothes.”<sup>84</sup> Saturday afternoons and Sundays on many plantations were times for enslaved people to care for their bodies, their homes, and their social lives. Mose Davis remarked that enslaved people did “personal work such as the washing and the repairing of clothing” after spending the day laboring “since no work was required at night.”<sup>85</sup> By forcing enslaved people to be clean at the risk of punishment, slaveholders extended their mastery into time that slaves could otherwise have spent unreservedly.<sup>86</sup>

Laundering clothing was difficult, heavy, hot work that was considered far beneath elite white women. Free black women often found work as laundresses because it was so incredibly abhorred as both hard labor and improper for a lady.<sup>87</sup> Mary Frances Webb stated that the women “had no tubs or washboards. They had a large flat block of wood and a wooden paddle. They’d spread the wet garment on the block, spread soap on it and paddle the garment till it was clean. They would rinse

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<sup>81</sup> Kathleen M. Brown, *Foul Bodies: Cleanliness in Early America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), chapter 12.

<sup>82</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 8.2: 194.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, S1-1.1: 452.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 12.1: 266.

<sup>86</sup> For examples of slave management and care regarding cleanliness of person and clothing see James O. Breeden, ed., *Advice Among Masters: The Ideal in Slave Management in the Old South* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), chapter 10.

<sup>87</sup> For an excellent study on cleanliness, including how it was used to define racial difference, see Brown, *Foul Bodies*, especially chapters 10 and 12. See also Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America* (2nd ed.; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 80–81.

the clothes in the creek. Their soap was made from lye, dripped from ashes, and meat scraps.”<sup>88</sup> Julia Stubbs said, “It took ’bout all day to do dem washings.”<sup>89</sup>

Enslaved people did not wash themselves and their clothing only because they were required to by slaveholders. The pride in appearance and the care taken of special clothing was an important part of life during slavery. Hattie Sugg recalled that her mother used her task of soap-making to obtain what she needed to wash her own items. Sugg said her mother would “steal a gourd full of it an’ bury it some place to wash our Sunday clothes with.” Sugg also remarked that it must all be washed on Sunday, the only time Sugg’s mother had to do this kind of work for herself and her family.<sup>90</sup>

In addition to washing, nicer clothing was starched or ironed. Much of this labor was done for the clothing of the white family, though some enslaved people did recall starching their fine clothing. Julia Stubbs stated there was always “a heap o’ ironing to be done” because the “white folks wore lots of white ruffled up, full things dat had to be starched an’ ironed.”<sup>91</sup> Starching and ironing required a bit more skill and attention than laundering, especially for delicate high-quality fabrics. A runaway advertisement with a two hundred dollar reward noted that the woman Moll, or Molly, was “an Ironer, Washer, and Clear-starcher, and has been several months, heretofore, doing the fine washing at the Mills House.”<sup>92</sup> Like enslaved

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<sup>88</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 7.1: 314–15. Maggie Pinkared recalled a similar situation and method for laundering: “There wasn’t any washboards. They had a big wide board. Lay the clothes on the board after they soak ‘em up and with a paddle they would beat out the dirt.” See Pinkared’s interview in *Ibid.*, S1-12.1: 256.

<sup>89</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S1-10.5: 2069.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, S1-10.5: 2076.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, S1-10.5: 2069.

<sup>92</sup> Advertisement, *Charleston Mercury*, May 11, 1858.

seamstresses, a woman with the skills to care properly for fine quality clothing could find wages to support herself if she ran away temporarily or permanently.

The intimate knowledge enslaved people had about the production of textiles from raw materials to finished garments greatly impacted how they understood the clothing they wore. Even those slaves who did not participate regularly in making fabric or clothing were aware of the labor done by others in the slave community to provide garments for all the slave population. This was especially true on cotton plantations of the antebellum period, where slaves were integral in every single step of the creation of clothing from its beginnings as a seed. Most enslaved people lived in isolated rural locations, yet they were likely aware of their importance within a global market as both producers and consumers through their participation in the creation of textiles and clothing. Knowing how to spin, weave, and dye cloth aided enslaved people in customizing their everyday work clothing, while sewing, laundering, and mending helped them in their endeavors to resist conditions of servitude and racism by dressing up. The work of textile production done by slaves was a crucial part of the southern economy. Enslaved people found in this required labor ways to individualize appearance and participate in American fashion through their creation of fabric and clothing.

## *Chapter Five*

### Troubled Soles: Footwear in Slavery

Frederick Douglass, writing the story of his time during enslavement in the South, stated, “My feet have been so cracked with the frost, that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes.”<sup>1</sup> Douglass carried these painful, permanent reminders of slavery for the rest of his life, most of which he spent as a free man and a celebrity in both the United States and Britain. Rather than asking one to walk a mile in his shoes, Douglass might better have proposed that a proslavery supporter walk a mile in his feet.

While it is easy to dismiss Douglass’s autobiography as an exaggerated accounting of slavery because of his political motives in supporting abolition, the above statement is corroborated time and again by the testimonies of others who experienced enslavement in the antebellum South. Even for those who did have shoes, slaves’ footwear was cheap and ill fitting. Enslaved people found ways to resist through personalizing their shoes by coloring or patching them, and enslaved shoemakers gained access to methods of resistance similar to those of enslaved seamstresses. The following pages discuss the role of men in making shoes, the types of footwear worn by enslaved people, and the consequences of poor quality or nonexistent shoes for enslaved bodies. Vulnerable feet were a gamble made by slaveholders for monetary reasons, but the added bonus of making those feet painful and ugly served to mark black bodies as unclean, uncivilized, and un-American.

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1995), 16.

Shoes were one of the first types of wearing apparel to be produced in mass quantity to a standard size.<sup>2</sup> For example, an entry in a pocketbook entitled “Shoes” lists “11 par no 11 — 25 no 10 — 3 no 12 — 22 no 9 — 23 no 8 — 9 no 7 — 6 no 6 — 1 no 5.”<sup>3</sup> Planter John Rutherford wrote often from Richmond, Virginia, to his son, also named John, who was on the family’s plantation, about supplying shoes for the slaves. On November 22, 1849, he wrote: “As the weather has been so very mild I do not suppose that the women who were not fitted with shoes, have suffered for the want of them. It wd. perhaps have been as well if we had deferred a while longer the delivery of shoes to the rest of the hands.”<sup>4</sup> Rutherford’s frequent mentions of measuring and forgetting the correct size shoes for the slaves reveal his apprehension of letting enslaved people’s feet be exposed during the winter months. Yet the letter quoted above indicates he also strove to strike a balance between spending money on only what was absolutely necessary. Ready-made shoes often cost between one and two dollars throughout the antebellum period, depending on the size and style of the shoe.<sup>5</sup> An advertisement in the *Columbia Telescope* placed by a merchant noted a variety of shoes for sale, including many types for white

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<sup>2</sup> Like the ready-made clothing in the Old South, ready-made shoes were shipped from New England. The center of shoe production in the United States was in Lynn, Massachusetts. Scholarship on this industry is sparse and mostly limited to studies of workers done by labor historians. See Mary H. Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work: Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780–1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976); and Paul G. Faler, *Mechanics and Manufacturers in the Early Industrial Revolution: Lynn, Massachusetts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981).

<sup>3</sup> Undated pocketbook, Devereux Family Papers, Duke University Special Collections.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from John Rutherford Sr. to John C. Rutherford, November 22, 1849, John C. Rutherford Papers, Duke University Special Collections.

<sup>5</sup> List of expenses, 1850–1858, Morris Conley Account Book, Duke University Special Collections. For a comparison, in 1851, Conley purchased osnaburg at \$0.11 per yard, for a cost of about \$0.66 per slave if each slave received six yards of cloth as was typical. Thus it cost Conley only \$0.66 to clothe each slave, but at least \$1.00 to provide footwear per slave.

customers as well as “a large assortment of House servants shoes” and “3000 pair, first rate sewed and nailed” Negro shoes.<sup>6</sup>

Some planters, particularly those with larger plantations, had shoes made for their slaves. The process began when an animal was slaughtered. The hides had to go through a long, arduous processing before the shoemaker could work with them. The period from slaughter to prepared hide took several weeks. Cobbling was an exclusively male job.<sup>7</sup> Conventional male tasks such as carving, blacksmithing, and tanning were all components of shoemaking. William Curtis was involved in this work and described the process in detail:

We'd kill a beef and skin it and spread the skin out and let it dry a while. We'd put the hide in lime water to get the hair off, then we'd oil it and work it 'till it was soft. Next we'd take it to the bench and scrape or 'plesh' it with knives. It was then put in a tight cabinet and smoked with oak wood for about 24 hours. Smoking loosened the skin. We'd then take it out and rub it to soften it. It was blacked and oiled and it was ready to be made into shoes. It took nearly a year to get a green hide made into shoes.<sup>8</sup>

Tom Mills said that it took eighteen months to get hides tanned using the process on the plantation where he lived.<sup>9</sup> Emma Tidwell's father was a shoemaker and told her that instead of using lime water, he soaked the skins in “red oak bark and white oak bark” in large vats. The skins were taken out and the hair removed, and then put back in the vat with red oak bark, where they remained soaking until they “turnt tan.” After the tanning process, Tidwell's father “would get his pattern an cut an make tan

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<sup>6</sup> Advertisement, *Columbia Telescope*, October 2, 1832.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Blewett discusses the gender dynamics of labor in the New England shoe industry extensively, noting that women often fought to continue doing certain parts of the assembly process, especially those that involved sewing. See Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work*.

<sup>8</sup> George P. Rawick, ed. *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* (1941, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Company, reprint ed., 1972), 7.1: 49–50.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.3: 90.

shoes outn dat tanned hide” for all of the slaves on the plantation.<sup>10</sup> Emmaline Heard was not knowledgeable about the tanning process, but she did recall that the “tanning vats reminded her of baptismal holes.” She said, “The water was very deep” and recalled a dangerous moment when “her sister almost drowned in one.”<sup>11</sup> Heard’s story serves as a reminder of how dangerous plantations could be for children, whose parents were not allowed to provide adequate supervision to keep them safe.

John Harrison described how shoes were assembled once the hides were prepared: “As there was no shoe nails, shoe pegs were whittled out and the soles were put on with these pegs. The rest of the shoes were sewed together with waxed thread attached to hog bristles and drawn through the hole that was made by the pegging awl.”<sup>12</sup> William Williams said that his “father was a cobbler and I used to have to whittle out shoe pegs for him” as a child.<sup>13</sup> Likely, Williams served as a sort of apprentice to his father, learning the skills of shoemaking so that he could one day take over his father’s role. Williams’ relationship with his father provided both men with special skills to rely on, and strengthened affective bonds between father and son. Often, shoemakers did other work associated with tanning and leather. Frank Hughes noted that “when de shoemaker had made shoes for every body, den he had to prepare collars for de teams” of oxen using the same leather for the animal harnesses as for the slaves’ shoes.<sup>14</sup> A woman identified only as Adeline recalled how slaves blacked their russet colored shoes, a moment of individualizing one’s

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 10.5: 330.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 12.2: 149.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., S1-12.1: 147.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 16.4: 115.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., S1-8.3: 1061.

appearance: “De way dey got dem darker was to take a hog ‘gristle’ and hang up in de chimbley. When hit git full of soot, we rub de shoes wid dat. Den dey used de darker shoes for dere Sunday best.”<sup>15</sup>

Itinerant shoemakers, enslaved and free, traveled from plantation to plantation making up shoes for the slave population and then moved on to the next job. Thomas Johns recalled that “A shoemaker would come ‘round once a year and stay maybe thirty days, makin’ shoes for everybody on de place; den in about six months he would come back and half-sole and make other repairs to de shoes.”<sup>16</sup> Addie Vinson recalled that her shoes were made by white women who probably did the assembling of the shoes, sewing the soles and uppers together, rather than doing any tanning or carving of soles.<sup>17</sup> These two women worked in “a shoe shop in de cellar under de big house” and would stay at the plantation to make shoes for all of the slaves, then “go on to de next place what dey ‘spect to make shoes.”<sup>18</sup> Johns’s and Vinson’s experiences offer small insight into a class of itinerant artisans often overlooked in the history of the Old South. These traveling people were an important part of the South, going from place to place and providing specialized, skilled work that contributed to the overall success of the plantation economy. In some cases, these people were slaves hired out to various plantations in a rural community. In this way, enslaved artisans, including those with other skills besides shoemaking, gained greater mobility than most enslaved people of the Old South.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 6.1: 183–84.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 4.2: 203.

<sup>17</sup> Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work*.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 13.4: 103.

Some plantations had a designated shoemaker who spent all of his work time in making shoes for the slaves. Sometimes these were enslaved men, such as Dosia Harris's uncle, Moses Downs, who Harris said was "a smart shoemaker."<sup>19</sup> Tom Douglas himself "was a shoemaker" who "made all the shoes during the time we wasn't farming."<sup>20</sup> Likewise, Nellie Smith said the master of the plantation "owned a man what he kept there to do nothin' but make shoes."<sup>21</sup> These cobblers were not always enslaved men. Sylvia Cannon recalled they "Had shop dere on de plantation whe' white man made all de shoes and plows."<sup>22</sup>

Tanning was hot, smelly work, but it could be done by people who could not do fieldwork. Other steps in the shoemaking process such as carving soles and assembling parts were also tasks that could be performed by people who could not walk or had trouble with heavy labor for other reasons. This was the case for Isaiah Green's step-father, who "was afflicted and could not help with the work in the field. Since he was a skilled shoemaker his job was to make shoes in the winter."<sup>23</sup>

Like the itinerant white female shoemakers Vinson recalled, enslaved black women sometimes made shoes. Again, they were not tanning hides or carving soles, but they did sew other styles of shoes. Betty Brown recalled that her mother "wuz a shoe-maker, she'd make moccasins for all o' us."<sup>24</sup> Thomas McIntire also remembered that his mother would "sew up moccasins fer us ter protect our feet."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 12.2: 107.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 8.2: 194.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 13.3: 308.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 2.1: 190.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 12.2: 51.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 11.8: 52.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., S1-5.2: 409.

Enslaved men who knew how to do skilled labor could use these skills to gain access to goods that most slaves could not get. Sarah Ford remembered that when her father ran away from the plantation, he remained hiding in the neighborhood so he could continue to provide for his family. He used his skills as a tanner to “tan hides on de sly,” and the people where he was hiding fed him and paid him for his work. Ford remembered that “lots of mornin’s when us open de cabin door on a shelf jus’ ‘bove is food for mama and me, and sometime store clothes. No one ain’t see papa, but dere it is. One time he brung us dresses.”<sup>26</sup> While Ford’s father did not run far, other skilled slaves did run permanently to freedom. Numerous runaway advertisements indicated that slave men took shoemaking tools with them or noted that the runaway was a cobbler.<sup>27</sup>

The shoe pictured below dates to about 1860 and came to the South Carolina State History Museum from Darlington County, South Carolina.<sup>28</sup>



5.1 Unknown maker. *Shoe*. c. 1860. Cotton, leather, wood, metal. South Carolina State Museum, SC86.79.1.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 4.2: 45.

<sup>27</sup> For examples see Advertisement for Jim, *Richmond Enquirer*, January 12, 1830; Advertisement for Jeremiah W. Reade, *Richmond Enquirer*, March 12, 1830; Advertisement for Louis, *Richmond Enquirer*, January 1, 1833; Advertisement for Moses, *Richmond Enquirer*, February 3, 1835; Advertisement for Charles, *Southern Patriot*, January 13, 1838; Advertisement for John Shadden, *Easton Gazette*, September 1, 1838; Advertisement for Jack Singleton, *Richmond Enquirer*, February 2, 1849; and Advertisement for York, *Daily South Carolinian*, March 29, 1853.

<sup>28</sup> Object file, Slave shoe, South Carolina State History Museum, Columbia, South Carolina.

The heeled wooden sole is very typical of other surviving examples and written descriptions of shoes worn by slaves. The upper part of the shoe is made of cotton and ticking, with a leather strap to hold it on; this type is less common in written descriptions of slave shoes than those with leather uppers. There was some variety across plantations in footgear though. Sarah Wilson recalled that slaves either had rough leather shoes or “sheep skin shoes with the wool on the inside.”<sup>29</sup> Protective footwear was not always a shoe. Lewis Favor, a boy who worked in the house of a widow, recalled that “In the winter time cracked feet were common,” but the slaves tried to protect their exposed skin by wrapping their “feet in bagging sacks to help them to keep warm.”<sup>30</sup> Charlie Sandles also recalled that slaves “did not have shoes, but when it got cold Maser would have lots of cowhides tanned in ashes with the fur left on them and we wrapped our feet and legs in them.”<sup>31</sup> More typically, slaves were given leather shoes with wooden soles. Bill Heard commented that the “Leather for slave’s shoes warn’t allus tannd and shoes made out of untanned leather looked lak dey had done been dyed red.”<sup>32</sup>

Just as they did with their work and fine clothing, slaves took time to individualize the appearance of their shoes. Eda Rains did not like the red color of her shoes so she would “skim the grease offen the dishwater, mix it with soot from the chimney and paint [her] shoes” black.<sup>33</sup> While Rains found a way to make her shoes look more to her taste, Cato Carter recalled that he “cried and cried” when he

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<sup>29</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 7.1: 349.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.1: 320.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, S2-9.8: 3443.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.2: 141.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, S2-8: 3223–24.

was given “red russet shoes” because he “didn’t want to wear no rawhide shoes.”<sup>34</sup>

Though people like Rains knew they could change the appearance of their shoes, Carter knew there was no getting around the roughness and uncomfortable qualities of the poor leather.

Most shoes used by slaves were of a type referred to as brogans, such as the one pictured below.<sup>35</sup>



5.2 Unknown maker. *Shoe*. c. 1850–1860. Leather, wood, and metal. Chicago History Museum, Gunther Collection, 1920.1753. Photograph by the author.

Brogans usually had a wooden sole with a leather upper. These were of the roughest hide, ill-fitting, and of poor quality. In written accounts slaves often describe their shoes as so uncomfortable they preferred to go barefoot. William Henry Towns said they were “de hardes’ shoes”; so hard, said Mary Johnson, that they could “knock a mule out.”<sup>36</sup> Towns also said that many slaves “would go barfooted until de fall an’ den wear shoes” when the weather was very cold.<sup>37</sup> Others tried to make their shoes more comfortable; Anderson Furr said that though his shoes were also

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., S2-2.1: 642.

<sup>35</sup> Runaway advertisements generally only list “coarse shoes” or “fine shoes” without further description, so they are a limited resource in determining further details about shoes. One exception is an advertisement for Sidney, who likely had on brogans, his footwear being described as “shoes such as are commonly worn by negro men in the country, with tacks in them.” Advertisement, *Baltimore Sun*, April 5, 1842.

<sup>36</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 6.1: 389; Ibid., 4.2: 220.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 6.1: 389.

“hard as rocks” he and the other slaves “put rags inside ’em to keep ’em from rubbin’ de skin off our foots.”<sup>38</sup>

By the time the leather was softened enough to bear, the cheap brogans were worn through or broken. The mule style shoe pictured below is clearly broken in and the leather softened, but the split in the wooden sole, with a nail through it to keep it together, was likely incredibly uncomfortable and pinched the bottom of the wearer’s foot.



