LABORING WOMEN

Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery

JENNIFER L. MORGAN

Laboring Women

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For Herman

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Chapter 3

"The Breedings Shall Goe with Their Mothers": Gender and Evolving Practices of Slaveownership in the English American Colonies

Slaveowners in the early American colonies did more than simply appropriate the labor of others for their own gain. They hammered together an evolving set of social and cultural norms pertaining to Africans and their descendents that set in motion generations of violence wrought on both their bodies and their sense of self. Gender furnished one of the crucial axes around which the organization of enslavement and slave labor in the Americas took place. Having left an environment in which gendered notions of work firmly placed women's labor in household production, seventeenth-century English arrivals to the colonies confronted a situation in which African women constituted close to half of all available agricultural laborers.[1] Enslaved women performed work critical to the profitable and orderly functioning of slavery in the Americas, and as "women" became "workers," slaveowners developed language and practices to clarify that contradiction. I thus begin my discussion of black women's lives in the Americas by exploring the connection between the broad ideological currents around Africa and African women and the behaviors of early American slaveowners. Slaveowners and the enslaved came to the unfamiliar ground of racial slavery from decidedly different perspectives. The ways slaveowners constructed their lives as separate and distinct from the lives of those they enslaved profoundly shaped the terrain of violence, control, and negotiation African men and women navigated. Particularly as they wrote their wills, colonial slaveowners enacted a moral grammar through which they attained fluency in the practice of slaveownership.

For most early American slaveowning settlers, the act of writing was confined to matters of accounting or other immediate business. Invento-

ries, bills of receipt, articles of sale, and logbooks or plantation records abound in far greater numbers than collections of personal letters, journals, or travel diaries. Large-scale ownership of land and persons was the purview of only a small proportion of land and slaveowners. Most slaveowning settlers were of the "middling sort," with that group's attendant economic insecurity and limited access to, among other things, education and the luxuries of a life of letters. Indeed, those who possessed the ability to write but lacked the urge to leave less prosaic evidence than their account books might have said that concerns with matters of life and death obviously took precedence over the contemplation of amorphous issues of race and identity. Nonetheless, as they articulated their desires about the dispersal of their estates—whether meager or considerable—through their wills, these slaveowners did in fact leave a record of sorts, a reflection of the shifting terrain of racial identity in the early English colonies.[2]

Certainly no act of writing was more permeated with the materiality of life and death in colonial America than that of writing a will. Frequently dated within months or even weeks of the testator's death, the wills are saturated with the widespread early mortality that characterized early American settlers' lives. At the same time, economic historians have commented widely on the relative reluctance of early American colonials to leave wills. Writing a will was costly, and the unpredictability of death in the colonies contributed to a large proportion of property owners dying intestate.[3] Moreover, demographic stresses altered both the materiality of inheritance and the intentionality of final testaments. In early Maryland, for example, the likelihood that a white couple would have more than two surviving children at the time of either of their deaths was extremely slim. It would be unlikely, then, for surviving children to struggle over complicated divisions of property, either real or chattel. The vagaries of mortality rates also meant that it was very likely that husbands would die before their wives, forcing them to contemplate the uneasy proposition of a wife's remarriage or return to England and the problem of protecting one's legacy from another spouse or the need to divest resources to make a journey back home. Finally, the evidence was pervasive that "newcomers" peopled the colonies and that one's place in the world was tenuous at best; there was no guarantee of one's own survival or that of one's heirs.[4] Nonetheless, despite the uncertainties of American life, birth rates among white settlers in the English colonies were significantly higher than birth rates in Europe as early as 1700, and by 1725 birth rates for enslaved Africans in North America had also surpassed those of Europeans at home.[5] The questions of legacy perme-

ated the atmosphere even as both slaveowners and enslaved struggled to make meaning of the birth and death that surrounded them.