5.3 Unknown maker. *Shoes*. 1850–1860. Leather, wood, and metal. Chicago History Museum, Gunther Collection, 1920.1734.a-b. Photograph by the author.

In addition to being tough and hard, slaves’ shoes were also made to standard sizes, not made to fit right and left feet, and were often too big or too small. Charlie Davenport said the shoes slaves received were “made in three sizes, big, little en mejum [medium]. Dey wuzn’t no right or left, but sorta club shaped so us

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 12.1: 347.

could wear 'em on either foot.”<sup>39</sup> Some people improvised with what they could get, meaning they occasionally bartered other goods for shoes. Such was likely the case for David Ostom, who ran away wearing “one old shoe and one old boot.”<sup>40</sup> Mary Reynolds said that her “Shoes was the worst trouble.” As a young girl, she was given shoes that were too small, and she developed blisters and sores on her ankles. Despite this, she was forced to continue wearing them. To try and alleviate the pain Reynolds “rubbed tallow in the sore places and wropped rags around [her] ankles,” but she “worked in the field and [her] sores got worser and worser.” Eventually her injuries became so severe that she feared her “feet would rot off.”<sup>41</sup>

From these stories it is difficult to say what was worse—having poorly made shoes or having no shoes at all. Because of their higher cost relative to other garments, shoes were a luxury to many enslaved people. Indeed, some white people went barefoot much of the time. John Mosley lived in Texas, and he said, “not very many white people knew what shoes were, much less the slaves.”<sup>42</sup> Lizzie Atkins recalled that her “Maser and Mistress went barefooted about half of the time,” but she did not say if this was also the case for the slaves.<sup>43</sup> Depriving enslaved people of shoes was also a way for masters to attempt to keep them from running away. This did not stop some though, including Frederick Douglass, who wrote of the scars on his feet years after he had been living in freedom and supplying himself with proper footwear.<sup>44</sup> Though the clothing a slave named John wore when he ran away was not described in the advertisement for a ten-dollar reward for capturing

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., S1-7.2: 561.

<sup>40</sup> Advertisement, *Baltimore Patriot*, August 6, 1834.

<sup>41</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S2-8: 3291.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., S2-7: 2798.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., S2-2.1: 94.

<sup>44</sup> Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 16.

him, it was noted that he was missing “several of his toes by frost,” indicating that shoes were not a common thing for him.<sup>45</sup>

Many people recounted horrific experiences due to a lack of footwear. Henry Wright, Emma Knight, and George Eason all recalled that their feet, after long exposure to the cold, “would crack open from the cold and bleed.”<sup>46</sup> John Eubanks also remembered having open sores on his feet in the winter time, noting that “it be so cold mah feet weah plumb numb mos’ o’ de time,” which was probably a relief considering that “the skin on the bottoms and in de toes weah cracked and bleedin’ mos’ o’ time, wit bloody scabs.”<sup>47</sup> To warm their feet, Eubanks and the others “druve the hogs from outin the bogs an’ put ouah feet in the wahmed wet mud.”<sup>48</sup> Jack Harrison and William Byrd recalled wrapping their feet in hides, furs, skins, and woolen rags in an attempt to keep them warm and somewhat protected.<sup>49</sup>

Maggie Wesmoland was enslaved by a very cruel master who kept her as a slave even after the Civil War and emancipation. He did not provide her with shoes, and though his wife made Wesmoland “moccasins to wear out in the snow—made them out of old rags and pieces of his pants”—her feet were incredibly mangled.<sup>50</sup> She remembered, “I had risings on my feet and my feet frostbite till they was solid sores.” As if this were not torture enough, her sadistic master “would take his knife and stob my risings to see the matter pop way out. He cut my foot on the side with a

<sup>45</sup> Advertisement, *Columbia Telescope*, April 13, 1839.

<sup>46</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S1-2.4: 202 (interview of Emma Knight); Ibid., 13.4: 197 (interview with Henry Wright); Ibid., 12.1: 301 (interview with George Eason).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., Vol. 6.2, 73.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S2-5.4: 1652–53 (interview with Jack Harrison); Ibid., S2-2.1: 574 (interview with William Byrd).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 11.7: 102. On punishment and violence see Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Capital in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013), 171.

cowhide nearly to the bone.”<sup>51</sup> Her mistress, who as a woman was also under the control of this man, would doctor Wesmoland’s feet when the master was out of sight.

Scott Bond also suffered great injury from lack of shoes, and his mother attempted to soften the pain of the injury. Bond recounted:

One of my heels was so chapped and cracked open that one could almost lay his finger in the opening. She got some tallow and warmed it in a spoon and having no idea how hot it was poured it into the crack on my heel. As I held my heel up and my toe on the floor, the hot tallow filled the crack and ran down over my foot to my toes. I cried because of the intense pain the hot grease caused. My mother quieted me as best she could and put me to bed. When she got up next morning she examined my foot and to her amazement the hot tallow had raised a blister full length of my foot as large as one’s finger. When she saw this she cried as if her heart would break and said as the tears streamed down her cheeks: “I didn’t mean to burn my child. I did not dream the tallow was so hot.”<sup>52</sup>

With little available to her in the way of medicines or poultices, Bond’s mother attempted a remedy she had likely seen used or even done before herself. But to the detriment of her son’s foot and to her utter horror, her nursing efforts only produced further injury.

While most slaves’ stories about shoes involved bad memories, some did find pride in wearing shoes. Ruben Fox said he felt “like I was the finest thing in the land when I got a pair of them boots with brass tips on the toes.”<sup>53</sup> Nicey Kinney also recalled that the shoes she and the other slaves received were “jus’ brogans wid brass toes, but us felt powerful dressed up when us got ’em on, ’specially when dey was new and de brass was bright and shiny.”<sup>54</sup> Both Fox and Kinney noted that their

<sup>51</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 11.7: 102.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, S2-1.3: 27–28.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, S1-7.2: 771.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.3: 27.

shoes were store bought and not plantation made, which may also account for why they felt special in their footwear. It is highly unlikely that store-bought shoes were any more comfortable than homemade shoes. The opposite is likely true since cobblers working on plantations could take better measurements of people's feet. Fox's and Kinney's reactions speak more to a shift during the antebellum period of valuing ready-made items at a higher status than homemade ones, a concept that was firmly entrenched in the American consumer culture of the 1930s when both were interviewed about their lives during slavery.

Because slaves did not receive shoes often, they usually saved them for the coldest weather or for dressing up. Lucy Lewis remembered that she "used to go barefoot and only when I go to church and dances I wore my shoes."<sup>55</sup> Henry Wright said "he used to save his shoes by placing them under his arm and walking barefooted when he had a long distance to go," and he kept them looking new by polishing them regularly with "a mixture of soot and syrup."<sup>56</sup>

Shoes could also be a source of entertainment. Emma Hurley said, "The first shoes I ever remembers had wooden bottoms an' sich a sound as they made when the folks walked 'round with 'em on."<sup>57</sup> While noisy shoes could certainly be an annoyance, the sounds they made also served as music-making devices. This was also true of the brass-toed brogans and other shoes with metal straps and pieces on the bottoms, such as the soles of the shoes pictured below.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 5.3: 15.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 13.4: 197.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 12.2: 275.



5.6 Detail of 5.2. Photograph by the author.



5.5 Unknown enslaved maker(s). *Shoe soles*. 1861–1865. Linden wood. Museum of the Confederacy. Richmond, Virginia, 985.0.13.

Tap dancing likely originated in the American South within the slave community.<sup>58</sup> With little access to musical instruments, slaves improvised with what they had, creating both music and dance with their footwear.

Though some slaves found moments to resist by individualizing their shoes, improvising foot coverings such as skins and rags, using cobblers' skills to make money, and even using shoes to create new styles of art, most enslaved people associated footwear with traumatic experiences during slavery. Slaveholders risked permanent damage to the feet of their laborers by not providing shoes, or distributing poorly fitted ones that caused injuries and extreme discomfort. Their willingness to sacrifice these important appendages to save money by not purchasing or having shoes made was a big gamble. The choice came down to spending more money on

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<sup>58</sup> Katrina Hazzard-Gordon, *Jookin': The Rise of Cultural Dance Formations in African-American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

a slave to make sure he could walk well enough to be working in the fields, or not providing shoes and having a slave permanently incapacitated to the point that his or her value as a laborer was vastly reduced. Enslaved people's feet were susceptible to exposure, injury, and infection. The visual appearance of feet with missing toes, gnarled knots and calluses, or cracked and dried from frostbite, further served to mark black bodies as unfashionable. Slaveholders failed to recognize the relationship between the deprivation of proper footwear and the uncivilized feet of enslaved people, thus perpetuating their reasoning for withholding shoes as unnecessary due to the perceived naturalness of black feet as inherently tough.

## Chapter Six

### Playing Dress-up: Fancy Clothes and Identity Politics

In her often-quoted diary, Mary Boykin Chesnut said of the slaves on her husband's plantation, "[o]n Sundays their finery is excessive and grotesque. I mean their holiday, church, and outdoor getup."<sup>1</sup> Throughout her diary she mocks slaves who dress in fine clothing for church or special events. It is difficult to tell why slaveholders would continue to allow enslaved people to dress up if they saw it as a major threat to their power, but Chesnut's comments reveal some hints. By ridiculing the outfits of slaves and highlighting the black face atop the fashionable costume, slaveholders interpreted highly fashionable dress among slaves as simple play-acting. In their minds, a person had to have white skin to be truly fashionable. The connections between slavery, race, and fashion are most clearly revealed in this chapter, which discusses the motivations of enslaved people for dressing in fine clothing and the responses by slaveholders toward these activities. First, this chapter demonstrates that celebratory outfits of slaves, including wedding dresses, were clearly interpreted by whites as unfashionable because the clothing was worn by a black body. Second, the race-based fashion system failed to prevent successful resistance when it was used by slaves to escape by disguising their bodies as non-black, and therefore potentially fashionable. Finally, this chapter reveals some of the ways in which contributions by African and African American people to western fashion have been marginalized or misinterpreted, and seeks to complicate

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Boykin Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 250.

understandings about slave counterculture and the sources for style in American fashion.

Fashion, like race, gender, and class, is a social construct. Society creates fashion but is simultaneously controlled by it. In the antebellum South, dressing fashionably was a sign of prestige among the slaveholding class. Enslaved people who dressed in cast-off clothing or made their own hoop skirts challenged the social system by participating in the current fashion system. By dressing up, slaves strove to assert themselves as members of the fashionable world, as well as express their individuality. The potential threat this made to slaveholders in the delicate balance of power in antebellum southern society is clear in their descriptions of slaves who were dressed up, such as the example from Chesnut given above.

Enslaved people in the antebellum South must be recognized as creators of culture and consumers of goods; they wanted “to participate more fully in a common North Atlantic world of cloth and clothing” that had developed during the colonial period into a unique fashion system.<sup>2</sup> They lived in a country that was increasingly reliant upon a global system of industrialized manufacturing, of which the South was a crucial supplier of raw goods. When thinking about the clothing worn by slaves, it must be remembered that they were indirectly participating in a capitalist market when they received fabric or ready-made clothing from slaveholders. Most enslaved people were also direct participants, bartering or purchasing consumer goods from local merchants including clothing.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert S. DuPlessis, “Cloth and the Emergence of the Atlantic Economy,” in *The Atlantic Economy during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Organization, Operation, Practice, and Personnel*, ed. Peter A. Coclanis (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 72–94 (quotation page 83). See also Joseph E. Inikori and Stanley L. Engerman, eds., *The Atlantic Slave Trade: Effects on Economies, Societies, and Peoples in Africa, the Americas, and Europe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992).



6.1 Unknown maker. *Wedding dress*. c. 1845–1855. Linen and cotton. Alamance County Historical Museum. Photograph by the author.

The dress pictured above belongs to the Alamance County Historical Museum in Burlington, North Carolina. It was passed down by members of the Murray family, slaveholders in northern Alamance County. It is made with a linen warp and a cotton weft, a very durable fabric blend common in the antebellum South for work clothing. It is a blue and red checked supplementary weft pattern woven on an off-white background. The hem, sleeves, and waistline contain detailed work,

making it doubly clear this was not an everyday work dress. The object record states the dress was made by this woman's mistress as a wedding dress.<sup>3</sup>



6.2 Detail of 6.1. Photograph by the author.

The dress was altered, likely in 1976 when it was given by Murray descendant Virginia Sellars Boland to Ann Spoon for use in a Bicentennial play.<sup>4</sup> The front seam on the bodice is machine sewn, and the alterer did not match up the pattern of the weave structure as is done very carefully elsewhere on the garment. The gathers along the front center of the waistline were probably let out to achieve the extra

<sup>3</sup> Object file, Murray family dress, Alamance County Historical Museum. Burlington, North Carolina; Jack A. Smith, "The Murray Family Dress," *Piecework* 16 (March/April 2008): 36–37.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

fabric needed to enlarge the bust of the dress. Other than this, the dress remains in excellent condition and in its original style.

The high quality of the fabric, with its closely and evenly woven structure and the colored detail of the woven design, as well as the hand-sewing techniques used to piece the garment, confirm the dating of this dress to the first half of the nineteenth century. Only the back of the bodice is lined with a plain woven undyed cotton; the front bodice and skirt have no lining. It fastens up the back with a hook and eye closure. The dress is all hand-sewn with a very even backstitch using cotton thread. The hem, sleeves, and waistline contain detailed work. The gathering at the twenty-five-inch waistline is done at about 18 pleats per inch, requiring great skill in manipulating the fabric to create such tight, even gathers while not disrupting the patterned design. The pintucks on the sleeves and around the bottom of the skirt are exactly matched so that the fabric design remains continuous.

The high waistline with tight gathering, the length of the skirt, and the close-fitting sleeves are all characteristics of popular fashions of the late 1840s and early 1850s. Oral tradition was likely the source recording this dress's use by an enslaved person in the object record. The Murrays owned the ancestors of Alex Haley, author of the novel *Roots*.<sup>5</sup> It is possible that this dress was worn by one of Haley's ancestors.

Though the Murray dress is a rare survivor today, it was not so uncommon for enslaved people in the antebellum South to own fine clothing. In many runaway advertisements, slaves were described with fur hats, velvet coats, and matching suits. An 1834 ad discusses Jack, who stole "one pair blue mixed cotton pantaloons;

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<sup>5</sup> Smith, "The Murray Family Dress."

one pair dark mixed casinet pantaloons; a dark Valentia vest; a black fur hat; a cambric shirt; a blue cambleck cloak; a pair of new shoes, tacked in the sole with cut saddle tacks; a silver watch, and about fifty dollars in Money” from his fellow slaves.<sup>6</sup> The slaves Jack knew had many different kinds and qualities of clothing, not to mention a silver piece of jewelry and fifty dollars cash in their possession, indicating that they invested in their appearances.

Slaves often spent their own money and goods on fine apparel. In an account book covering intermittent years in the 1850s into the early 1860s, J. Eli Gregg kept records of debt owed to him by slaves. The items the enslaved people purchased were largely foodstuffs and clothing. But they were not buying any old pair of pants. The items Gregg recorded included everything from a ready-made man’s shirt to silk handkerchiefs to hoop skirts, and even an umbrella. It appears the slaves were selling cotton and foodstuffs to Gregg in exchange for these material goods.<sup>7</sup> Similar accounts from other planters and of local dry goods merchants demonstrate that most slaves who had something to barter with, be it cash or crop, often used their resources to purchase fine clothing.<sup>8</sup>

Interviews with former slaves also reveal several instances of saving money to purchase clothing. Gus Feaster’s mother was allowed to leave the plantation and

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<sup>6</sup> Advertisement, *Columbia Telescope*, October 1, 1834, Columbia, South Carolina.

<sup>7</sup> J. Eli Gregg Account Book, 1850-1863, Duke University Special Collections.

<sup>8</sup> There was much disagreement among slaveholders about allowing slaves to raise crops, trade them, or earn cash and purchase goods. Some sought to extend control by only allowing slaves to sell goods to the owner, or by only allowing them to purchase goods under supervision of the master or an overseer. See “Negro Crops” in James O. Breeden, ed., *Advice Among Masters: The Ideal in Slave Management in the Old South* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), 266–275. Timothy James Lockley notes that shopkeepers or drygoods merchants who sold to slaves without permission of the master were breaking the law, and their willingness to do so contributed greatly to slaves’ buying powers. See Lockley, *Lines in the Sand: Race and Class in Lowcountry Georgia, 1750–1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 62.

go to a drygoods store on her own to purchase herself a bonnet.<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Ross Hite remembered that her mother raised corn, which was purchased by the master. Hite's mother bought "nothing but silk dresses" with the corn money.<sup>10</sup> Hite also noted that the slaves on the plantation where she lived took advantage of their access to clothing in relation to other slaves, recalling that she and the others "sold our old clothes to darkies who had mean masters."<sup>11</sup> For Hite, access to clothing or other needed goods was predicated on a multi-level local system of barter and exchange between master and slave on the plantation, and within the slave community beyond the plantation's borders.<sup>12</sup>

Some instances demonstrate that slaveholders respected the extra labor done by enslaved people and paid them for it. Both Martha Patton and Millie Ann Smith recalled that slaves on the plantations where they lived raised cotton in separate patches. Patton said that the "master sol' dere cotton for dem and dey had money to buy shoes or anything dey needed."<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Smith stated that the master took cotton raised by the slaves "to Shreveport to sell it and bring us back calico, plaid and nice cloth for clothes."<sup>14</sup> In both of these examples slaves raised cotton that was exchanged for good quality textiles by the master. Without the master's account it is unknown if he took a cut of the price of the cotton he sold for

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<sup>9</sup> George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* (1941, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Company, reprint ed., 1972), 2.2: 69.

<sup>10</sup> Ronnie W. Clayton, *Mother Wit: The Ex-Slave Narratives of the Louisiana Writer's Project* (New York: P. Lang, 1990), 101.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 101–102.

<sup>12</sup> Dylan C. Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Betty Wood, *Women's Work, Men's Work: The Informal Slave Economies of Lowcountry Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 5.3: 173.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, S2-9.8: 3652.

these slaves or if he put the full amount toward the purchase of the goods they had requested. That the master did the actual economic exchange also shows that while some slaves had the ability to supplement their wardrobes with fine clothing, they were rarely the ones who did the actual purchasing. Masters continued to limit the direct access slaves had to the market.<sup>15</sup>

Susan McIntosh recalled quite a diverse number of ways slaves had for gaining extra capital. She remembered slaves “rais[ing] chickens, and cows, and have cotton patches too. They would ball butter, eggs, chicken, brooms, made out of wheat straw and such like.”<sup>16</sup> They used the sale or barter of these items to purchase “calico, muslin, and good shoes, pants, coats and other nice things for their Sunday clothes.”<sup>17</sup>

Dozens of enslaved people recalled the importance of their Sunday clothes and the care they took of these finer items of apparel. Mary Donatto recalled that women “save all de money what dey could git and buy de bes’ white clo’f dey could git” to make themselves remarkable white sunbonnets to wear to church, which Donatto remembered in great detail: “Dem bonnets was huge, dey was mek wid slats runnin’ all ‘roun’ de front, and wide ruffles.”<sup>18</sup>

Most of the fine apparel items purchased by slaves were ready-made clothing or accessories such as hats, shoes, and ribbons. Fewer bought lengths of high-quality cloth because they did not have the sewing skills necessary to make it into a fashionable fitted gown or tailored jacket. Clothing made from finer fabrics was

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<sup>15</sup> For a detailed local analysis of the trading, buying, and selling habits of enslaved people in Thomaston, Georgia, see David E. Paterson, “Slavery, Slaves, and Cash in a Georgia Village, 1825–1865,” *Journal of Southern History* 75 (November 2009): 879–930.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.3: 81.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S2-4.2: 1222–23.

usually received second-hand as a gift or cast-off. Numerous slaves and slaveholders noted the giving of soiled, out-of-date, or old finery to slaves for a special favor or as a reward. If old clothing was the main source of fine fabric, then slaves' good clothing was naturally unfashionable to whites. This clothing did not fit well, and very few slaves had the skills to remake garments in the high style to match the skills of professionally made items. The combination of slightly worn, faded, or unfashionable colors and patterns, the outdated styles, and the poor fit or haphazard alterations all contributed to the unfashionableness of slaves' finery.<sup>19</sup>

Many people also remembered the great amount of care and time they spent on Sundays, the one day some slaves had free of labor, to dress for church. Myra Jones spoke to the heightened feeling of individuality and importance that came from this weekly ritual of dressing up: "All through de week we wore plain solid colored dresses an' barefooted but on Sunday us felt dressed up for our dresses wuz striped an' plaid."<sup>20</sup> Though it is clear from various accounts that enslaved people valued this chance to express themselves more fully in their apparel, they were not free from the gaze of the master. Felice Boudreaux recalled that the women would fix their hair and dress, then go as a group "up to de big house an' mistus 'low us to look in her lookin-glass see us purty 'nuf to go to ch'ch."<sup>21</sup> Though it

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<sup>19</sup> Enslaved people were not the only social group who participated in the second-hand clothing market. Walter Johnson relates a court case where an enslaved man stole a unique coat from an overseer before running away, which was later purchased by the slave owner's son from a white man who had purchased it from the runaway. See Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 62–63. For other information on popularity of the second-hand clothing trade see Beverly Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade before the Factory, 1660–1800* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan/Palgrave, 1997); Marla R. Miller, "Clothing and Consumers in Rural New England, 1760–1810," in *The Needle's Eye: Women and Work in the Age of Revolution* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 25–55; John Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S1-8.3: 1248.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, S2-6.5: 2038.

is unclear if the mistress was the judge of who looked presentable enough to travel off the plantation to church, she was most certainly there to oversee this weekly ritual of preening. Sometimes masters also required this dressing up of their slaves. C. B. McRay recalled that all of the slaves on the plantation had to get ready for church in the Sunday clothes provided by the master, and then “come to de parlor so he could look dem ober befo’ dey went to chu’ch.”<sup>22</sup> For McRay’s master, this Sunday finery was an opportunity to display to other slaveholders that he could afford to dress his slaves well, and that he followed the paternalistic approach to slaveholding popular in the late antebellum period by supplying his slaves with good clothing and allowing them to attend church services.

Slaveholders also expected a certain amount of cleanliness and personal hygiene. As property, slave bodies were a reflection on the master’s wealth and refinement. Under the paternalistic slave society of the antebellum South, a clean, properly clothed slave was a sign to other slaveholders and, to a certain extent, anti-slavery proponents that the system as a civilizing mission was a successful one.<sup>23</sup> In his plantation book, Edward Spann Hammond lists detailed rules and regulations for his overseers in governing his plantation. Under the heading “Punishment” he writes:

The following is the order in which offences must be estimated & punished: 1 running away. 2 Getting drunk or having spirits. 3 Stealing hogs. 4 Stealing. 5 Leaving plantation without permission. 6 Absence from house after horn-blow at night. 7 Unclean house or person.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., S2-7: 2517.

<sup>23</sup> Kathleen M. Brown, *Foul Bodies: Cleanliness in Early America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), chapter 12; Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619–1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 118, 127

The list continues on, with normal punishment being 15 to 20 lashes though it "must not exceed 100 lashes in one day not severely given & only in extreme cases."<sup>24</sup>

Hammond ranked uncleanliness near the top of his list of offenses, behind only transgressions involving absence or stealing. Rather than gaining freedom of expression through Sunday finery, slaves on the Hammond plantation found extra labor and punishment for not obliging his version of cleanliness and good hygiene.

Regardless of the amount of choice slaves had in dressing for church, they certainly took advantage of a chance to dress in items usually forbidden to them and that were obtained in a variety of ways, from bartering and selling goods to receiving cast-off items from slaveholders. Gus Feaster recalled in great detail the Sunday outfits of slaves on the plantation where he lived and where these items were obtained:

De Marse give us a coat and a hat and his sons give all de old hats and coats 'round. Us wore shirts and pants made from de looms. Us kept dem clean't and ironed jes' like de Marster and de young marsters done their'n. Den us wore a string tie, dat de white folks done let us have, to church. Dat 'bout de onliest time dat a darky was seed wid a tie. Some de oldest men even wore a cravat, dat dey had done got from de old marster. De gals come out in de starch dresses fer de camp meeting. Dey took dey hair down out'n de strings fer de meeting. In dem days all de darky wimmens wore dey hair in string 'cep' when dey 'tended church or a wedding. At de camp meetings de wimmens pulled off de head rags, 'cept de mammies. On dis occasion de mammies wore linen head rags fresh laundered. Dey wore de best aprons wid long streamers ironed and starched out a hanging down dey backs. All de other dark wimmens wore de black dresses and dey got hats from some dey white lady folks; jes' as us mens got hats from our'n. Dem wimmens dat couldn't git no hats, mostly wore black bonnets.<sup>25</sup>

Feaster's description implies that the male and female slaves, though dressed in different outfits, also adhered to a sort of dress code as far as the colors of certain

<sup>24</sup> Undated plantation journal, Edward Spann Hammond Plantation Books, South Caroliniana Library at the University of South Carolina.

<sup>25</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 2.2: 62.

items of clothing, such as the older women's crisp white aprons and the younger women's black dresses, or the necessity of covering the head with a hat, cap, kerchief, or bonnet.

Occasionally, enslaved people found ways to gain access to fine clothing through subversive means. Jerry Boykins noted that a relative of the master was the same size so Boykins borrowed clothes from the relative to attend a social gathering at another plantation and "sneak off all dress up—then I sneaks back and puts his clothes back 'fore he gets up. He nevah cotch me."<sup>26</sup> Boykins' actions speak to other work on how enslaved people understood stealing.<sup>27</sup> Since he never actually kept any of the clothing, he was not a thief, though he knew using this clothing was taboo and he must be careful about it. While Boykins used the cover of darkness to gain access to fine clothing, Salena Taswell used the master's physical absence as a chance to act out by dressing up: "The doctor's folks were so stylish that they would not let the servants wear hoops, but we could get the old ones that they threw away and have a big time playing with them and we would go around with them on when they were gone and couldn't see us."<sup>28</sup>

One of the most noteworthy discoveries about slave women's clothing concerned their use of bell-shaped skirts worn over hoops or cages. These skirts were popularized in the 1850s and worn all over Europe and the United States throughout the mid-nineteenth century. The skirt required a vast amount of fabric

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., S2-2.1: 372.

<sup>27</sup> Another example of borrowing or using items as not stealing is given in Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (New York: Henry Bibb, 1849), 166. This is also explored in Alex Lichtenstein, "'That Disposition to Theft, with Which They Have Been Branded': Moral Economy, Slave Management, and the Law," *Journal of Social History* 21 (Spring 1988): 413–440.

<sup>28</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 17.1: 306. Boykins took this clothing to participate in a secret party. For more on these types of gatherings see chapter 3 in Camp, *Closer to Freedom*.

and was supported by a hoop skirt consisting of a series of hoops that grew larger as they progressed to the floor. That slave women had access to the yards of fabric it required to make a hoop skirt seems remarkable. Some may have gotten old skirts from white women on the plantation and then created their own hoops. Others bought hoops from local stores with cash or bartered goods.<sup>29</sup>

Gus Feaster and the other children on the plantation “made de gals hoops out’n grape vines. Dey give us a dime, if dey had one, fer a set of hoops.”<sup>30</sup> Rivana Boynton knew several ways to obtain hoops, or at least the appearance of them: “My missus, she made me a pair of hoops, or I guess she bought it, but some of the slaves took thin limbs from trees and made their hoops. Others made them out of stiff paper and others would starch their skirts stiff with rice starch to make their skirts stand way out.”<sup>31</sup> Camilla Jackson remembered that “her sister made hoop skirts by cutting slits in the hem of the skirt and running a hoop through it.”<sup>32</sup> The women Julia Larken knew did not have hoops, but they “wore two or three petticoats all ruffled and starched ’til one of dem underskirts would stand by itself” to achieve the same look of hoops.<sup>33</sup> By wearing this apparel, black women were claiming their right to femininity in a large way. Hoop skirts embodied the separate sphere of the domestic woman of the nineteenth century. By making this separate space for themselves, black women asserted their gender and their humanity.

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<sup>29</sup> Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, chapter 3; Drew Gilpin Faust, “Chapter Ten: If I Were Once Released: The Garb of Gender,” in *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 220-233; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 216–219.

<sup>30</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 2.2: 46. Robert Shepherd, “Slave ‘omans had new calico dresses what dey wore wid hoopskirts dey made out of grapevines.” *Ibid.*, 13.3: 253.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.1: 44.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.2: 297.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.3: 41.

Sarah Tate's wedding dress, supposedly made by her mistress like the Alamance County dress, is an incredibly intricate and beautiful dress made of thin white muslin.<sup>34</sup> Born in Tennessee, Tate was moved by owner James Edgar to DeWitt County, Texas, in 1853. This dress is a style popular in the early to mid-1840s, a dating that coincides with written records about Tate's marriage around 1843, while she was still living in Tennessee.



6.3 Attributed to Selah Edgar. *Sarah Tate's Wedding Dress*. c. 1845. Cotton. Witte Museum, San Antonio, Texas.

The dress is made from a plain woven white cotton, a simple fabric that was of a much higher quality than the clothing typically allotted to slaves by masters, but not

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<sup>34</sup> Object file, 26.1131.66.G, Witte Museum. San Antonio, Texas.

an extremely expensive fabric. Like the Murray family dress, this one was also supposedly made by the plantation mistress, who would have been Edgar's wife, Selah. Whoever made this dress was a good seamstress. The back gathers are very evenly done, but more impressive are the details on the front of the bodice, including the heavily gathered and smocked fabric at the front center waist, which ends in a deep v at the very center front. The gathering at the cuffs, the even tuck at the bottom of the skirt, and the deep hemline also required good sewing skills. While almost all women, including elite white women, knew plain sewing in the antebellum period, the techniques required to make both the Murray and the Tate wedding dresses required skills and time beyond most women.

While marriage between slaves was not legally recognized, interviews suggest that many of them saw their wedding as an important life event.<sup>35</sup> That Tate's wedding dress and the Alamance County dress, both made as wedding gowns for slave brides, still survive today also attests to the importance of these garments for their wearers in remembering their marriages. But relationships between enslaved men and women were often dictated by slaveholders. When asked if she was married while enslaved, Lizzie Grant recalled what she wore: "My wedding clothes were just plain ever day clothes but they were real clean. I had on plain white dress trimmed with some cloth dyed from poke root berries."<sup>36</sup> Grant's wedding dress was likely a new one, given as a reward by the master for her marriage. But for Grant, her wedding day was not a happy one to be remembered and celebrated for she also noted of her new husband, "Maser made me marry him

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<sup>35</sup> Patrick W. O'Neil, "Bosses and Broomsticks: Ritual and Authority in Antebellum Slave Weddings," *Journal of Southern History* 75 (February 2009): 29–48.

<sup>36</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S2-5.4: 1555–56.

as we were going to raise him some more slaves.”<sup>37</sup> A nice new dress was no compensation for a lifetime in a forced marriage and the knowledge that her children would all be legal property. The wedding ceremony could also be for the benefit of the slaveholder’s need to express paternalism, a display that confirmed his status as a good master who took care of his slaves.<sup>38</sup> This seems to be the case for Mandy Jones’s mother, who often retold the story of when “she was married right in the white folkses house, they dressed her up for it.”<sup>39</sup>

Matilda Daniel, a house servant, recalled that her wedding dress was one of the mistress’s cast-off “party dresses, hit sho was fine, made out ob white tarelton, wid a pink ribbon tied round my head.”<sup>40</sup> Daniel appeared as the image of her mistress, dressed in old finery during what the white family likely saw as a play-acting imitation of a legally binding wedding ceremony. Enslaved women’s remembrances of their weddings were inherently complicated by the presence and the desires of slaveholders, yet women such as Sarah Tate attached importance to wedding gowns, saving them and passing them down along with oral remembrances.

Slaves who dressed up for weddings, church services, or secular celebrations used clothing not to imitate slaveholders but to resist slavery, to throw off the badge of Negro cloth and pass through whiteness into expressions of freedom.<sup>41</sup> Enslaved

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 1556.

<sup>38</sup> O’Neil, “Bosses and Broomsticks.”

<sup>39</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S1-8.3: 1230.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., S1-1.1: 109.

<sup>41</sup> The phrase and the concept of “passing through whiteness” rather than passing as white is borrowed from P. Gabrielle Foreman, “Who’s Your Mama?: ‘White’ Mulatta Genealogies, Early Photography, and Anti-passing Narratives of Slavery and Freedom,” in *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity*, ed. Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 132–166.

people also used disguise to escape slavery by cross-dressing. An advertisement placed for Brazile in New Orleans stated that he had not left the city as he “has been seen dressed in women’s clothes several times” and “is a regular attendant of the balls.”<sup>42</sup> An advertisement for Mariah, a woman of about thirty years, warned that she would likely be dressed “as a boy, as she has frequently dressed herself in boy’s clothes, and has her hair cut short for the purpose.”<sup>43</sup> It is certainly possible that one or both of these people was transgendered and used freedom to express the gender they identified with rather than that presumed by their sex. Regardless of the underlying motives of Brazile and Mariah, their choice to cross dress did provide further disguise.

Whiteness was not the only racial disguise for enslaved people to use when attempting to run away. A man named Moses who escaped in Missouri was dressed like, and also suspected of acting like, a Native American in order to avoid detection. In a very detailed description, the owner noted that Moses wore “a hunting shirt made after the Indian fashion, a pair of coarse leggings, dark grey color, [and] a pair of moccasins made of coarse leather,” and “he had a red band or garter around his leggings, and a handkerchief around his hat.” In addition to this apparel, Moses likely “wore false hair, so as nearly to resemble an Indian, whose language he can speak, and may attempt to pass for an Indian.”<sup>44</sup> Moses used his knowledge and his location in a frontier space to his advantage.

The story of William and Ellen Craft, a husband and wife who escaped from slavery and published their narrative, is particularly revealing in the usefulness of

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<sup>42</sup> Advertisement, *Daily Picayune*, March 29, 1848.

<sup>43</sup> Advertisement, *Times-Picayune*, April 28, 1837.

<sup>44</sup> Advertisement, *National Banner*, (Nashville, Tennessee), January 11, 1836.

visual disguise. Ellen was very light skinned and posed as an invalid white man while her husband William pretended to be her valet.<sup>45</sup>



6.4 Wilson Armistead. *Ellen Craft, the Fugitive Slave*. 1853. Ink on paper. Schomburg Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division, New York Public Library, SC Rare 325.4-A.

Ellen used clothing to transcend both race and gender. By temporarily claiming the power and status of a white man through the expected visual signs and cues of a person of that background, she was able to free herself. This character change for Ellen also required that her husband treat her as a master, meaning that he had to shed the role of husband and all that it entailed in a married couple's power dynamics during their escape. As African Americans, the Crafts used the presumptions and expectations of the racially exclusionary American fashion system to their advantage. For them, dressing up in disguise was the ultimate form of resistance because it led to their permanent freedom. It was not that enslaved people wanted to become white; it was that they wanted to be recognized as equal. While maintaining a counter-cultural fashion system within the slave community,

<sup>45</sup> William Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; or, the Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery* (London: William Tweedie, 1860).

many enslaved people also expressed a desire to partake of the advantages of participating in the dominant American fashion system.<sup>46</sup> Ellen Craft's costume and her performance as a white man indicate a weakness in the race-based fashion system because she was able to successfully disguise her race (and her gender) in order to resist enslavement.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese noted in her study of black and white women in the Old South that "[s]lave women, especially those who worked in the house, shared slaveholding women's appreciation of dress as the badge of class or quality."<sup>47</sup> Stephanie M. H. Camp argues that enslaved women, more than men, enjoyed dressing up.<sup>48</sup> But men also took pleasure in procuring special garments and readying themselves for festivities. Jacob D. Green recalled one party when he went to great trouble to make himself look special, clearly hoping to catch the attention of the young women at the dance. Green took "twenty-four cents, or pennies which I divided equally with fifty large brass buttons in my right and left pockets" so that when he danced the women would "stare to hear the money jingle" and believe him quite well set.<sup>49</sup>

Fanny Kemble, an English actress, spent very little time in the U.S. South on her husband's plantations, but she recorded her observations and later published

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<sup>46</sup> This is related to white people having more of what Pierre Bordieu termed "cultural capital." For an excellent explanation of how cultural capital relates to fashion, see Tim Edwards, *Fashion in Focus: Concepts, Practices, and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 9.

<sup>47</sup> Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 216. Stephanie Camp discusses enslaved women's attention to fine dress in chapter three of her book, *Closer to Freedom*. See also Helen Bradley Foster, *"New Raiments of Self": African American Clothing in the Antebellum South* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1997); and Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

<sup>48</sup> Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 78.

<sup>49</sup> Jacob D. Green, *Narrative of the Life of J. D. Green, a Runaway Slave from Kentucky, Containing an Account of His Three Escapes, in 1839, 1846, and 1848* (1864, New York: Library of America, 2000), 960.

them. Like southerner Mary Chesnut, Kemble characterized the fine clothing of enslaved people as “grotesque” and “the most ludicrous combination of incongruities that you can conceive—frills, flounces, ribbons; combs stuck in their woolly heads . . . filthy finery, every color in the rainbow, and the deepest possible shades blended in fierce companionship round one dusky visage; head handkerchiefs, that put one's very eyes out from a mile off; chintzes with sprawling patterns . . . beads, bugles, flaring sashes, and above all, little fanciful aprons, which finish these incongruous toilets with a sort of airy grace which I assure you is perfectly indescribable.”<sup>50</sup> The zealous reactions of wealthy white women such as Kemble and Chesnut toward slaves' dressing up can partly be explained through Malcolm Barnard's assertion that “because dress is so intimately related to our bodies, because it is thus profoundly connected to our sexual and gender identities, fashion is uniquely able to unsettle and unnerve us.”<sup>51</sup>

Past studies of slavery have noted a seeming preference among those of African descent for bright colors, particularly the color red.<sup>52</sup> Evidence does suggest that slaves had red clothing. Lawrence Holt described his dancing ensemble as “black calico pants with red ribbon up de sides and a hickory shirt.”<sup>53</sup> While he did not remark on their color, he also noted that the women had “ribbons 'round de waist

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<sup>50</sup> Fanny Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation, 1838–1839* (1863, New York: Knopf, 1961), 93.