To write a will was also a necessary response to the shifting meanings of property and progeny in the Americas. Intestate estates in all southern colonies followed the English law of primogeniture (northern colonies followed multigeniture for intestate property), but in practice slaveowning settlers consistently disavowed primogeniture in their wills and deeds.[6] The law of entail was in fact omitted from South Carolina's 1712 legal code, with the result that many women inherited considerable estates in the colony.[7] Particularly when dispersing property in persons, early American slaveowners were not inclined simply to leave all to their eldest son. Land was customarily divided between sons, with the eldest receiving the land on which the family home stood. If the estate was large enough, both sons and daughters would receive slaves. Enslaved persons left to sons were often a bequest in entail, which meant that the terms of the will demanded that the inherited slaves had to be kept on the land. Daughters were far more likely to inherit enslaved persons in fee simple, unencumbered by entail.[8] Slaveowners understood the value of portable property for daughters and the fact that ownership of land meant nothing without workers to cultivate it. As a result, enslaved persons appear in probate records more often than they would have had simple primogeniture prevailed. Changes in customary English inheritance laws and practices reflected the new material realities of property and family among settlers, and as the terms of prosperity for white settlers in the southern and Caribbean colonies came to depend on racial slavery, so too did ideas about the relationships between wealth, property, and race.

Wills and other probate records thus trace the ways discourses of race, gender, and progeny were transforming and transformed by the quotidian realities of owning property in persons. The milieu within which early America's colonists functioned was deeply insecure. While there is no need to rehearse the myriad factors that compounded the vulnerability of settlers' physical, emotional, and economic safety in New World colonies, it is important to situate their probate records—evidence of the certainty of that vulnerability—in the light of the constant reminders that their footing in the Americas was rarely secure.[9]

Legislative efforts to regulate racial purity on the North American mainland similarly testify to the insecurity of early American life for white settlers. Slaveowning assemblies in Maryland and Virginia initiated drawn-out statutory processes of regulating contact between slave and free over

the course of the seventeenth century, processes that would ultimately be borrowed by slave societies throughout the region. The rigidity of the final outcome obscures the process during which anxieties about connections between black, brown, and white bodies defined the central concern of those in positions of power. In 1664, Maryland passed a law that decreed that "whatsoever free-born woman shall intermarry with any slave . . . shall serve the Master of such slave during the life of her husband; and that all the issue of such free-born women, so married shall be slaves as their fathers were." Punishing white women for giving birth to black babies renders the apprehensions of the colony's slaveowners transparent, for even as racial categories came into focus for white settlers, interracial sexual and social contact belied the fixity of their own whiteness. At the same time, Virginia assemblymen enacted legislation to guide them through the emerging morass of racial identities. The essential difference between black and white women lay, according to the 1643 statute, in the relationship between them and the work that they did. In this first act to legislate racial difference, black women's work was defined as permanent—tithable regardless of any change in their status from slave to free—while white women's could be free of tax.[10] The 1662 Virginia act that defined all children born of the bodies of black women as slaves, even if their fathers were free and white, simply cemented things further. The association between blackness and forced labor was now legally complete. Both pieces of legislation suggest that colonial slaveowners saw questions of racial constancy as critical and highlight the intensity of their quest to separate themselves from the women, and men, they enslaved. The concerns about sexual liaisons the Chesapeake legislators made explicit are the implicit foundations for laws regulating economic and social contact unsullied by sexuality between free whites and enslaved or free blacks throughout the English colonies.

The laws regulating interracial contact are a central index of how the very idea of race came into being for New World setters. However, there were other important changes in the worldviews of those settlers. Notions about the relationship between self and community among seventeenth- and eighteenth-century colonials evolved as ideological and emotional individuation gradually replaced the communality within which most Westerners found themselves enmeshed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Just as travel writing became part of the arsenal of those whose sense of national and ethic identity was beleaguered, so too did the language and parameters of slaveownership. Scholars have differed on the trajectory of

the transition from a "we-self" to an individuated self. Some trace this course through literature or dream journals, others through the increased need of colonists to turn to the courts to resolve disputes that were previously untangled informally.[11] In my view, this process of individuation was enmeshed in the intersectionality of discourses about race and gender. As an individuated "American" self came into being, key notions of mastery over property were mobilized that defined both whiteness and masculinity. Robert Olwell has remarked that "it is a truism that those instances when slaves appear most prominently in the historical record were precisely those moments in their lives when they were most subject to their masters' scrutiny and power."[12] Probate records reflect one of those moments when the enslaved come under slaveowners' scrutiny, but they also reflect a moment in which unscrutinized suppositions about slaveownership, race, and gender infuse documents. The fact that these documents were also places where, through the whims or careful planning of an owner, an enslaved person could most certainly be made cognizant of her diminished power over her own self or children highlights the need to carefully sift through slaveowners' probate records before we turn, in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, to an exploration that centers on the lives of the enslaved.

With some important exceptions, colonial settlers rarely turned first to Africa to fulfill their needs for labor. Indentured English servants, alongside enslaved or indentured Native Americans, were the first wave of workers. Most of these workers were of course men. In that regard, patterns of labor in the New World followed a familiar Old World form. Ultimately, then, in the act of colonizing the Americas, English settlers—particularly those with the means and the will to appropriate the labor of others—transformed the very concept of laborer to adapt to New World realities. The lure of the New World—with wealth embedded in the landscape—inscribed masculinity firmly in the act of colonization. Over the course of the seventeenth century, women constituted no more than 25 percent of all English indentured servants sent to the Americas, but their new environment chafed against the historically defined boundaries of femininity. They found themselves neither exempted from the hard labors of New World settlements nor solely consigned to domestic labors.[13] Initially, white women performed fieldwork alongside white indentured and free men, but there was something unsettling to colonial assemblymen about white women in the field. Virginia lawmakers betrayed their assumptions about white women's work in Virginia tobacco fields through the tax laws that conveyed its temporary nature. The assumption that white women's work would eventually move from field to

household was at the heart of lawmakers' willingness to overlook white women's labor as a source of official colonial revenue. Ambivalent lawmakers assumed that white women's work was circumscribable as they passed legislation that, logically, would have encouraged the use of tax free laborers to cultivate crops for export. Virginia legislators saw black women, on the other hand, as permanent laborers and thus a tithable source of revenue; when they enacted the tax law declaring this so in 1643 they provided evidence of the entanglement of race and gender ideologies from the onset.[14] No longer the adult white married male who lived separate from the master who employed him, the laborer in the Americas was distinguished by how he or she differed—physiologically, sexually, religiously, and linguistically—from his or her "employer."[15]

Like their counterparts in Virginia, Barbadian settlers looked to England and Ireland for servants in the first decades of the island's settlement, but they were quick to make the transition from servant to slave labor. In 1638, only a few years prior to the onset of the sugar revolution, approximately one-third of the white population on the island was indentured.[16] Slaveowners cast a wide net in their quest to obtain reliable laborers and initially were not unduly concerned about protecting those few white female servants who made the journey to the Americas from the rigors of the field, even as they explicitly located these women's value in their ability to offset white minorities through their procreative capacities. "Send me . . . any sort men women or boys . . . what I make not use off . . . I can exchange with others," wrote an early settler, and although the captain of an Irish ship carrying servants to Barbados in 1636 expressed concern that he had too many women on board, he received no complaints about the "lustye and strong Boddied" women he sold in only two days.[17] In the first half of the seventeenth century, indentured women cost exactly the same amount as indentured men; planters paid equally for servants from whom they logically must have expected to extract equal amounts of profit.[18] Eight years after the island of Barbados was settled by the English, the white population was close to 95 percent male, and while that stark imbalance shifted over time, it was not until the 1670s that white sex ratios fell as low as 3:1.[19] Unsatisfied with the numbers of white women on the island, planters in Barbados repeatedly called for "loose wenches" to augment the white population. In 1656, out of gratitude for Barbadian participation in Cromwell's expansion of England's naval power, Cromwell ordered 2,000 "young women in England" to be sent to the colony. At least 400 of these "gifts" arrived "in order that by their breeding they should replenish the white

population."[20] In response to similar pleas from Martinique, the king of France sent almost 200 white "women of ill repute" from Paris to the French colony between 1680 and 1682. And in 1681, Governor Pouancay asked for 450 such women to bolster white settler populations in Saint-Domingue.[21] It is in the context of this other "labor" performed by women that the clear distinction between white and black women's work becomes somewhat muddled, for no rigid distinction between the procreative and the agricultural existed. Rather, as the 1643 Virginia statute illustrates, the issue was one of duration—all women must work, but some women work forever. Similarly, all women must procreate, but some women procreate for the social and economic good of their own community and others do so for the social and economic good of someone else's community.