<sup>51</sup> Malcolm Barnard, *Fashion as Communication* (2nd edition; London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 117.

<sup>52</sup> Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 558. Many of Genovese's statements are intriguing, but are based on questionable primary sources or lack secondary source citations. For example, his only evidence for slaves' preference for the color red as a continuance from African cultural beliefs comes from a WPA interview and his own unsubstantiated conclusions of multiple theories regarding the meaning of the color red in Africa.

<sup>53</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 4.2: 152.

and one like it 'round de head."<sup>54</sup> Cindy Kinsey recalled that her finer dress was "always a bright red cotton, I suah member dat color, us dye de cotton right on de plantation mostly."<sup>55</sup> Solomon Northup also observed: "Red—the deep blood red—is decidedly the favorite color among the enslaved damsels of my acquaintance. If a red ribbon does not encircle the neck, you will be certain to find all the hair of their woolly heads tied up with red strings of one sort or another."<sup>56</sup> Red was a color that was easily obtained from a variety of wild, natural sources, and it was easier to achieve a colorfast red than other vibrant colors. The prevalence of red in slaves' clothing, both everyday workwear and special occasion apparel, can partly be accounted for from this practical reason.

This does not mean that African Americans did not seek out certain colors or patterns as culturally significant markers. But these connections, particularly when remembering that very few enslaved people in the antebellum period had been born outside of the United States, were distant. What is more useful is to think broadly in terms of the influence of African textiles and patterns on American culture and fashion preferences. To say that there are Africanisms in American culture moves the influences of African cultures to the margins in the process of early American cultural formation.<sup>57</sup> This phrase also implies that African and American (or African

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 17.1: 191.

<sup>56</sup> Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853* (Auburn, New York: Derby and Miller, 1853), 214.

<sup>57</sup> The phrase "Africanisms in American culture" is used in reference to a collection of essays edited by Joseph E. Holloway, *Africanisms in American Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990). For an assessment of the earliest scholarship on African Americans and American material culture see the introduction in Holloway, and Theodore C. Landmark, "Comments on African American Contributions to American Material Life," *Winterthur Portfolio* 33 (Winter 1998): 261–282. For a more recent collection of scholarship on this topic see Jacob U. Gordon, ed., *The African Presence in Black America* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2004).

and European) are inherently opposite. It pushes aside the commonalities between European and African cultures that coalesced naturally in the process of creating American culture.

The idea of Africanisms in American culture is also ahistorical in ignoring the vast worldwide trade networks already in place for hundreds of years by the time the Atlantic trade system developed. People brought from Africa to the North American colonies in the 1700s were already living in a homeland that was greatly changed by nearly three centuries of world trade that depended on enslavement of the African population.<sup>58</sup> Many were accustomed to seeing and using goods from around the world, including those manufactured in Europe. And Europeans had also developed cultural tastes based upon access to new goods from Asian, African, and American markets.

By the height of the Atlantic slave trade, West African people on the coast and in the interior were wearing a mixture of locally produced textiles and fabrics from around the world.<sup>59</sup> Geometric patterns were more fashionable in Africa than the floral designs often preferred in Europe, though brightly colored printed and painted cottons from India were valuable in both markets. Africans also purchased and traded English woolens, a fiber that was not familiar to Africans prior to the deep

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<sup>58</sup> Giorgio Riello states, "By the 1580s the Portuguese were already trading Indian cottons to North Africa and the Levant." Textiles were highly profitable in the West African slave trade market, netting profits up to eight times their value when exchanged for slaves for the Americas. The mercantile system through the eighteenth century required that all goods to Africa, including Indian cottons, go through English ports. Sixty-eight percent of these goods from England to Africa were textiles in the eighteenth century. See Riello, *Cotton: The Fabric That Made the Modern World* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 137 and 138. For a deep history of textiles in West African history before and during the Atlantic slave trade see Colleen E. Kriger, *Cloth in West African History* (Lanham, Md.: AltaMira Press, 2006). See also Akinwumi Ogundiran and Toyin Falola, *Archaeology of Atlantic Africa and the African Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

<sup>59</sup> Riello, *Cotton*, 139.

involvement of the English (and other northern European countries to a certain extent) in the slave trade.<sup>60</sup> Particularly popular were bright red wools, which were used by Africans in ceremonial cloths. Often, the wool cloth was unwoven and the red yarns were then rewoven into popular local patterns with other fibers to create a prestigious fabric.<sup>61</sup>

African Americans were not the only Americans attracted to bright colors, or to reds. Plantation mistress Fanny Kemble admitted, "I have considerable fellow feeling for the passion for all shades of red which prevails among these dusky fellow creatures of mine, a savage propensity for that same color in all its modifications being a tendency of my own."<sup>62</sup> White women certainly owned and wore gaily colored printed and woven designs. Indeed, the search for brighter colors and the fast adoption of saturated synthetic dyes in the 1850s is proof that white Americans also enjoyed dressing in colors.<sup>63</sup> Yet Kemble also shows reluctance and shame in admitting her preference for reds, a sign that what was considered culturally acceptable for middle- and upper-class white women was not always what they actually purchased.

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<sup>60</sup> Kriger, *Cloth in West African History*, 178. See also Colleen E. Kriger, "'Guinea Cloth': Production and Consumption of Cotton Textiles in West Africa before and during the Atlantic Slave Trade" in *The Spinning World: A Global History of Cotton Textiles, 1200–1850*, eds. Giorgio Riello and Prasanna Parthasarath (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 105–126.

<sup>61</sup> Kriger, *Cloth in West African History*, 35–36, 178. Kriger also points out that "compared to cotton and other cellulose fibers, wool absorbs natural dyes much more easily and deeply. Hence dyed wool, especially wool dyed scarlet, would have been immediately appreciated for its exceptional luminosity" (p. 36). In many different cultures in Africa, the colors red, black, and white have important meaning and power, especially when combined. Red is often associated with power and danger. See Judith Perani and Norma Hackelman Wolff, *Cloth, Dress, and Art Patronage in West Africa* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1999), 28.

<sup>62</sup> Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation*, 130–131.

<sup>63</sup> Simon Garfield, *Mauve: How One Man Invented a Color that Changed the World* (New York: Norton, 2001); Amy Butler Greenfield, *A Perfect Red: Empire, Espionage, and the Quest for the Color of Desire* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005).

The handkerchief is probably the most common fashion item associated with African American women, particularly in the case of the stereotype of the Black Mammy. The handkerchief pictured below is tied in a style typical among black women in New Orleans in the antebellum period, and the fabric dates to that period as well.<sup>64</sup>



6.5 Unknown maker. *Plaid handkerchief*. 1820–1870. Cotton. The Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1981.033.073.

While it is often assumed that handkerchiefs tied around the head originated in Africa and were brought to the Americas by enslaved women, their actual source is more ambiguous. Helen Bradley Foster has conducted extensive research into the visual and written records of European travellers to Africa from the seventeenth through the early nineteenth centuries. Foster ultimately concludes that head coverings were not widely adopted by African women until the latter half of the

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<sup>64</sup> Object file, 1991.033.073, Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana.

eighteenth century and were “a combination of a West African worldview with European material goods.”<sup>65</sup>

Foster’s dating of the wearing of brightly colored headcoverings by West African women coincides with the remarkable popularity, indeed fashion craze, for handkerchiefs in England and the United States.<sup>66</sup> Printed and woven handkerchiefs were worn around the neck, the head, in the pocket, and even framed and displayed on walls, during the late 1700s and early 1800s. Foster also points to the popularity in the first two decades of the nineteenth century among French women for turban-styled headgear. These French styles were also popular in the United States and in the Caribbean colonies of France. Foster points out that this French high fashion style was an adaptation of the turbans worn in the Middle East and in North Africa by Muslim men.<sup>67</sup> Regardless of their origins, head-wrapped handkerchiefs, particularly those of multi-colored plaids, were strongly associated with black women by the antebellum period. Slaveholders often gave handkerchiefs to enslaved women, and the women also purchased handkerchiefs for themselves. The infinite options for tying the fabric around the head and the ability for women to pass down this tradition through familial connections speak to the importance of this fashion item for

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<sup>65</sup> Foster, “*New Raiments of Self*,” 275–284 (quotation page 280).

<sup>66</sup> Styles, *The Dress of the People*; Sophie White, “Wearing three or four handkerchiefs around his neck, and elsewhere about him’: Slaves’ Constructions of Masculinity and Ethnicity in French Colonial New Orleans,” *Gender & History* 15 (November 2003): 528-49.

<sup>67</sup> Foster, “*New Raiments of Self*,” 281–284. This is a rather fascinating connection that deserves further exploration. The adoption of foreign fashions by Europeans, who prized the exotic and strange during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is well documented in several kinds of material culture. The connections between and meanings behind the claim by white women in Europe and the United States to wear head coverings that were like turbans, while simultaneously relegating black women’s head coverings to the realms of the unfashionable, speaks volumes about assumptions of race and the cultural capital of white people in the Atlantic world.

enslaved women.<sup>68</sup> In both dressing up and in everyday wear, enslaved women had found a way to simultaneously express their individuality and their relationship to others within the slave community.

But in the end, what ultimately mattered most in the antebellum fashion system in the United States was not the cut of one's dress or the pattern of one's waistcoat—it was the color of one's skin.<sup>69</sup> Race had become such an integral part of the visual culture of the United States by the antebellum period that no one with dark skin was considered truly fashionable by whites. Blackness indicated an outsider status, an un-Americanness that prevented all African Americans, not just those who were enslaved, from expressing themselves as part of the nation through their clothing and style. By excluding African Americans from the fashion system, slaveholders were able to dismiss any efforts by enslaved people to dress up as mere mimicry or a desire to be white. Meanwhile, enslaved men and women used the rules of the established fashion system to resist slavery through disguise and by creating an alternate dress code that had a lasting impact on the larger history of American fashion.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., chapter 6; Richard J. Powell, *Cutting a Figure: Fashioning Black Portraiture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 42 and 44.

<sup>69</sup> This was a delicate balance, particularly when some African Americans had access to more fashionable clothing than some white people. As Elizabeth Fox-Genovese notes in *Within the Plantation Household*, enslaved women who were gifted cast-off finery “would be much more likely to be in fashion than yeoman women” (p. 219). By defining fashionability as exclusive to whites, southern slaveholders were able to continue what they saw as a benevolent gesture of gifting finery to their slaves without running the risk of upsetting the racial alliance between themselves and non-slaveholding white southerners.

## *Chapter Seven*

### The Shirttail Brigade: Children's Clothing and Gendering Slaves

Though their labor was less valued than that of adults, children were an important part of the plantation. Their presence across the South was ubiquitous and was often commented upon by visitors and locals alike. Frederick Douglass noted, "Children from seven to ten years old, of both sexes, almost naked, might be seen at all seasons of the year" doing work around the plantation such as light hoeing and weeding, carrying burdens or toting water to field hands, and running errands.<sup>1</sup> And George Fleming, who experienced slavery as a child, said, "Lawd, I is seed lil' naked niggers setting on de rail fences like pa'cel of buzzards."<sup>2</sup> Exploring and understanding the unique challenges of growing up in slavery is an important part of fully comprehending the slave community and life for all in the Old South. Examining how enslaved people recognized transitions in their lives by associating these changes with new kinds of clothing reveals aspects of slavery that would otherwise remain invisible. The styles and quantity of clothing distributed to slave children are discussed in this chapter, as well as the deep connections between physical and reproductive labor potential and aging slave bodies. Enslaved children learned about their gender difference through the changes in clothing they experienced as they aged; they learned about their racial difference through the different pace and quality of clothing they received as compared with white children.

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1995), 6.

<sup>2</sup> George P. Rawick, ed. *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* (1941, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Company, reprint ed., 1972), S1-11.2: 134.

In a set of rules for his plantations, slaveholder Edward Spann Hammond listed detailed instructions for overseers regarding when and how much cloth should be given to men, women, and children. For children he writes:

Each child gets 2 shirts of cotton drilling every fall, & 2 of shirting in the spring made very long. The girls get a frock, & the boys a pr. of pants reaching the neck & with sleeves, every fall & spring - of lighter woolens in the fall than that given to the work hands....Mothers are required to put entirely clean clothes on their children twice a week, & it is the duty of the nurse to report any omission to do so.<sup>3</sup>

Compared with the children in records kept by other slaveholders and the testimonies of enslaved people themselves, the slave children on Hammond's plantations had a generous amount of clothing. Because children were not full work hands, planters sought to save money by not giving them as much clothing, reasoning that they would not wear it out as fast with the lighter labor required of them and would be inside on days with inclement weather. This often included the omission of shoes altogether, even if adults on the plantation received them. All children in the antebellum period regardless of race or class were dressed in unisex clothing.

As slave children grew in physical strength and were able to contribute a full days' labor, they gained access to more and better clothing. The Comingtee Plantation record book lists entries throughout the 1850s for "half hands" and "second hands." The second hands receive between three and four yards of cloth and are sometimes also separated as girls or boys, indicating these are probably enslaved people between ages eight and thirteen who were doing more work than children, but not as much work as full hands, and whose bodies were not adult-

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<sup>3</sup> Undated plantation journal, Edward Spann Hammond Plantation Books, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

sized.<sup>4</sup> The children are listed separately and grouped under their mothers' names, each mother receiving between one and three yards of cloth per child depending on the child's age.<sup>5</sup> This would be enough yardage to make one or two shirttails.

Often, an individual's physical growth to the point of laboring as a full hand coincided with puberty. The distribution of adult, or full hand, clothing also marked a stage in a person's life cycle. As Tim Edwards notes, "most children's clothing at least prior to adolescence is not defined as 'sexual' or intended to have the function of enhancing sexual attraction—indeed it is this sexual *intentionality* that often defines dress as 'adult.'"<sup>6</sup> Children dressed in unisex clothing were not as fully aware of their gender or their sexuality until the moment they received adult, gender-based clothing. Consequently, slaveholders and slaves associated the adulthood of enslaved people with both physical potential and reproductive potential. While it has long been recognized that slaveholders saw monetary value in slave women who could reproduce, examining the reactions of men who experienced slavery upon receiving adult male attire reveals that they, too, were valued for their reproductive potential.

Hammond's list and other sources reveal an aspect of masculinity during slavery that can only be seen by examining slave clothing. The unisex clothing given to all children in this time, white and black, was a one-piece dress or long shirt that often went below the knees. White boys were awarded breeches, or short pants,

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<sup>4</sup> Comingtee Plantation Record Book, Duke University Special Collections.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. See also earlier record books for Ball family plantations, including Comingtee, at the South Carolina Historical Society; John Coming Ball Plantation Book. South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; William James Ball Plantation Book, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>6</sup> Tim Edwards, *Fashion in Focus: Concepts, Practices, and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 98.

between the ages of five and ten. The wearing of long pants was meant to mark their gradual transition from boyhood to young men.<sup>7</sup> Slave children were also dressed in unisex clothing, though of much cheaper material than their white counterparts. Uncle Sabe Rutledge described children's apparel in his interview with the WPA similar to that described by Hammond: "All boy chillun wear a shirt – long down to knee and lower. Have belt round the middle – just like you belt to hold 'em."<sup>8</sup> Other interviewees described their shirt-tails as "loose shirts" that "come to the calf of the leg" and "homespun shirts and britches and little slips."<sup>9</sup> G. W. Hawkins remarked that during slavery, "A colored boy had to be more than twelve years old before he wore a pair of pants. He wore nothing but a long shirt that come down to his knees."<sup>10</sup> These multiple statements indicate that slaveholders across the South had a standardized approach to clothing enslaved children.

What is interesting about Hammond's list is the detail in which he described the clothing to be allotted, and the unusual generosity of so much clothing being given to children. Hammond was aware of the need for heavier, warmer cloth in the fall as evidenced by his specifying drilling, while in the spring the shirttails were to be made of a lighter cotton called shirting. Hammond also supplied the children he enslaved with nicer clothing. The frocks for girls and the one-piece jumpsuits for boys were a unique example of a planter providing gendered clothing for slave children. Likely these garments were meant to be worn to church service, but in

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<sup>7</sup> Anya Jabour, *Topsy-Turvy: How the Civil War Turned the World Upside Down for Southern Children* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2010), 30–31. See also chapter two in Lurie, *The Language of Clothes*; and "Chapter One: Understanding Children's Clothing" in Jo Paoletti, *Pink and Blue: Telling the Boys from the Girls in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 3.4: 65.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.1: 116. [interview of Spencer Barnett]; *Ibid.*, 7.1: 172 [interview of George Kye].

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.3: 216.

winter they could also be used as an extra layer for warmth. By specifying that the woolens for children's clothing were to be lighter "than that given to the work hands," Hammond shows he is still striving to spend as little as possible on clothing his slaves.

Plantation mistress Fanny Kemble recorded the lack of clothing of enslaved children she encountered in her journal, expressing repugnance at their state of nakedness. In one instance she said, "I found myself suddenly surrounded by a swarm of young ragamuffins in every stage of partial nudity, clamoring from out of their filthy remnants of rags," and in another she remarked on the "filthy, wretched, almost naked, always barelegged and barefooted children" who were ever present during her time in Georgia.<sup>11</sup> Frederick Douglass also recalled the pain he suffered due to the meager amount of clothing he was provided with, stating he had "no shoes, no stockings, no jacket, no trousers, nothing on but a coarse tow linen shirt, reaching only to my knees." To combat the cold Douglass would "steal a bag which was used for carrying corn to the mill" and sleep with his "head in and feet out," his feet being numb from walking about barefoot constantly.<sup>12</sup>

Several of the men interviewed during the WPA project commented upon the moment they first received pants. J. C. Alexander got his first pair at thirteen, made when "Mistress cut up a pair ob Mawster Wills' pants and made 'em to fit me."<sup>13</sup> Stearlin Arnwine recalled his first pair of pants at age fourteen, which were made at

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<sup>11</sup> Fanny Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation, 1838–1839* (1863, New York: Knopf, 1961), 130 and 156.

<sup>12</sup> Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 16.

<sup>13</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S2-2.1: 40.

home from a store bought cloth that was so uncomfortable Arnwine's pants "stung me til I was mizable."<sup>14</sup>

Jesse Stevenson noted that he was fifteen years old before he got his first pair of shoes, another marker of adulthood.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, Bud Jones recalled, "Many times I went in the snow barefoot. When I got bigger they got me brass studded shoes and a hat once a year but no pants."<sup>16</sup> In the records of James Heyward, as in those of many planters, children did not receive footwear.<sup>17</sup> Callie Elder remembered this was the case on the plantation where she was enslaved, noting that lack of protective footgear meant that her "foots cracked open 'til dey looked lak goose foots."<sup>18</sup> One reason for not giving children shoes was their rapid growth; Tom Hunley said of the shoes he wore as a child, "We couldn't wear 'em out. We could have worn our foots out sooner dan dem shoes. All we did was outgrow 'em."<sup>19</sup>

The multiple statements by men from the WPA narratives regarding their pants reflect the sentiments of Mose Davis, who remembered getting his first pair of pants as "one of the greatest thrills."<sup>20</sup> This evidence shows that the transition from boy to man marked an important time in the lives of black male slaves. It is noteworthy that slaveholders allowed male slaves the opportunity to assert their masculinity through clothing, and indeed encouraged it as the master usually chose when a male slave would be given pants. Scholarship on black masculinity during slavery emphasizes the emasculation of slave men, who were often called boy even

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., S2-2.1: 85.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 2.2: 201.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., S2-6.5: 2080.