All free white women were enmeshed in the project of settlement, domesticity, and the "peopling" of the new colonies. In an early promotional description of Carolina, women were tempted with the news that "if any Maid or single Woman have a desire to go over, they will think themselves in the Golden Age, when Men Paid a Dowry for their Wives; for if they be but Civil, and under 50 years of Age, some honest Man or other, will purchase them for their Wives."[22] And indeed they were wives and mothers, their procreative powers firmly fixed in social categories. Their domesticating bodies were important enough to become evidence of large-scale colonial successes. Samuel Wilson wrote of Carolina in 1682 that "the air gives a strong appetyte and quick digestion . . . men finding themselves more lightsome, more prone and more able to all youthful Exercises than in England; the Women are very fruitful and the Children have fresh Sanguine Complexions."[23] The remarkable curative powers of the colony restored youth to aging men, and fertility to their wives. In 1709, John Lawson wrote "it has been observ'd, that Women long marry'd, and without Children, in other Places, have remov'd to Carolina, and become Joyful Mothers. They have very easy Travail in their Child-bearing, in which they are so happy, as seldom to miscarry." So powerful a claim found itself reproduced verbatim in literature on the colony published almost twenty years later.[24] The combination of low white female population figures and the urge to domesticate the landscape of the Americas caused colonial pamphleteers to promote these colonies as especially conducive to motherhood to lure white women to American shores.

Yet not all white women would have the path to "joyful Mothering" so easily cleared. The difficulties faced by indentured women—women whose labors were contracted for a specific purpose—meant that some white

women's fecundity would be punished, not celebrated. Laws throughout the English colonies penalized white servants who had the temerity to become pregnant during their service. As they wrestled with the relationship between race and status, colonial authorities understood the need for a certain elasticity in order to allow women of the 'lower sorts" to become mothers in the service of the crown's empire. Arguing that an indentured woman who married introduced "two competing masters" into a situation where mastery should reside with the holder of the indenture rather than the husband, and that pregnancy likewise interfered with the owners' demands on female servants, colonial legislators punished women who married or became pregnant while under indenture. The paramount importance of agricultural labor and patriarchal authority meant that "unauthorized" pregnancies that prevented a white female servant from completing her duties would be punished by further demands on her contractual time and, frequently, the forced indenture of the child.[25] Even as her pregnancy took place outside sanctioned social norms, it would become transformed into an economic gain. Such punishments, of course, allowed both the holders of the indenture and the larger colonial settlement to benefit from the reproductive labor of indentured servants, even when they did not sanction it.

Complicated attitudes toward the pregnancies of indentured white servants became a bridge to more explicit assumptions about black women's reproductive identities. Neither in Barbados nor elsewhere in the English colonies did English elites shrink at the notion of breeding the "lower sorts." White elites who conceived of indentured females as both laborers and breeders easily transferred those assumptions onto the more debased and despised bodies of enslaved Africans. Settlers steadily incorporated black women's sexual and reproductive identities into the economics of New World mercantile successes. Writing in 1620, a colonial agent for Bermuda asked for assistance in procuring "3 men able to worke, out of England, or lett me have 4 negroes: 3 men 1 woman."[26] The cost differential between slaves and servants does not explain why four enslaved workers would be considered the equivalent of three indentured servants, but the addition of the woman is perhaps more transparent. The agent imagined the "Negroe" woman capable of something a woman "out of England" could not render. Even those far removed from American slave societies understood and sought to capitalize on the duality of women's labors. In the 1650s, a document determining tax relief for settlers to the Americas outlined the number of slaves and the amount of land required to free the

settler from taxation. The "negroes children from 8–12 years shall count two for one . . . under the eight years, three for one . . . [and] the breedings goeth with the mothers."[27] While the linguistic description of the infants as "breedings" catches one off guard, it is the seventeenth-century presumption that "Negroes" shall both work in American fields and produce taxable children that warrants our immediate attention.

This attention to the demographic problem posed by women and their small children was not limited to the fertility of enslaved Africans; Native American women too became part of the mathematics of "mastery." By the turn of the seventeenth century, North Carolina settlers understood slaveownership in terms of both black and brown bodies. Isaac Wilson, for example, enslaved "Negroe Phebe Indian Mall Negroe Patt and Negroe Maria," in 1706, his workforce exemplifying the connections between African and Native American women enslaved in this period.[28] In 1707, the South Carolina assembly established the Commissioners of the Indian Trade to regulate trade between English settlers and Native Carolinians, and shortly afterward John Archdale mentioned that the Yamasee brought "Spanish Indians" to Charlestown, "designing to sell them for slaves to Barbados or Jamaica as was usual."[29] Trade in Native American slaves followed quickly on the heels of settlers' arrival to the mainland colony in 1670, and by 1708 a third of the total enslaved population were Native Americans.[30] It is significant that Native American women were enslaved at a rate of three to five times that of Native American men. Men were more likely to be killed in the wars incited by settlers' demand for trade goods and slaves, while women and children became the logical extension of the trade in deerskins and baskets so essential to the colonial economy of the colony before the introduction of rice culture.[31] During a military expedition against the Tuscarora in 1713, for example, 558 persons were captured. One hundred and sixty six men were captured and the remaining 392 women and children were sold at the Charlestown slave market.[32] By the first decade of the eighteenth century, faced with a substantial number of enslaved Native American women, the Commissioners of the Indian Trade stipulated that "every slave be sold singly, unless a woman with her child."[33]