<sup>17</sup> James Heyward Plantation Books, South Carolina Historical Society.

<sup>18</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 12.1: 309.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., S1-8.3: 1069.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 12.1: 267.

though they had gray hair and were treated with disrespect by young white males.<sup>21</sup> Slaveholders maintained control by deciding when their male slaves were allowed this rite of passage while also giving some of the power associated with masculinity to these enslaved men.

Many of the men interviewed tied the receiving of pants to a shift in their work duties, most indicating they were performing the work of full hands in the fields when they received adult clothing. Caleb Craig remembered that even after being assigned more intensive labor he still “b’long to de shirt-tail brigade . . . . Why I use to plow in my shirt-tail!”<sup>22</sup> Willis Cofer’s experience was a more common transition that tied field labor to adult clothing; he remarked that “all de boys wuz mighty proud when dey got big enough to wear pants and go to wuk in de fields wid grown folks.”<sup>23</sup> William Curtis did not go to work in the fields when he received his first pants. He said he “was fifteen when I started driving the fambly carriage and I got to put on pants then.”<sup>24</sup> Curtis’s transition to adulthood coincided not only with the privileges of pants but also with an increased range of mobility. Similar to slaves who served in the house or in other roles that exposed their bodies to white people, Curtis’s master likely saw an opportunity to display his property and a need to respect notions of modesty and respectability.

For Frederick Douglass, a move from a rural plantation to the city of Baltimore resulted in his first pair of pants around the age of eight. His recollections speak to the different qualities of life of rural versus urban slaves, and to the expectations of

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<sup>21</sup> Daniel T. Black, *Dismantling Black Manhood: An Historical and Literary Analysis of the Legacy of Slavery* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Thomas A. Foster, Mary Beth Norton, and Toby L. Ditz, eds., *New Men: Manliness in Early America* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 2.1: 230.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.1: 203.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.1: 49.

slaveholders in maintaining the physical appearance of slaves. Douglass was told to wash himself thoroughly, so he “spent the most part of . . . three days in the creek, washing off the plantation scurf.”<sup>25</sup> He continued that he fulfilled the requirement of cleanliness “not so much because I wished to, but because Mrs. Lucretia had told me I must get all the dead skin off my feet and knees” or he would not get his first pair of pants. Douglass noted, “The thought of owning a pair of trousers was great indeed!” after previously only having a shirttail (hence the dry and dirty skin on his knees).<sup>26</sup>

The period of boyhood seems to have been prolonged for black men. Most comment that boys like themselves received pants at age twelve, thirteen, or even as late as fifteen.<sup>27</sup> Henry Johnson remembered that he had no clothing at all until he was more than twenty.<sup>28</sup> In contrast, white boys in the antebellum period usually transitioned from gowns into short pants or breeches around age five, and then into pants by the age of ten at the latest.<sup>29</sup> There are various reasons why this difference occurred. In the minds of slaveholders, it was impractical and wasteful to supply clothing to any slave who did not produce a full day’s labor. By age twelve and certainly by age fifteen, male slaves would be able to do the work of at least a three-quarter if not a full hand. Delaying the transition for black males also reinforced the

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<sup>25</sup> Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 16.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>27</sup> Wilma King notes: “A slave’s life followed an identifiable progression of stages. However, slave-owners truncated segments of the cycle to satisfy themselves, and one of the greatest disruptions was the quantum leap from childhood into the world of work.” See Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America* (2nd ed.; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 71. In the case of male slaves and breeching, we see the opposite happening. Rather than shortening the period of childhood, slaveholders held off on giving out pants. The transition from boyhood to manhood as related to work assignments and the receiving of pants was still very abrupt, though.

<sup>28</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 11.8: 207. Johnson’s claim of complete nakedness may be exaggerated, or a consequence of his feeling naked due to a lack of the respectable amount of clothing for the time.

<sup>29</sup> Paoletti, *Pink and Blue*, chapter 1.

gendered power structure of the Old South. By shifting white male children into gendered clothing at an earlier age, masters ensured that black male children would remain more subservient. Without the garb of masculinity, enslaved boys were recognized by slaveholding boys as less powerful and therefore people to be dominated.

Jesse Stevenson noted that he and the other slaves where he lived “was most grown befo’ we know’d a thing ’bout man and woman.”<sup>30</sup> The notion of sexual difference marked an important event in the lives of slaves partly because masters expected them to reproduce.<sup>31</sup> By allowing male slaves to differentiate themselves through clothing, slaveholders may have been encouraging partnering and reproduction. In wearing the garb of white men, male slaves may also have been able to assert more authority over younger slaves and women.

Slaveholders clearly recognized the power that pants held in terms of cultural control. Louisiana planter Bennet H. Barrow used a unique form of punishment for male slaves that took advantage of ideas about masculinity and bifurcated garments. Barrow punished a male slave by making him “ware womens cloths for running away & without the least cause” in April during the midst of the planting season.<sup>32</sup> The following summer, Barrow again used women’s clothing to punish male slaves, noting that he gave four men “Bagging skirts to wear—instead of shirt & pants,” though Barrow does not say what these four men did to receive such punishment.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 2.2: 201.

<sup>31</sup> Patrick W. O’Neill, “Bosses and Broomsticks: Ritual and Authority in Antebellum Slave Weddings,” *Journal of Southern History* 75 (February 2009): 29–48.

<sup>32</sup> Bennett H. Barrow, *Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes of Louisiana, 1836–1846: As Reflected in the Diary of Bennet H. Barrow*, ed. Edwin Adams Davis (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 112.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

Though it cannot be determined from Barrow's punishments how the enslaved men dressed in female attire reacted, it can be assumed that they felt the psychological effects intended by Barrow from the comments made by other men who experienced slavery and so strongly associated their manliness with receiving pants.

Maurice O. Wallace has pointed out that "the construction of American white masculinity was dependent upon the homosocial counterconstruction of black male savagery."<sup>34</sup> Wallace's theory posits that white masculinity was inherently different from black masculinity, and that white men depended upon dominating men of other races and ethnicities in order to define themselves as manly. Evidence of the empowerment of male slaves by white slaveholders in giving out pants provides a more complex picture of black masculinity in the pre-Civil War South. It also complicates the delicate balance of power that slaveholders tried to construct and maintain in the social structure and adds another dimension as to why white people felt threatened by black masculinity.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Maurice O. Wallace, *Constructing the Black Masculine: Identity and Ideality in African American Men's Literature and Culture, 1775 – 1995* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 2. For an overview of masculinity studies see David Buchbinder, *Studying Men and Masculinities* (New York: Routledge, 2013). Scholarship on black masculinity is more limited than that on white masculinity, and most studies of black masculinity focus on the years after freedom. See Darlene Clark Hine, ed., *A Question of Manhood: A Reader in U.S. Black Men's History and Masculinity*. 2 vols. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999, 2001); Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien, "Race, Sexual Politics, and Black Masculinity: A Dossier," in *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, eds. Rowena Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), 97–164; Tim Edwards, "In Black and White: Race, Ethnicity, and Masculinity," *Cultures of Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 64–78; and Sallie Westwood, "Racism, Black Masculinity, and the Politics of Space," in *Men, Masculinities, and Social Theory*, eds. Jeff Hearn and David Morgan (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 55–71. Two articles that do examine enslaved black masculinity are Edward E. Baptist, "The Absent Subject: African American Masculinity and Forced Migration to the Antebellum Plantation Frontier," in *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South*, ed. Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 136–174; and Rebecca Fraser, "Negotiating Their Manhood: Masculinity Amongst the Enslaved in the Upper South, 1830–1861," in *Black and White Masculinity in the American South, 1800–2000*, ed. Lydia Plath and Sergio Lussana (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 76–94.

<sup>35</sup> In his study of poor whites and slaves, Jeff Forret provides a deep analysis of the masculinity of non-elite white men in relation to black masculinity and elite white masculinity in the antebellum

Some of the remembrances of men born enslaved provide further insight into black masculinity during slavery. For some, their maturing bodies and the possibility of their exposed genitalia became threatening enough to warrant pants. This was the case for Jerry Boykins, who recalled, "One day when I was 'bout fo'teen, ol' missie say to Marster when he fix that day to go to town, 'See here, I can't stan' the sight of this black boy runnin' 'round in this house without 'nuf clothes to hide his nakedness. You brings him back from town a pair of long pants,' and that's how I got my first pants."<sup>36</sup> At fourteen, Boykins' body looked more like that of a man than a boy, and the white woman of the plantation likely felt it was inappropriate for her to be in such close proximity to this impropriety. Boykins received pants not because of his own actions or a change in his work duties, but because of the mistress's discomfort at seeing his exposed body.<sup>37</sup>

Hary Coleman first received pants because of a combination of his new labor assignment and a sense of modesty or propriety. Coleman noted that his mother

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South. Forret concludes that all three masculinities were based upon codes of honor and were expressed through violence, but that elite white men understood their access to honor as both a racial and a class privilege, while poor white men also felt they could be honorable within the poor white male cohort and had more honor than enslaved black men. Forret further argues that codes of honor were an aspect of black masculinity expressed within the slave community. See Forret, "A Masculine Subculture of Violence," in *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 157–183. The two classic works on elite white southern masculinity are Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982). Ariela J. Gross also discusses the role of honor in understanding slavery and the law in *Double Character: Slavery and Mastery in the Antebellum Southern Courtroom* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), especially chapter 2.

<sup>36</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S2-2.1, 372. Catherine Clinton mentions notions of respectability and the different standards of white and black bodies and nakedness. She argues that white women were conditioned to see black male bodies as nonhuman and therefore nonthreatening when naked. See Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 209. This assertion does not account for the fears expressed about overly-sexualized black men of the same period. See also King, *Stolen Childhood*.

<sup>37</sup> For a similar interpretation see King, *Stolen Childhood*, 66.

remarked one day that Coleman, “got to git hissef some pants” because she was “gwine to put him up over de white fokes table” to operate a fly brush, a contraption similar to a punkah fan.<sup>38</sup> With only a shirt and no pants, Coleman’s genitals would be exposed as he swung above the table waving the fan, a sight both improper and unappetizing for the diners below.

Males who experienced their childhood as slaves were not the only ones who remarked upon the condition of their clothing or the transition into adult apparel. Many females also remembered having very little clothing as children. Virginia Harris recalled the unisex appearance of the slave children, noting, “All the children wore was their shirt tails. I was about sixteen years before I ever owned a dress.”<sup>39</sup> Martha Colquitt said that children like herself did have access to some warmer clothing in cold weather due to the extra efforts of her female relatives: “In winter grandma made us yarn underskirts and yarn drawers buttoned down over our knees. Ma made our home-knit stockings.”<sup>40</sup> These garments were likely similar to the frocks and one-piece pants described by Edward Spann Hammond in his instructions to overseers.

On some plantations, master and mistress differed in their opinions of what was adequate for their slaves. Lou Smith recalled a particularly influential experience she had as a girl. While the master was absent, the mistress “said us kids didn’t need to wear any clothes and one day she told us we could jest take ’em off as it

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<sup>38</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 2.1: 210. The punkah fan was adopted by some southerners from India. It was a fan that hung over the dining table and was operated by a slave during meals to keep away flies and other pests. It was usually operated by a pulley system, but was also constructed with a small bench seat upon which a child sat and swung the fan. Dana E. Byrd, “Punkahs and Fly Brushes,” in *World of a Slave: Encyclopedia of Material Life of Slaves in the United States*, ed. Martha B. Katz-Hyman, Vol. 2, (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2011), 381–385.

<sup>39</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S1-8.3: 938.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.1: 241.

cost too much to clothe us.”<sup>41</sup> From Smith’s story it seems that she had recently been moved to the plantation of her original owner’s son, who was newly married. Smith said that when the master returned, “He wanted to know what on earth I was doing without my dress on. I told him, and my goodness, but he raised the roof. He told her if she didn’t treat us better he was going to take us back to old Master.”<sup>42</sup> Smith’s story shows that slaves sometimes found themselves in the midst of the marital disputes of the master and mistress, which added to the slaves’ stressful environment. For Smith, the experience of being stripped of her clothing was humiliating. She recalled that though she “was jest a little child . . . I knowed I oughten to go without my clothes. . . . I just crept off and cried.”<sup>43</sup> This final aspect of Smith’s retelling reveals her own concepts of modesty and a right to keep parts of her body private. In feeling shame, she also felt her person had been violated by the mistress.

Like men, women’s shift into adult clothing was marked by a change in their work duties, but unlike men, women’s adult clothing was associated much more directly with their reproductive labor.<sup>44</sup> Mattie Curtis recalled that she “went as naked as Yo’ han’ till I was fourteen years old.”<sup>45</sup> At that age she began menstruating, and her mother insisted that the master provide her with clothing. A woman identified only as M. Fowler in the WPA records recalled that she “never had a underskirt until

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 7.1: 301.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Deborah Gray White states that children aged twelve to sixteen of both sexes often belonged to the “trash gang,” a group of enslaved people including these young teens, pregnant and nursing women, and old slaves who did light work such as picking up trash, light hoeing or pulling weeds, gardening, and running errands. She notes the importance of this shift for enslaved females as the group that made up the trash gang was predominantly female. See White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1999), 94.

<sup>45</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 14.1: 218.

just befo' my first child was born."<sup>46</sup> Fowler did not have access to a garment that provided warmth as well as additional modesty until after her body had been marked as that of a mother, and therefore a woman whose body was not pure. Fowler may also have received this additional garment as a gift, a thank you from the master for providing him another slave by her having a child.

Other people who experienced slavery recalled receiving gifts of clothing for having babies, as well as clothing or blankets for the children themselves. Dink Walton Young recalled that every woman who had a baby received "a calico dress and a bright, shiny silver dollar."<sup>47</sup> The recollections of Mary Reynolds point to the connections slaveholders made between the value of their enslaved population in both productive and reproductive capacities. Reynolds stated that at Christmas time, "The highest cotton picker gets a suit of clothes and all the womens that has twins that year gets a out fittin of clothes for the twins and a double warm blanket."<sup>48</sup>

Gifting wedding gowns to enslaved women was a way for slaveholders to encourage reproduction among their slave population, but family and love were also important to enslaved people. The relationships young women, usually teenagers when they married, had to gifts of clothing as part of wedding a male slave are apparent in the survival of two dresses that have a history of being worn during slave weddings. Both of these dresses were also supposedly made by the mistress of the plantation especially for the occasion.<sup>49</sup> These garments raise questions about the relationships between white and black women as well as the feelings of enslaved

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., S1-1.1: 151.

<sup>47</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S1-4.2: 667.

<sup>48</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S2-8: 3294–95.

<sup>49</sup> Object file, Murray family dress, Alamance County Historical Museum, Burlington, North Carolina; Jack A. Smith, "The Murray Family Dress," *Piecework* 16 (March/April 2008): 36–37; Object file, 26.1131.66.G, Witte Museum, San Antonio, Texas.

women in wanting to be loved, yet cautious of slaveholders' control of their bodies and their potential children.

The romantic lives of slaves were closely monitored by slaveholders for many reasons beyond the possibility of increasing enslaved property through reproduction. Masters had to provide enough space for enslaved black men and women to express their genders and sexualities so that courtship and marriage would be desirable. At the same time, white masters had to regulate the opportunities black men had for expressing masculinity. Mary Johnson recalled that her brother was “a pow’ful big boy and he wasn’t ’lowed to have no pants till he twenty-one year old, but that didn’t ’scourage him from courtin’ the gals. I try tease him ’bout go see the gals with dat split shirt.”<sup>50</sup> Johnson’s brother was fully grown to maturity, and likely performed the labor of a full hand by this time. But the master must have felt threatened by the male slave’s physical strength and attractiveness, so forced him to appear in clothing that would make him subservient to the women he sought as romantic conquests. In this instance, the master’s concern over his own power trumped his potential capital gain from slave children.

In the minds of slaveholders, every enslaved person they claimed to own should reflect monetary value. Much of the work that enslaved children performed was part of the nonproductive labor on the plantation, work that was necessary to maintain maximum efficiency, including textile and clothing production. Alice Hutcheson recalled doing this kind of work as a child, noting, “Missy give us chillum six cuts of thread for a days wuk.”<sup>51</sup> Hutcheson’s recollections speak to part of

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<sup>50</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 4.2: 220.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 12.2, 285.

Wilma King's assertion that enslaved children did not experience a childhood.<sup>52</sup>

Forced labor and physical violence were both important aspects of enslaved children's understanding of themselves as slaves.<sup>53</sup> Masters became quite creative in finding uses for young children who did not have the physical stamina to labor in the fields as full hands. Some slaveholders used children and the domination of them as a source of entertainment. An advertisement for eleven-year-old James Henry Fields described him as wearing "an old ragged jacket and pantaloons," which was not unusual, but Fields also had on "a dog collar with Isaiah Shaw's name thereon."<sup>54</sup> Shaw, presumably the owner of Fields, literally treated this slave like a dog.

Runaway advertisements also provide some insight into the motivations of slave youth for resisting by absenting themselves either temporarily or permanently. Though the vast majority of slaves who ran were males in their twenties, there were a significant number of teenaged slaves, male and female, who ran away. From a selection of 572 runaway advertisements gathered through the *America's Historical Newspapers* digital database, 52 people were under the age of 18; of these, 35 were male and 17 were female. Only 7 people were under the age of 13. The most compelling aspect of these 52 people is that every single one of them was described as wearing adult clothing; no one ran away wearing a shirttail.<sup>55</sup> Notions of modesty, as well as practical needs such as warmth, partly account for these results. The

<sup>52</sup> King, *Stolen Childhood*, xxi–xxii.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.; Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 21.

<sup>54</sup> Advertisement, *Easton Gazette*, October 12, 1839. Interestingly, Fields is also advertised as "Lost or Stolen" rather than as a runaway.

<sup>55</sup> Advertisements for males described them as wearing "pants," "pantaloons," or "trousers"; female slaves wore a "frock" or a "dress."

shirttail also marked black bodies as enslaved, possibly even more so than Negro cloth by itself. Enslaved children bore a sort of double burden on their persons as they were usually wearing shirttails made from Negro cloth.

Tattered, torn, ragged, and filthy, enslaved children were a ubiquitous presence across the Old South. Understanding their experiences reveals how both slaveholders and slaves understood gender and sexuality during slavery. Male and female slaves experienced moments of gender and racial awareness as they grew into new labor roles. The capacities of slave bodies to do productive and reproductive labor were inseparable from their gendered identities. This was especially true for women, whose reproductive capacity was more closely monitored, controlled, and rewarded by slaveholders. The pride of manliness and the garb of masculinity symbolized by pants took on a new importance during the Civil War when black men began to don that most manly of all ensembles—the soldier's uniform.

## *Chapter Eight*

### Life in Pieces: Slaves and Clothing during the Civil War

When the American Civil War broke out in April 1861, many on both sides expected a swift end to the conflict. Few expected that the southern states would be occupied by invading armies for the next four years, wreaking havoc upon urban centers and rich farmland across the region. The disruptions of daily life are evidenced in plantation records, many being kept in a new hand, inconsistently, or not at all. This chapter discusses the consequences of textile and clothing shortages within the Confederacy and, briefly, the impact of blockades on the world textile market. In the midst of extreme hardships, enslaved people found moments to resist when they dressed in the fine clothing that was abandoned by slaveholders or put on the Union uniform. The chaos of war provided greater opportunity for enslaved people to challenge the race-based fashion system as part of their increased defiance of enslavement during the war years.

Kate Stone was twenty years old when Louisiana seceded from the United States and joined the Confederacy in 1861. Realizing the importance of the events she witnessed, Stone began keeping a journal chronicling daily life during the war on her family's cotton plantation, Brokenburn. Stone, whose family's wealth was deeply entrenched in the slave economy of the Old South, embraced her position as the citizen of a new nation—the Confederate States of America—and threw herself wholeheartedly into supporting the war. Throughout the war, Stone commented on the changes in cloth goods during a time of shortages and inflations. Her journal is filled with accounts of days spent making clothes for her soldier brothers and of the

family left at home, struggling to find goods to keep the enslaved population of Brokenburn warm and fed, and watching as hundreds of her family's cotton bolls burned to nothing.

By the mid-nineteenth century the world economy depended on the slave labor of the southern United States as a major element in a complex trading system that crisscrossed the oceans and continents.<sup>1</sup> When the South seceded from the United States, the resulting war had massive implications for nations across the globe. It is often thought that the U.S. South existed as an isolated pocket, a peculiar place where race-based slavery and a single cash crop reigned supreme. Indeed, the antebellum South was like no other place on earth at the time, but its very uniqueness led to its crucial role in the global textile trade. Though the ideological origins of the Civil War remain hotly debated, the war, like so many others in human history, was rooted in the financial interests of slavery. The world textile market, not just the South, bowed to the whims of King Cotton. Though morals and politics regarding slavery were important, foreign nations were most invested financially in the debates about the ending of American slavery.

By May 1862, only one year into the fighting, Stone wrote in her journal, "Clothes have become a secondary consideration. Fashion is an obsolete word and just to be decently clad is all we expect. . . . A gentleman thinks nothing of calling on half a dozen young ladies dressed in home-dyed negro cloth and blue checked shirt."<sup>2</sup> Thus, gentlemen appeared in the garb of slaves to woo the most desirable

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Schoen, *The Fragile Fabric of Union: Cotton, Federal Politics, and the Global Origins of the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Kate Stone, *Brokenburn: The Journal of Kate Stone, 1861–1868*, ed. John Q. Anderson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 109.

damselfs of the community. Of course, the ladies themselves were attired in dresses that had been turned, mended, and patched. No doubt, each party felt out of his or her element, suffering a sort of identity crisis amid the many other upheavals of life during war.<sup>3</sup>

As the Civil War continued and Union troops encroached farther into the southern interior, southerners took drastic measures. Often under the direction of the Confederate military, civilians burned their homes and abandoned their land. At Kate Stone's plantation Brokenburn, the family did as instructed, along with their neighbors, and burned their cotton crop. She wrote in her journal:

Though the Yankees have gained the land, the people are determined they shall not have its wealth, and from every plantation rises the smoke of burning cotton. The order from Beauregard advising the destruction of the cotton met with a ready response from the people, most of them agreeing that it is the only thing to do. As far as we can see are the ascending wreaths of smoke, and we hear that all the cotton of the Mississippi Vally from Memphis to New Orleans is going up in smoke. . . . Mamma has \$20,000 worth burning on the gin ridge now.<sup>4</sup>

Rather than have their cotton confiscated and shipped north to the monetary advantage of the Union, hundreds of southerners did just as Stone's family, watching their wealth drift away in curls of smoke.

Absent from Stone's accounting are the people who actually worked to plant and grow the cotton, the same people who were tasked with burning it. What Stone saw as thousands of dollars, they saw as thousands of hours of hard labor gone to waste. Though the people Stone enslaved appear sporadically in her journal, their

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<sup>3</sup> The effects of war and identity in terms of dress for privileged white women are discussed in detail in Drew Gilpin Faust, "Chapter Ten: If I Were Once Released: The Garb of Gender," in *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 220-233. See especially the incident of Lizzie Neblett purchasing one of her own dresses back that she had given as a gift to an enslaved woman, p. 222. See also George C. Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), especially chapter 5.

<sup>4</sup> Stone, *Brokenburn*, 100-101.

daily trials and triumphs during the war remain unknown. Records of other plantation owners, as well as the voices of enslaved people who lived through the war, show that they too experienced extreme hardship during the war years. Charles Heyward, who owned five plantations in the Carolinas, made a concerted effort to continue distributing what goods were available throughout the war. Before the war, Heyward gave his slaves woolen plains each winter. He continued this practice in 1862 but noted, "No caps nor Hdkfs. Could not buy any."<sup>5</sup> By the following year he could only find cotton osnaberg to distribute, and in 1864, the final year the plantation account was kept and less than six months before the war ended, he again noted, "There being no woollen cloth to be procured, had to give Cotton Oznaburgs to the negroes 17 Dec."<sup>6</sup>

Late in October 1862, Kate Stone mentioned her younger brother's shopping excursion: "Jimmy went to Mississippi today to get leather to make shoes for the Negroes. Should he fail to get it, the Negroes will certainly suffer in the cold."<sup>7</sup> She never writes whether Jimmy was successful in his search. Regardless, shoes remained a serious concern as shortages worsened and inflation skyrocketed. Jerry Eubanks recalled that shoes were available to him "until de war come" and continued that the lack of shoes and other depravities in wartime meant he and the other slaves "couldn't hardly live."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Plantation Record Book, January 1862, Charles Heyward Plantation Books, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. "Hdkfs." is an abbreviation for handkerchiefs. In this instance, Heyward probably gave men caps and women handkerchiefs for headgear, though handkerchiefs were worn by both sexes in a variety of ways during this time period.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., December 1864.

<sup>7</sup> Stone, *Brokenburn*, 152.

<sup>8</sup> George P. Rawick, ed. *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* (1941, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Company, reprint ed., 1972), S1-7.2: 689.

When blockades prevented imports and battles disrupted factory work, many slaveholders turned to household production.<sup>9</sup> The record book of Silk Hope plantation in Georgia shows the purchasing of shoemaking tools, spinning wheels, and weaving supplies during 1863.<sup>10</sup> By the second year of the war, textile production tools were also at inflated prices. A pair of wool cards cost Manigault \$35.00 and a pair of cotton cards \$27.00.<sup>11</sup> Previously, this plantation had purchased cloth yardage, but to combat the shortage of ready-made cloth they switched to homespun. The family at Brokenburn took the same approach. Before they burned their crop, they set aside some for their own use, purchased a loom, cards, and spindles, and learned how to spin and weave. In 1864 Stone noted, "We are at last using homespun. The house servants are charmed to see the cloth. They have been fit suspects for the ragman for weeks. Mamma is readying up Charles, who has been a regular ragamuffin. We are sorry Adeline, the seamstress, selected this as a fit time to run away. It keeps our hands full."<sup>12</sup> Prior to the war, Adeline and other enslaved women did most of the sewing of the slave clothes, while Stone and her mother made and mended clothing for the white family. The seamstress Adeline absented herself for three days during a time she knew her workload would be increased, an instance of resistance against her enslavement. This left Stone and her mother to do much of the sewing themselves, which Stone clearly resented.

Shortage of goods meant increased labor for all on the plantation, as evidenced by Stone's resentment at her heavier load of plain sewing. As the need

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<sup>9</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 45–51.

<sup>10</sup> Silk Hope Plantation memo books, 1863, Gabriel Manigault Papers, South Carolina Historical Society,

<sup>11</sup> See entry for June 1863, *Ibid.* These are probably listed in Confederate dollars, which were also incredibly inflated during this period.

<sup>12</sup> Stone, *Brokenburn*, 286.

for more textile production arose, some wealthy white women began to do a kind of labor that was considered inappropriate to their station. Typically women such as Stone learned decorative embroidery skills, lace making, and some plain sewing. By the mid-nineteenth century, the more menial work of preparing fibers, spinning, and weaving was relegated to enslaved women or to white women who worked for wages and were thus not of the upper crust. As Drew Faust notes in her study of slaveholding women during the Civil War, this shift in labor “blurred the all-important lines of differentiation between them and their female slaves.”<sup>13</sup> For various reasons, many white women such as Stone quickly abandoned their efforts to learn new textile related skills, choosing to recycle or go without.

In addition to added home sewing, enslaved women spent additional time spinning and weaving as more and more plantations shifted to home production. For some, such as Maria Sutton Clements, who noted that “we didn’t spin and weave till the war come on,” these were newly added tasks and skills that had to be learned.<sup>14</sup> This was also the case for Alice Sewell, who points to the investment of new tools that was incurred during the war when the plantation owners “up and bought spinning wheels and cards so us women could spin it to make cloth, and make clothes at home.”<sup>15</sup> In other cases where some home production had been done before the war, the work of spinning, weaving, and sewing increased.

As was the case with Kate Stone’s family, the war brought shortages of cloth and limited access to manufactured goods to everyone, including those on the plantation where Susan Snow lived. “Durin’ de war,” Snow recalled, “de white folks

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<sup>13</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 47.

<sup>14</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 8.2: 25.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.8: 302.

made deir own clothes too. Ol' mistis made dye an' dyed de thread an' made beautiful cloth."<sup>16</sup> Snow's statement indicates that there was production at her home before the war, but only for clothing for the slaves. The plantation mistress clearly had developed some skill and knowledge of dyeing and weaving if she was able to create her own dye from found objects (commercial dyes being unavailable because of blockades and high prices) as well as weave designs into the cloth made at home.



8.1 Unknown enslaved makers. *Woven fabric swatches*. 1861–1865. The Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia, selections from 0985.10.25.

Though home production of cloth most certainly increased during the Civil War, it was mostly because all cloth was being made at home rather than just some of the cloth used for utilitarian purposes or for clothing slaves. This is evidenced in the fabric swatches pictured above, which were made during the war by enslaved women on the McIver plantation in South Carolina.<sup>17</sup> The women who made these fabrics clearly had knowledge of making colorfast dyestuffs, getting an even coloring

<sup>16</sup> Rawick, *Ibid.*, S1-10.5: 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Object file, 0985.10.25, Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia; Madelyn Shaw, "Slave Cloth and Clothing Slaves: Craftsmanship, Commerce, and Industry," *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts* 33 (2012), [www.mesdajournal.org](http://www.mesdajournal.org).

across the fiber, and in weaving complicated colored designs into the fabrics. Weaving stripes is rather simple, but the brown and blue plaid and the blue, white, and red basketweave designs pictured required knowledge of how to set up the warps on a loom correctly with these different colors and how to operate the heddles and the shuttle to create the correct pattern with the weft threads. Because so many accounts of the war years in the South come from wealthy white people unaccustomed to wearing or making their own cloth and clothing, the extent to which home production of textiles increased during the war years may have been previously exaggerated.<sup>18</sup>

The story of textile production in the Civil War South provides a very unique glimpse into enslaved women's forced labor for the Confederacy. A few male slaves accompanied masters to the battlefields as valets or personal servants. Most enslaved people who worked in the Confederate military were forced to do menial hard labor such as digging trenches, burying the dead, or cooking and laundering. The military temporarily seized slaves from nearby plantations as they moved around the South to assist in preparation for or recovery from battle, much to the consternation of the local slaveholders. It is well known that enslaved men were forced to assist the Union and Confederate forces with menial labor throughout the war, but less has been said about the forced labor of enslaved women. A few likely found themselves laundering and cooking in or near military camps, but even those

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<sup>18</sup> Drew Faust concurs with this statement in her book *Mothers of Invention*, determining that "there was no homespun revolution" in the Confederacy and that the increased levels of home textile production in the wartime South "did not have a significant impact in meeting the demand for textiles in the Confederacy" (pp. 49, 48). See also Mary Edna Lohrenz and Anita Miller Stamper, *Mississippi Homespun: Nineteenth Century Textiles and the Women Who Made Them* (Jackson: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1989); and Madelyn Shaw and Lynne Zacek Bassett, *Homefront and Battlefield: Quilts and Context in the Civil War* (Lowell, Mass.: American Textile Museum, 2012).

who remained at home were expected to contribute to supporting the war. Lavinia Lewis noted that wool from the sheep raised on the plantation was carded and spun “into thread ter knit de socks an’ de sweaters for de soljers.”<sup>19</sup> Charlie Trotty recalled during the war that he watched his mother “stayin up lots of nights, nearly all de night, spinnin and weaving for de soldiers, makin socks and shirts.”<sup>20</sup> This labor was in addition to that needed for clothing the white and black population left at home, not to mention the other daily labor expected of women in the fields or domestic spaces.

As it became clearer toward the end of the war that the South was going to lose and slavery would end, slaveholders sometimes worked their slaves harder to maximize the amount of labor gained from the enslaved people before freedom. Sarah Waggoner assisted the plantation mistress with weaving and was kept from playing at all with the mistress’s child, Jane, who was told by her mother, “‘Sarey, has to work fast now, ’cause she goin’ to be free.’”<sup>21</sup> Slaveholders also tried to stock up for the near future, extracting extra labor so that goods would be on hand for the uncertain times after peace and freedom. Mary Divine recalled that a single young slave on the plantation “done spun enough thread to clothe her whole family for de next three years to come.”<sup>22</sup>

Many slaveholders attempted to retain their human property by fleeing encroaching Union forces and relocating to the western frontier or Texas. Ben Simpson, an enslaved child during the war, went on a forced march from Georgia to

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<sup>19</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S2-6.5: 2355.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, S2-9.8: 3888.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.8: 360–61.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.8: 104.

Texas to escape the invading army. He told a WPA interviewer, "Somewhere on the road it went to snowing, and master would not let us have shoes or anything to wrap around our feet. . . . Mother, she give out on the way somewhere about the line of Texas. Her feet got raw and bleeding and her legs swell plum out of shape. Then master he just take out his gun and shot her and while she was dying he kick her two or three times and say dam a negro that couldn't stand anything."<sup>23</sup> Ben Simpson suffered the consequences of a war-torn homeland to the fullest extent. He also remarked, "After marster come to Texas he never did get us any clothes. We went naked that was the way he worked us."<sup>24</sup> In late March 1863, the Stone family decided to abandon their property at Brokenburn and flee to the safety of the Texas frontier.<sup>25</sup> The Stone family's slaves preceded them to Texas; their state of dress remains unmarked in Stone's journal, though she continually recounts failed efforts to locate clothing for herself, so the slaves likely went without.

Thousands of enslaved southerners escaped through the Union lines, first as contraband of war and then as free people. Black men, both those born free and those who had escaped slavery, were able to enlist in the Union military as soldiers beginning in 1863.<sup>26</sup> For those who wore the badge of slavery—the rough and ill-

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 9.8: 3550.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 9.8: 3551.

<sup>25</sup> Stone, *Brokenburn*, xx.

<sup>26</sup> Literature on the experiences of African American soldiers, and of all African Americans during the Civil War, is a field that is growing quickly. Particularly important are the recent studies done of black people living through the war in the South. For examples, see Richard M. Reid, *Freedom for Themselves: North Carolina's Black Soldiers in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of Chapel Hill Press, 2008); William Cohen, *At Freedom's Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern Quest for Racial Control, 1861–1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991); Bruce Levine, *Confederate Emancipation: Southern Plans to Free and Arm Slaves during the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); John David Smith, ed., *Black Soldiers in Blue: African American Troops in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Ella Forbes, *African American Women during the Civil War* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), Tara Deshpande, "Race and Heroism in Thomas Wentworth Higginson's Civil War Memoir," in *Southern*

fitting Negro cloth—a military uniform became a badge of freedom.<sup>27</sup> One of the best known examples is that of Hubbard Pryor. He escaped from slavery in late 1863 to Union lines near Chattanooga, Tennessee, and was photographed in both the clothing in which he arrived at the camp and in his soldiers' uniform. Plates were made of these photographs and widely circulated throughout the North to raise sympathy and express praise for the U.S. Colored Troops (USCT).



8.2 A. S. Morse. *Private Hubbard D. Pryor after enlistment*. 1864. National Archives and Records Administration, ID849136.

The full meaning of a change from the garb of slavery to an army uniform remains unexplored as few first-hand accounts from formerly enslaved black soldiers exist. However, white officers and troops did leave some descriptions of their observations of the transformative power of clothing. Ludlum C. Drake, a captain of USCT, noted of the troops under his command, "New uniforms, guns in their hands, and the

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*Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South*, ed. Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 158–180.

<sup>27</sup> Maurice O. Wallace. "Framing the Black Soldier: Image, Uplift, and the Duplicity of Pictures," in *Pictures and Progress*, ed. Wallace and Smith, 244–266.

stamp of government upon them seemed to give them self respect and consciousness of manhood and power so that the rapidity of the transformation was marvelous.”<sup>28</sup> Particularly interesting is Drake’s noticing “the stamp of government” as a source of pride. While donning the uniform of a country instills in the wearer a sense of belonging and of patriotism, military outfits are designed with the purpose of making all of the soldiers look alike. For men like Pryor who had struggled during slavery to express individuality through supplementing or altering the standard issue wardrobe of slaves, putting on a soldier’s uniform likely recreated a feeling of anonymity.<sup>29</sup> Further complicating matters was the type of fabric Union uniforms were made from. The military purchased cloth from the same northern factories that had produced Negro cloth in such great quantities in the antebellum period. These manufacturers did not change what they were making, rather the end use of the textiles shifted; Union soldiers, including USCT like Pryor, were in essence wearing Negro cloth.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ludlum C. Drake, “War Reminiscences,” Papers of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, Michigan Commandery, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. As quoted in Ronald S. Coddington, *African American Faces of the Civil War: An Album* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 209.

<sup>29</sup> Wallace, “Framing the Black Soldier.”

<sup>30</sup> Susan Oba, “‘Mostly Made, Especially for this Purpose, in Providence, R.I.’: The Rhode Island Negro Cloth Industry,” Bachelor’s thesis, Brown University, 2006, 67.



8.3 A. S. Morse. *Private Hubbard D. Pryor before enlistment*. 1864. National Archives and Records Administration, ID849127.

Pryor's clothing when he arrived at the camp was tattered, torn, and clearly used up. It was two years into the war, and he likely had not gotten new clothing for at least that long, not to mention it was worn and soiled from his escape efforts through the woods. Many of the descriptions of slaves' clothing given by Union soldiers observing enslaved people for the first time note their ragged conditions. But these observations must be balanced out with those of plantation owners and slaveholders such as Kate Stone, who also noted how poorly their enslaved property were dressed and fed during the war years. Pryor's story did not end with his becoming a soldier. He was recaptured by Confederate forces and made to build and repair railroad lines until Pryor and the crew were abandoned in May 1865. He eventually returned to the place where he had been enslaved "in a sick, broken down, naked and starved condition."<sup>31</sup> Pryor's wartime story of escaping to freedom, serving as a

<sup>31</sup> Coddington, *African American Faces of the Civil War*, 123–128 (quotation page 128).

soldier, being reenslaved, and finally being abandoned with no recourse to food or shelter at the end of the war is quite a remarkable adventure that demonstrates how fragile freedom was during the war, even after donning a soldiers' uniform, and how much uncertainty freedmen faced after the fighting ended.