The Colonial Frontier

As planters struggled to delineate the new terms for defining and balancing white and Native American women's productive and reproductive labors,

the shift from servitude to slavery meant that black bodies increasingly became the object of white planters' scrutiny. And indeed, one might expect large-scale slaveowners—surrounded as they were by the inescapable rhythms of sex and birth and death in the so-called Negro villages—to calculate the reproductive capacity of their plantations with care. But prior to the economic successes that made large plantations possible, slaveholdings were quite small, and economic gain was by no means assured. This "frontier" period of slavery, when slaveowner and enslaved person were mutually dependent upon one another for survival, has been characterized as a time of tenuous equalitarianism that "tempered white domination and curbed slavery's harshest features."[34] However, even these small-scale slaveowners managed to articulate an evolving sense of separateness from the enslaved as they imagined their own prospects and the future of their laborers.

On the island of Barbados, where tobacco cultivated by indentured servants in the 1640s gave way by the 1660s to sugar cultivated by enslaved Africans, one can see the distinctions between servants and the enslaved quite clearly. Barbados, founded as an English colony in 1627, went through a thirty-year period with only a nominal presence of enslaved Africans. Over the course of the 1640s, landowners brought greater numbers of enslaved laborers to the island as they diverted their holdings from tobacco fields to sugar works. Among the smattering of extant probate records for white Barbadian settlers in this period, few mention enslaved laborers. Of the seventy-eight wills written prior to 1660 that bequeath or mention laborers, forty-six (59 percent) concern only white servants and frequently include bequests made to them (see Table 2).[35] The extremity of the colonial frontier forged important bonds between masters and servants and, in some cases, caused masters to embrace a sense of responsibility for the future of those with whom they had worked so closely. Thus Christian Brockehaven wrote in August of 1651 that he "give[s] unto every Christian servant I have one hundred poundes of sugar a piece to bee payd unto them a month after they are free."[36] And John Turner wrote that he "give[s] to my servant Richard Payne one year of his time."[37] But as the realities of Barbados's new reliance upon African laborers sank in, along with the vexing problem of a dwindling ratio of whites to blacks, the island's land and slaveowners began to grapple with the shifting parameters of their own identity and future in the face of their ownership in perpetuity of black bodies.

As owners of other people, slaveowners were forced to confront the linkages between the future of their progeny and that of their property. In 1651, in one of the first surviving wills to bequeath an enslaved person in

TABLE 2. WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN SLAVEOWNERS' WILLS, BARBADOS, 1650–79

	1650–59	*1660–69*	*1670–79*
Total wills			
Wills containing slaves	48	138	235
Wills that name slaves	16	98	165
Wills that identify women	18	82	154
Wills that identify children	3	26	35*
Wills that use the term "increase"	4	13	32**
Wills that identify a parent	1	12	26
Willis that "couple" slave men and women	2	15	10
Wills that use the term "spouse"	0	2	4

*Two children are listed with no women; **two wills use "increase" without listing women.
Source: Recopied Will Books, Series RB/6, Barbados Department of Archives and History.

Barbados, a "negroe woman together with all moveables and nonmoveables" and six acres of land is handed down to a wife until two children "come to age and then to bee equally divided betwixt her and the children."[38] This kind of division posed, I would argue, a very different problem than that embedded in John Wilkinson's 1652 will in which a third of his property—his "plantation . . . containing forty-seven acres of land . . . alsoe with ye thirde of all household stuff as Brass, pewter, Linene bedding [and] all Christian servants, negroes, horses, cowes, assenegroes [and] stock of hogge"—went to his wife and the remaining two-thirds were to be divided among a son and three daughters.[39] Even though any probate court would have understood the first will to mean that each child receive assets equal in value, the impossibility of dividing one woman's body between two adult inheritors is a symbol in which reproductive futures were imbedded—only through her reproductive activity could "a negroe woman" be bequeathed to two adults. By collectivizing all "servants, negroes, and horses" on the other hand, the testator does not have to imagine the division of a single person between more than one heir. Thomas Kennett too, avoided the dilemma of such divisions when he bequeathed "nineteen acres or thereabouts, with one Irish servant with the time he hath to serve, [and] two women negroes together with all household stuff" to his three stepchildren, Peter, Robert, and Mary Fistam.[40] The three laborers would accrue to the three heirs with relative ease. Presumably, Mary would have to make do with a servant whose time would soon be up, while Peter and Robert would find themselves in possession of laborers whose future progeny