Enslaved men also used access to the Union forces to obtain clothing. Photographs taken of newly freed people during the war show men wearing one or two items that are clearly from Union uniforms. Often these are kepi hats or pants. Runaway advertisements also speak to this access of clothing. Among other apparel, Ben was wearing "a pair of blue Yankee pants" when he ran off in 1863.<sup>32</sup> Jim ran away in 1864 wearing "cavalry boots, a soldier's cap faced with red, a slouch hat, gray overcoat, jacket, [and] a blue cloth military frock coat." The advertiser also noted that Jim "has been in the army, and will try to pass himself off as the servant of an officer," though it is unclear if he had served a Union or a Confederate officer.<sup>33</sup>

Wartime provided unique ways in which clothing could also be used to subvert or rebel against enslavement. Jane McLeod Wilburn noted that even Union soldiers recognized the extremely important role dress played in defining status on the plantation. When the Union forces occupied the land she lived on, they "wud tak de white ladies clothes an' giv' dem to de cullud gals an' dey wud be cookin' out in de yard wid dey trails [trains] hung over dey arms."<sup>34</sup> While it is unclear from Wilburn's telling if the enslaved women were given a choice as to the wearing of this finery, they undoubtedly recognized that the Union soldiers were using their mis-clothed bodies to annoy the southern enemy. Drew Faust has noted instances of

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<sup>32</sup> Advertisement, *Richmond Examiner*, July 1, 1863.

<sup>33</sup> Advertisement, *Richmond Whig and Daily Advertiser*, May 17, 1864.

<sup>34</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, S1-10.5: 2295.

white slaveholding women being appalled at finding their slaves dressed in ball gowns and other finery.<sup>35</sup>

Thomas Lewis used an encounter with Union soldiers to gain more clothing. He recalled that he “had no cap. One soldier asked me why I did not wear a cap. I said I had no cap. The soldier said ‘You tell your mistress I said to buy you a cap or I’ll come back and kill the whole family.’ They bought me a cap, the first one I ever had.”<sup>36</sup> Whether or not a Union soldier actually threatened to kill women and children over a slave’s lack of headgear, Lewis was able to use the presence of the enemy and the threat of violence to get a cap to keep his head protected. Mary Colbert and Lindsey Moore both saw the proximity of Union troops as a chance for monetary gain. Colbert was given “a bag of gold and silver, and some old greenback Confederate money” by the daughters of the plantation and asked to hide them in her apron when the Union troops searched the house.<sup>37</sup> She did as asked but regretted it afterward when she was not rewarded with any of it after keeping it safe. Lindsey Moore made money carrying drinking water from a spring to Union troops camped nearby, eventually saving enough to purchase a pair of shoes for himself.<sup>38</sup> As these examples show, enslaved southerners attempted to renegotiate the power dynamics on plantations that were susceptible to Union occupation.

While Union troops did not always bring safety or stability for the slaves of plantations they overtook, enslaved and newly freed people took advantage of the upheaval to obtain clothing and apparel, or the money to purchase these items.

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<sup>35</sup> Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 223.

<sup>36</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 6.2: 125.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.1: 216.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.1: 231–32.

Plantation mistress and diarist Mary Boykin Chesnut recorded on May 21, 1865, that newly freed people “carried bouquets to the Yankees—and dressed *themselves* in their gaudiest.”<sup>39</sup> But Chesnut was not describing an example of Yankee benevolence. Instead she had witnessed African Americans walking toward freedom and being denied their expectations. She wrote that the freedpeople “had a right to feel injured.”<sup>40</sup>

Like others before the war, Robert Smalls used clothing to disguise his identity and escape to freedom. Smalls was an enslaved pilot who worked on the Confederate ship the *Planter*. He dressed in an extra uniform an officer had left on board and put on the unique straw hat favored by the *Planter*’s captain. He and the other enslaved crewmates navigated the ship out of Charleston Harbor and surrendered it at the Union line.<sup>41</sup> Smalls used disguise by dressing above his station, not even needing to pass as white in the darkness and distance on the water. The daring escape of the enslaved men on the *Planter* resulted in a new ship for the Union as well as the black sailors’ knowledge of the interior waters and locations of Confederate mines and troops. Smalls’s own individual escape to freedom by donning a special hat resulted in the direct freedom of the other enslaved men on the ship and the indirect freedom of all slaves through his efforts assisting the Union military.

Numerous factors contributed to the shortage of all kinds of textiles in the Confederate States. Blockades of southern ports like New Orleans and Charleston

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<sup>39</sup> Mary Boykin Chesnut, *The Private Mary Chesnut: The Unpublished Civil War Diaries*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 250.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

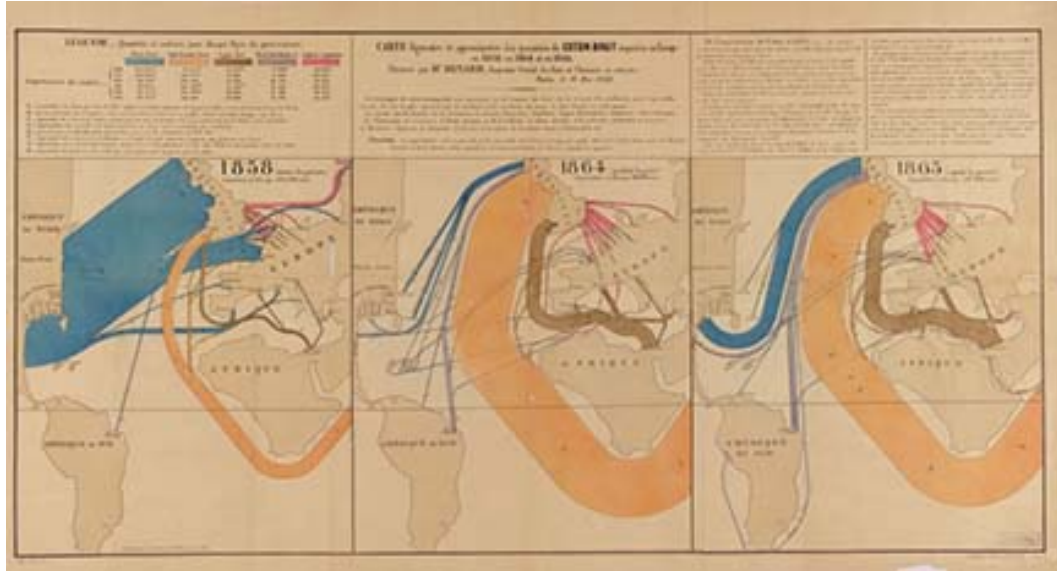
<sup>41</sup> Coddington, *African American Faces of the Civil War*, 26.

by the United States Navy were a major threat. These ships prevented all kinds of goods necessary for waging war, from weapons to foodstuffs, from passing to the Confederate military and civilians. When the war broke out in 1861, the U.S. South supplied over half of the world's supply of raw cotton, most sent to manufacturers in Britain and the northern United States to be spun, woven, and otherwise finished, then shipped back as finished cloth for purchase by consumers.<sup>42</sup> When blockades disrupted this trading system during the war, southerners were left without a market for exports and a limited ability to receive imports.

The inability to ship raw cotton out of the South also affected the economic stability of the northern United States and much of Great Britain. The world supply of cotton dropped quite suddenly as the war began, leaving textile mills without the necessary raw material to manufacture goods. Some changed to manufacturing wool or linen, while others obtained cotton grown in India.

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<sup>42</sup> Sven Beckert, "Emancipation and Empire: Reconstructing the Worldwide Web of Cotton Production in the Age of the American Civil War," *American Historical Review* 109 (December, 2004): 1405–1438; Beverly Lemire, *Cotton* (Oxford & New York: Berg Publishers, 2011). The shift of the raw cotton supply to the U.S. South happened at an unprecedented rate. Giorgio Riello notes that by 1850, 2.4 million bales of cotton left southern ports, whereas in 1830 the South only exported 334,000 bales. See Riello, *Cotton: The Fabric That Made the Modern World* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 207.



8.4 Charles Joseph Minard. *Europe's Raw Cotton Imports, 1858, 1863, 1865*. 1866. Ink and watercolor on paper. Library of Congress, Geography and Maps Division, G3201.J82.1865.M5.

The image above shows the drastic shift of English manufactures from U.S. cotton to Indian cotton during the Civil War.<sup>43</sup> In England, some cities depended almost exclusively on the manufacturing or shipping of finished cotton goods. One of their main markets before the Civil War had been the southern states, which bought utilitarian fabrics by the bolt or ready-made to clothe their enslaved work force. Because of this close connection, many southerners believed that Britain would readily support them in their war efforts. Indeed there were many British sympathizers who rallied to the Confederate cause, but the government never fully supported the South.<sup>44</sup>

As producers and consumers, enslaved people were crucial to the world trade system—and it temporarily broke down during the Civil War. Southerners black and

<sup>43</sup> Britain was instrumental in the growth of the agricultural cotton sectors of India, Brazil, and Africa during and after the American Civil War using coerced labor systems. These same prewar markets also served to encourage sharecropping in the postbellum South. The scholarship on this postwar shift is extensive. For recent studies see Giorgio Riello, *Cotton*; and Beckert, "Emancipation and Empire."

<sup>44</sup> Amanda Foreman, *A World on Fire: An Epic History of Two Nations Divided* (New York: Allen Lane, 2010); Brian Schoen, *The Fragile Fabric of Union: Cotton, Federal Politics, and the Global Origins of the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

white, enslaved and free, witnessed the destruction of an entire society during the many battles between 1861 and 1865. The American Civil War brought freedom to millions of enslaved African Americans, but the South was left with a ravaged landscape, a depleted population, and an uncertain future.<sup>45</sup> The chaos of war had created a space for increased resistance that was seized by enslaved people in many ways, including a continuing resistance of race-based fashion. As the United States sought to reconcile and the world worked to rebuild the textile market, they all found that cotton would once again rule a racially exclusionary South as a despotic king.

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<sup>45</sup> For more on the destructiveness of the war see Megan Kate Nelson, *Ruin Nation: Destruction and the American Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012).

## *Epilogue*

### Capturing Slavery and Wearing Freedom:

#### Postbellum Photography and Emancipation Dresses

After four years of fighting, the Confederacy surrendered to U.S. forces. James Malcolm Hart wrote to his uncle in 1866, “The collapse of the Southern Confederacy left me without a cent of money and with no labor but hired labor.”<sup>1</sup> Like Hart, Kate Stone lamented the loss of the enslaved work force. Her mother obtained a loan, and the family resettled back at Brokenburn to try to establish their cotton plantation again—only now with free African Americans working the land. With much of the land restored and cotton being grown once more, there was a movement to bring more manufacturing into the southern economy. Cotton production continued, but textile mills gradually became a leading industry in the postbellum South.<sup>2</sup> The South built itself into something not quite new, but not quite old, while the North celebrated a military victory and thousands of African Americans rejoiced in their freedom.

Despite the great change in the status of the laboring class, life in the postbellum South looked much like it did before the war. Many African Americans continued to work the cotton fields, providing a backdrop for romanticized depictions of black figures such as Winslow Homer’s 1876 painting *The Cotton Pickers*.

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<sup>1</sup> Kate Stone, *Brokenburn: The Journal of Kate Stone, 1861–1868*, ed. John Q. Anderson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 39.

<sup>2</sup> For a classic work on the postbellum South, see C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913* (Rev. ed.; Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972). An account of the many industries of the New South is related in Susanna Delfino and Michele Gillespie, eds., *Technology, Innovation, and Southern Industrialization: From the Antebellum Era to the Computer Age* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008).



E.1 Winslow Homer. *The Cotton Pickers*. 1876. Oil on canvas. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, acquisition made possible by Museum Trustees, M.77.68.

Over time, this painting came to be understood as an image of slaves picking cotton, but these women are free. Although Homer wanted viewers to recall slavery and the Old South, he was also commenting upon the New South as something both strange and familiar. The resolute look upon the women's faces, and the fact that they, rather than the landscape around them, are the central focus of the painting makes Homer's a statement about them as individuals who carry a burden of the past and a hope for the future. He intended this image to be ambiguous: are these women resigned to their fate or determined to find something newer off in the distance?<sup>3</sup>

As with Eastman Johnson's prewar painting *Negro Life at the South* discussed in chapter 1, Homer's *The Cotton Pickers* came to represent an image of

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Burns, "In Whose Shadow?: Eastman Johnson and Winslow Homer in the Postwar Decades," in Teresa A. Carbone and Patricia Hill, *Eastman Johnson: Painting America*. (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1999), 184–213. For a historian's interpretation of Homer's Civil War art see Peter H. Wood, *Near Andersonville: Winslow Homer's Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010).

the romanticized, idealized Old South that had disappeared with emancipation.

White viewers understood Homer's subjects not as newly freed people in an uncertain world, but as icons of a simpler, happier time. The depth, ambiguity, and original intent of Johnson and Homer in painting African American subjects was lost to the dominant beliefs associated with black people in the United States as southern slaves. These ideas were further strengthened by cultural projects of romanticizing reconciliation that began in the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>4</sup>

During the Civil War, Americans had also become used to seeing photography much more often. Photographs were understood to have the ability to present a more authentic portrayal than paintings or illustrations.<sup>5</sup> Images like those of Hubbard Pryor in his slave clothes and in his uniform served as documents of the veracity of slavery and freedom. Similar images of newly freed African Americans in civilian clothing were taken across the South during the war. As historians have struggled to understand slavery, the Civil War, and emancipation, they have looked to these photographs as authentic sources. Below is a grouping often republished in monographs, history textbooks, and other sources of a family of newly freed people in South Carolina.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001); Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> Joan L. Severa, *My Likeness Taken: Daguerrian Portraits in America* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> These people would have participated in the Port Royal project, an experiment undertaken by northerners who moved to the Sea Islands of South Carolina early in the war and worked the land using black laborers who were supposedly paid a salary. The trial ultimately failed. For more see the classic work: Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964).



E.2 Timothy H. O'Sullivan. *Five Generations on Smith's Plantation*. c. 1862. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-B8171-152-A.

This image is usually used as an illustration of slave life in the South before the Civil War. However, the people in the photograph are not slaves; they are freed people. In the context of this study an important question raised is at what point should this be considered the clothing of freed people? Recently liberated by the flight of their owners at the approach of the Union forces, these people are probably wearing the same clothes they had worn as slaves. Yet the bodies that carry these same garments are now free.

This question becomes more complicated when looking at other photographs taken of newly freed slaves, many of whom were clearly given cast-off soldiers' clothing to supplement their wardrobes. Men wear sack coats, frock coats, and pants that were standard issue for soldiers, and both men and boys are often wearing a

kepi hat. What must be remembered about these photographs is that they are a historical source limited by the time of their creation. They cannot represent complete freedom, which was still in flux in the midst of the fighting, nor can they serve as documentation of the material life of slavery.<sup>7</sup> War created chaos and changed the daily lives of everyone in the United States, whether soldiers in a strange land or enslaved people with no owners but an ambiguous status as free.

After the war and the official legal ending of slavery, African Americans continued to live their lives with many of the same values they held during slavery as they fought to define freedom on their own terms. This included a commitment to the presentation of individuality and social belonging through clothing. Asserting their freedom by the ability to have complete control over their apparel, freed people continued to spend earnings on fine clothing, just as many of them had done in slavery. Ferebe Rogers, when interviewed for the WPA project, told the interviewer, “I still got de fus’ dress my husband give me,” and produced it from a chest. The interviewer recorded, “The soft material, so fragile with age that a touch sufficed to reduce it still further to rags, was made with a full skirt and plain waist, and still showed traces of a yellow color and a sprigged design.”<sup>8</sup> Rogers carefully saved this dress, a testament to her husband’s love and care, for decades after its usefulness was worn out.

A similar story is told by the survival of Sarah Tate’s emancipation dress, pictured below.

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<sup>7</sup> Deborah Willis and Barbara Krauthamer, eds., *Envisioning Emancipation: Black Americans and the End of Slavery* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Rawick, *American Slave*, 13.3: 211.



E.3 Unknown maker. *Sarah Tate's Emancipation Dress*. c. 1865. Witte Museum, San Antonio, Texas.

Tate used the first money she ever earned as a free person to buy this dress for herself.<sup>9</sup> Though simple in style, it is made from a high-quality fine cotton lawn. It was not extravagant, but it also was not cheap. The ability to indulge in the purchase of a nice gown was a moment for Tate to assert her freedom. In earning this money, she also fought against racist notions of African Americans as unable to be successful in freedom.

Saving these things was not merely about being able to acquire material goods or to consume stuff. Rogers saved the dress because of its ability to remind

<sup>9</sup> Object file, Tate emancipation dress, Witte Museum, San Antonio, Texas; Lonn Taylor, "Sallie Tate's Emancipation Dress: A Rare Glimpse into Texas Slavery and Freedom," *Texas Monthly* (April 2014), [www.texasmonthly.com](http://www.texasmonthly.com). Both Taylor and I arrived at the phrase "emancipation dress" independently. My special thanks to Taylor for sharing his article prior to publication.

her of her husband and that he liked to express his love for her at times by purchasing her beautiful things. Tate saved her dress to remind her of her success as a free person. Rather than the dress itself, it was the story of the object that made it worth saving. It is not necessarily the hats, shoes, dresses, and pants themselves, but the stories they keep and the meanings they carry that make all of the objects researched in this study a unique and important set of sources. Sometimes these are stories of pain, oppression, and heartache; sometimes these are stories of love and triumph.

Continuing to explore and understand enslaved people's clothing will help explain how freedpeople understood themselves as coerced laborers in the postbellum world textile market. The production and consumption of textiles and clothing by enslaved people was an important aspect of their lives during slavery that was greatly altered by freedom and the Second Industrial Revolution, which coincided in the late nineteenth century. Just as the visual culture of the antebellum period leads to better understanding of postwar imaginings of slaves and slavery, studying the lived experiences and material lives of enslaved people furthers knowledge on how the Old South became the New South.

Ultimately, knowing more about the clothing of enslaved people in the antebellum South demonstrates how deeply entrenched race and racism were in the United States by this time. Even something as trivialized as the fashion system was used by whites to exclude African American people from participating in American culture, from expressing themselves individually and collectively, and from being recognized as contributors to mainstream society. Patches, headkerchiefs, frills, and

silk vests all became tools for resistance when enslaved people used them to throw off the “badge of slavery” that came with the wearing of Negro cloth. Meanwhile, slaveholders used their cultural capital in the race-based fashion system to dismiss slaves’ efforts at collective and self-expression. Enslaved people successfully resisted slaveholders’ continual efforts to monotonize them through clothing, but they failed to gain full participation in American fashion. Slavery was one of many aspects of life disrupted by the Civil War. Postbellum Americans, including newly freed people, attempted to find stability by continuing to practice the social habits of their prewar lives. And so American fashion remained racially exclusionary, and Sarah Tate saved her money to buy herself a beautiful dress, continuing to fight against racism in the postbellum United States by fashioning her own body into a site of resistance.

## Glossary of Textile and Clothing Terms

Bast fiber: A long fiber derived from a plant such as flax (linen) or hemp; as opposed to an animal fiber such as sheep's wool. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish different bast fibers without magnification. Textile scholars sometimes use the term bast fiber when it cannot be determined which plant the fiber is derived from. Light reflects off the long length of the fibers, giving fabrics and threads made from these plants a distinct sheen.

Breeches: A men's clothing item for the legs that reach just below the knee, usually worn with hose or long stockings. Breeches were used for young boys in the antebellum United States but fell out of fashion for adult men in the early decades of the nineteenth century, being replaced by pantaloons and trousers.

Brogans: Shoes made from a wooden sole and leather uppers that laced up the front of the foot. These were shoes used by male and female laborers. They often had metal reinforcements on the bottoms of the toes and heels.

Calico: A plain woven fabric, usually cotton, with a printed repeating pattern. Calicos were worn by men and women of all classes. They were particularly popular for women's dresses. In England, the term calico refers to a plain woven, undyed cotton, known in the United States as muslin.

Cambric: A linen or cotton fabric with a tightly woven plain weave. Could be patterned and was used for lightweight garments such as shirts and aprons and ranged in quality and price from very fine to very poor.

Cap: A man's headgear used for warmth and protection from the elements. The term referred to a variety of styles but usually implied a more informal type of head covering than a hat. Many runaway advertisements specify that slaves wore fur caps, which were likely similar to those popularized by American frontiersmen.

Card: A tool consisting of metal teeth or wire attached to a wooden base used to separate fibers. A pair of cards with the teeth facing in and the fiber between the teeth were worked back and forth by hand, pulling apart the fibers and readying them for spinning. Carding was done to many types of fibers, including cotton and wool.

Cassimere: A twill or jacquard woven wool fabric of a medium weight that was used for men's coats and waistcoats. Sometimes spelled kerseymere. Cassimere is not at all like cashmere, which was a luxury, lightweight fabric.

Cassinet: A low-quality, coarse satinet fabric often associated with slaves in the antebellum United States. Could appear advertised as Negro cloth.

Check: A plain woven pattern created by alternating the colors of the warp and weft to create a checkerboard design. A very popular pattern for work clothing in the antebellum United States, usually in combinations of blue and white or brown and white.

Comb: A tool used to separate fibers to prepare them for spinning. Metal tines are fixed to a wooden bar and the fibers are pulled through to straighten and lengthen them. Cotton, wool, and linen can all be combed. Unlike carding, which can damage the length of a fiber, combing maintains fiber length and creates a fiber that can be spun and woven into a tighter, finer fabric.

Copperas: A mordant very popular in the antebellum period for dyeing browns, grays, and greens. Copperas is an iron mordant.

Cotton: A fabric derived from the boll of the cotton plant. There are hundreds of varieties of cottons, including natural colors in white, cream, brown, yellow, and green. In the antebellum United States, cotton was the main cash crop. Long-staple, or Sea Island cotton was grown in the Lowcountry of South Carolina and Georgia. It was valued for its longer fiber length, which created smoother, finer, and thus more expensive fabrics. Short-staple cotton was grown in the Black Belt of the South, across Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and East Texas. The shortness of the fibers and the ginning process of this variety of cotton resulted in a lower quality raw product that was used to create cheap cotton textiles for utilitarian use or for work clothing.

Cottonade: A heavy cotton twill woven fabric, sometimes napped, that has a similar appearance to woolen and worsted cloths. Cottonade was used for working men's pants and jackets, and for women's dresses.

Crinoline: A women's undergarment used underneath a skirt to give it shape. Early crinolines were made from horsehair, but by the 1850s the steel cage crinoline, or hoop skirt, had become the most popular crinoline style.

Crocus: A plain woven sacking or bagging fabric made from coarse linen or other bast fibers. It was also used for slaves' clothing.

Denim: A durable twill woven fabric of cotton or mixed cotton and wool. It was often dyed or woven from a dark color such as brown or blue. It was used for men's pants and jackets.

Drawers: Undergarment for men and women. In the antebellum period, women's drawers were open in the crotch, while men's were seamed shut to create a truly bifurcated garment. Drawers varied in length according to the changes in fashion throughout the nineteenth century.

Drill: A medium or heavy cotton twill used for work clothes. It is similar to denim, though the twill is left-handed in drill versus right-handed in denim. Drill was also used for summer military uniforms.

Duck: A heavy, stiff, and strong fabric made from plain woven cotton, sometimes cotton with linen. Duck is a kind of canvas and was used for sails, shoe linings, tents, and work clothing such as aprons and belts.

Dyed: A fiber or fabric that has been changed from its naturally occurring color to a different one through the process of dyeing. Most dyes in the antebellum period were natural chemical dyes, though early synthetic chemical dyes were becoming available.

Felt: A non-woven fabric usually made from wool. Felt is created by agitating the fibers in hot water so that they mat together in a dense cloth. Both felted and fulled wools have moisture-resistant properties that make them useful for outerwear.

Frock: A woman's dress; the term usually implies a garment of a simple style meant for daywear or working.

Frock coat: A men's outerwear item with a fitted chest and sleeves and a skirt that reaches to the knee. The frock coat changed in fashion throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, varying in the fullness of the skirt and being both single and double-breasted. The frock coat was usually made from a fulled wool and was worn by men of all classes, the quality of the fabric and the fit and style of the coat determining who could afford it.

Fulled: A woven fabric that has been agitated after weaving so that the fibers are matted. Fulled fabrics sometimes have the same appearance as felt. Both felted and fulled wools have moisture-resistant properties that make them useful for outerwear.

Fustian: A term used for several different fabrics made from cotton using a variety of weave structures and usually with a slight nap. Jean is a type of fustian.

Gin: A tool that separates cottonseeds from the lint. There were two types of gins common in the antebellum South. The saw gin was used for short-staple cotton and could clean cotton at the fastest rate of any gin, though it often damaged the fibers in the process. The roller gin was used for long-staple cotton because it did not break up the fibers, though it did not work as fast as the saw gin.

Gingham: A woven patterned check design made from lightweight cotton that was popular for household goods and women's dresses. Blue and white was a very popular color combination.

Guinea cloth: Cheap cottons made in India for sale on the African Guinea Coast and to plantations in the West Indies as slave clothing. Guinea cloth was usually checked

or striped and brightly colored. This term was more commonly used in the eighteenth century, though it does appear in some antebellum records.

Handkerchief: A large square of fabric, popular in the nineteenth century with woven and printed patterns. It was worn by men and women as headgear, around the neck, around the mouth and nose to protect the wearer from dust and debris, and in the pocket to be taken out and used to wipe one's nose, mouth, or brow.

Headscarf: A term for a handkerchief or other piece of fabric that is tied around the head.

Homespun: Fabric that was either made through home production or domestically in a U.S. factory. Homespun was usually made from poor quality fibers that resulted in an uneven weave. It could be patterned, usually with a woven check, stripe, or plaid design. The term homespun took on political meaning during the American Revolution when Patriot women sacrificed fine fabrics in the name of independence. This call to produce and wear homespun revived to a certain extent in the Confederacy.

Hoopskirt: A type of women's undergarment used to give shape to the very full skirts in fashion from the 1850s through the early 1870s. The most popular hoop skirt was the cage crinoline, made from a series of stiff hoops that increased in circumference from the waist to the hem which were connected with strips of cotton or linen.

Indigo: Several species of plants that contain the chromophore indigotin and used to create a blue dyestuff popular throughout the world in the nineteenth century for its colorfastness and versatile color palette, ranging from pale blue to nearly black. Some indigo was grown in the antebellum United States South, but was mostly used for local or domestic use. Before the American Revolution, much indigo was grown in the South and sold to England.

Jacquard: A complex weave structure created on a loom using a series of punch cards to guide the warp and create a detailed design.

Jean: A lightly napped twill woven fabric of a light or medium weight cotton or mixed cotton and linen. It is not as heavy as denim, though it has many of the same uses for clothing articles such as men's pants, vests, and jackets.

Kersey: A heavy woolen fabric that is fulled and the nap trimmed short. Kersey was water-resistant and cheap, so was very popular among the poorer classes as outerwear.

Lawn: A very thin, fine cotton muslin. Lawn is sometimes sheer because of the thinness and openness of the weave.

Linen: A type of bast fiber derived from the flax plant that was popular for household textiles as well as clothing items. It was often combined with cotton or wool in clothing.

Linsey-woolsey: A fabric woven from cotton and wool or cotton and linen that was used for work clothing and undergarments. The cost of the fabric varied depending on the quality of the fibers used as well as any woven or printed patterning. People of all classes wore linsey-woolsey, though it was most commonly associated with the poor and common laborers.

Lowells: This term originated from the fabrics made at the early textile mills in Lowell, Massachusetts, but came to be used as a colloquial term to describe low-quality fabric for clothing; could be used interchangeably with osnaburg, homespun, and Negro cloth.

Madras: A colorfully dyed Indian cotton or silk and cotton fabric, often in a fancy woven plaid pattern. Madras was a popular choice for enslaved women's head coverings in the antebellum South and was probably similar to or the same product as Guinea cloth. By the nineteenth century there were also many imitations of Madras made in England and France that did not hold their color as well as true Madras.

Mordant: A binding agent, usually metallic, used to affix a dyestuff to a fabric.

Mote: The process of cleaning ginned cotton to make sure that no seeds or other debris remain before it is pressed into bales for shipping.

Muslin: A term used for plain weave cottons of varying weights and qualities. They could be plain, or patterned with a woven or printed design. Muslins varied greatly in price depending on the quality of the fibers used. Calico is a type of muslin.

Nap: The fuzzy ends of fibers that have been pulled from a loosely spun thread in a woven fabric. Napping creates a soft texture and enhances the warmth of the fabric. Jean and denim are often napped. Unlike fulling, napping leaves the weave structure apparent to the eye. This term was also used by slaveholders to describe the thick, curly hair of people of African descent.

Negro cloth: A term that applies to a variety of fabrics that could be mixtures of cotton with wool, cotton with other bast fibers, or all cotton. Weave structure is not specified, though likely the cloth was a plain or twill weave as these were durable weave structures common in other types of work clothing, including other textile terms used to describe slave clothing. Negro cloth was an extremely low grade fabric that was marketed and understood as a raced consumer good created for clothing American slaves.

Osnaburg: In the nineteenth century, a term used for plain woven cotton or cotton blend fabrics made of very low grade fibers. They were often patterned in blue and white or brown and white checks and stripes and were popular for work clothing throughout the United States.

Pantaloons: Men's lower garment with two legs tapering inward at the ankle. These were a transitional garment between the shorter breeches of the late eighteenth century and the wider legged trousers that quickly overtook pantaloons in popularity in the early nineteenth century. Pantaloons became associated with working-class men, while trousers were more fashionable.

Patterned: A fabric with a design that is either woven or printed.

Petticoat: A women's skirted undergarment used for both modesty and warmth.

Pick: A word that could mean either the removal of a cotton boll from the rest of the plant, or the process of cleaning seeds and debris from the bolls by hand, or hand ginning. In weaving, a weft thread is also called a pick.

Plaid: A woven pattern design consisting of colored bars of varying widths that cross each other at right angles. The design is achieved by placing different colors in the warp and weft when weaving. Plaid is also sometimes referred to as a fancy checked pattern.

Plain woven: A type of weave structure that refers to the weft going over and under the warp, alternating the over and under in each width. Plain weave fabrics were made from all kinds of fibers that were used for a variety of purposes. It was a simple, fast, and durable weave.

Plains: A type of plain woven fabric, usually a woolen, which was typical for winter work clothing.

Printed: A patterning technique that involves applying color to the surface of a woven fabric by dyeing or painting. Calicoes were a very popular printed dress fabric in the antebellum United States. There were many methods of printing on fabric by the antebellum period; printing fabric was a process that became increasingly faster and cheaper as mechanization was perfected during this period.

Roundabout: A men's short jacket with a rounded waist hem, usually ending at the waist. The style was also called a monkey jacket or a sailor's jacket and was very popular among day laborers and for use as male slaves' outerwear.

Royal: A cheap, lightweight, twill woven wool fabric commonly used for work clothing.

Sack coat: A men's short coat of a plain style. Popular among working-class men in the antebellum period because its length, usually ending just below the hip line, made it practical for moving.

Sacking: Utilitarian textile usually made from low-grade cotton, linen, or a combination of the two. It was sewn into sacks or bags (and was sometimes called bagging) and used to carry all kinds of items. Records indicate that Negro cloth was very similar in quality to sacking.

Satin woven: A weave structure that produces a smooth surface that often has a shine to it. When weaving, warp threads are left floating over several consecutive rows with the weft threads underneath.

Satinet: Fabric with a satin weave made from cotton and wool. It is fulled in the finishing process so that it imitates an all-wool fabric. Satinet was used for outerwear by the lower classes.

Shirrtail: An unfitted one-piece garment worn by men and by enslaved children of both sexes. Men wore sleeved shirrtails as undergarments and nightwear. Enslaved children often only wore a shirrtail, without any other garment including underwear. Both men's and enslaved children's shirrtails were long, some reaching as low as the knee.

Silk: A textile fiber derived from the cocoon of different species of moths. The cocoon is unspun to create a long, continuous fiber that is very strong and lustrous. The skill and time required for processing silk makes it an expensive fiber, even in its lower-quality forms. Several unsuccessful attempts were made in the colonial and antebellum South to raise and harvest silk, but none became commercially successful.

Stripe: A patterned woven design created by alternating colors in the warp or the weft. Stripes were popular in varying widths and colors for all sorts of purposes, from furnishing textiles such as chair cushions, to men's silk waistcoats, to working people's garments.

Stuffs: A term used for a variety of qualities and weights of worsted woolens.

Tow: The short, rough parts of a bast fiber. Tow was used in making twine, rope, and in the lowest quality utilitarian fabrics. Sacking, osnaburg, and Negro cloth often contained tow.

Trousers: Men's lower garment that consisted of two legs reaching to the ankles with a straight inseam. They replaced both breeches and pantaloons as the most fashionable item for menswear in the early years of the 1800s.

Twill woven: A weave structure that creates a diagonal stretch in the fabric by alternating the number of warps over wefts and shifting the alternation each row. The diagonal could lean right or left. Twill is an extremely durable and hardwearing weave and thus was very popular for work clothing and outerwear.

Valencia: A cotton and wool material, often striped, used primarily for men's vests, especially for livery waistcoats.

Warp: The threads that are attached to a loom and run parallel to the weaver sitting at the loom. Warp threads must be strong to endure the tension of the loom and the repeated beating of the weft threads by the weaver.

Weft: The threads that are used to fill in the spaces between the warp threads and to create different weave structures by alternating the number of warp threads passed over or under. The weaver passes the weft from side to side, creating right angles with the warp threads. The edges of the fabric where the weft moves up one row are called the selvedge. The weft is sometimes referred to as the woof, the filling, or the pick.

Woolen: A cloth made from carded wool. Carding created short, bristly fibers. Woolens were usually fulled to soften the texture of the fabric.

Worsted: A cloth made from combed wool, which created longer, smoother fibers than carding. In general, worsteds were finer quality and more expensive than woolens.

The definitions in this glossary pertain to the usage of the above terminology in a specific location and period—the first half of the nineteenth century in the United States. In some cases, words have alternate meanings in other times and places. These definitions were compiled from the author's own knowledge and the following sources: Florence M. Montgomery, *Textiles in America: 1650–1870* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007); Phyllis G. Tortora and Robert S. Merkel, *Fairchild's Dictionary of Textiles*. 7<sup>th</sup> edition (New York: Fairchild Publications 2007); R. Turner Wilcox, *The Dictionary of Costume* (New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1969); Norah Waugh, *The Cut of Men's Clothes, 1600–1900* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1964); Elena Phipps, *Looking at Textiles: A Guide to Technical Terms* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2011).

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#### List of Clothing Used by Enslaved People in the U.S. South, 1830–1865

Item	Owner	Location
Brogan shoe	Chicago History Museum	Chicago, IL
Child's skirt	Smithsonian-NMAAHC	Washington, DC
Child's vest and pants	Shadows on the Teche	New Iberia, LA
Cotton apron	Charleston Museum	Charleston, SC
Cotton apron w/ sleeves	Charleston Museum	Charleston, SC
Cotton skirt	Smithsonian-NMAAHC	Washington, DC
Dress	Smithsonian-NMAAHC	Washington, DC
Frock coat	Historic New Orleans Collection	New Orleans, LA
Jockey suit	Charleston Museum	Charleston, SC
Leather shoe	Chicago History Museum	Chicago, IL
Linen pants	Tennessee State Museum	Nashville, TN
Linsey-woolsey dress	Alamance County Historical Museum	Burlington, NC
Livery coat	Historic New Orleans Collection	New Orleans, LA
Madras handkerchief	Louisiana State Museum	New Orleans, LA
Madras handkerchief	Louisiana State Museum	New Orleans, LA
Madras handkerchief	Louisiana State Museum	New Orleans, LA
Madras handkerchief	Louisiana State Museum	New Orleans, LA
Pair of shoes	Chicago History Museum	Chicago, IL
Pewter slave trader button	Charleston Museum	Charleston, SC
Pewter slave trader button	Charleston Museum	Charleston, SC
Printed handkerchief	Louisiana State Museum	New Orleans, LA
Shoe	Prestwould Plantation	Clarksville, VA
Shoe	South Carolina State Museum	Columbia, SC
Silk cape and bonnet	Stephens County Historical Society	Toccoa, GA
Skirt	Henry Art Museum	Seattle, WA
Wedding dress	Witte Museum	San Antonio, TX
Wooden shoes	Museum of the Albemarle	Elizabeth City, NC

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Alston-Pringle Family Papers  
 Ball Plantation Book  
 James Barnwell Heyward Papers  
 Drayton Family Papers  
 Hopkins Family Papers  
 Elias Horry Estate Account Book  
 Macbeth Family Papers  
 Gabriel Manigault Plantation Memo Books  
 Henry A. Middleton Papers  
 Slave Blanket Book, 1853–1860

#### South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia

Anderson and Kincaid Family Papers  
 John Coming Ball Plantation Book  
 Thomas G. Blewett Plantation Book  
 Benjamin Britton Account Book  
 Marx E. Cohen Plantation Journals  
 William John Connors Farm Book  
 John Horry Dent Farm Journals and Account Books  
 Guignard Family Account Books  
 Edward Spann Hammond Plantation Books  
 Charles Heyward Plantation Books  
 Henry Mazyck Account Book  
 Davison McDowell Plantation Journal  
 Harriott Pinckney Papers  
 James Washington Watts Papers  
 E. Mikell Whaley Papers  
 Yon (Youn) Family Papers

#### Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

William James Ball Plantation Book  
 Rice C. Ballard Papers  
 Bayside Plantation Journals  
 Capehart Family Papers  
 John Hamilton Cornish Diaries  
 Elliott and Habersham Family Papers  
 William Ethelbert Ervin Diaries  
 Hugh Fraser Grant Plantation Records  
 James Greenlee Diary  
 George Kollock Journals and Plantation Books  
 Manigault Family Papers  
 George Morrison Papers  
 Rufus Reid Papers

Roach and Eggleston Papers  
 Stoney and Porcher Family Papers

Special Collections Library, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina

John Baker Account Book  
 Bolling Chinn Account Book  
 Comingtee Plantation Book  
 Morris Conley Account Book  
 Devereux Family Papers  
 Edward Dromgoole Papers  
 J. Eli Gregg Account Book  
 Jacob Rhett Motte Papers  
 Robert Poindexter Account Book  
 John C. Rutherford Papers  
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 Henry Watson Account Book

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