would further enlarge their fortunes. But with an equal number of laborers and progeny, Kennett, like Wilkinson, did not have to struggle with slippery mathematics. The problem of dividing a single "negroe woman" among a white family was, at this early stage of slaveownership, solved through an implicit assumption about her fertility; that by the time the children came of age, the Negro woman might have children of her own to add to the equation. Such an unspoken referent would become increasingly explicit over time and would come to constitute a central component of slaveholders' individuation processes.

Robert Wilshire divided his property, after passing the expected third to his wife, among four children. The property they could anticipate coming into possession of included

> Men negroes vizt. Peter, Tom, and Pendee; Woman negroe named Judith and two young negroes one aged three years ye other aged three months; A breeding mare, one foale about two months old; A breeding Cow, one heifer with calf, and one calfe about three months old.[41]

Judith's proximity to the breeding livestock is inscribed both in the text of the will and that of her life. For though she is not stamped with the descriptor "breeder," her childbearing successes and the similar way her "young negroes" and the foal and calves are described suggest that dividing her among four heirs presented only modest difficulties to Wilshire's executor. Wilshire himself could only have understood his investment in Judith as a wise one that would accrue long into the future and well past the point of his own demise. His estate was small, limited to a house, seventeen acres of land, the enslaved men, women, and children, and livestock. As he surveyed his properties shortly before his death, probably while ill, he would have been under no illusion about the scale of his achievements. Small acreage, probably given over to tobacco cultivation, four enslaved adults and two small children, offset perhaps by his stable and presumably healthy family—these were not the marks of certainty and success accumulated by the growing numbers of Barbadian landowners who transformed the island into a "global economic giant" and the single most valuable overseas asset to the English Crown by 1660.[42] By the same token, his ownership of Judith created a possibility far more vivid than that wrought by Peter, Tom, and Pendee or, alternatetively, than the profit that would accrue from the work of male or female indentured servants.

Wilshire's division of his property in persons aligned him with other

slaveowners on the island and in the colonies, as they too contemplated their deaths and their (limited) property. Men who behaved differently, whose expressions connected them to enslaved persons rather than distanced them from them, were few and far between. John Copper fell ill in 1656 and died with neither a spouse nor children to leave his estate. Instead, after gifts of sugar to his brother and sisters, he freed his "negro woman Jugg" and "likewise I give unto my Negro man Will and my negro woman Battee there [*sic*] freedom." He provided a yearly allowance for them all and gave them ten acres of land and the houses that stood there "for them and their children." Copper was alone in his intersecting bequests of freedom, land, and support, and one suspects that his singularity reflected both his understanding of the materialities needed to support freedmen and women in mid-seventeenth-century Barbados and his unique desire to supply them. It should be noted that his connection to Jugg and Battee does not necessarily indicate an antislavery stance, as the other bequest he made was to his servant Robert Shepart, to whom he gave thirty acres and "a negro I also give him." But the fact that he left the future of Jugg and Battee's children in their own hands, and the care with which he stipulated the support he hoped would maintain those futures, suggests his awareness of the anomaly of his behavior. Cooper knew, in 1656, that Jugg and Battee and their children were supposed to have very different futures from the ones he imagined for them.[43]

Women such as Judith, who were subjected to speculation about the connection between their lives as mothers and their lives as slaves, served a related but very different purpose. Lorena Walsh and David Eltis have both argued that the experience of owning slaves allowed owners to moderate the cultural norms that would have constricted behavior toward English workers. "Africans could be made to function outside the conventions, especially those of gender, that the English had constructed for themselves" before traveling to the American colonies.[44] It is in their appropriation of African women's future children that slaveowners bear witness to their sense of slaveownership. Judith enabled Wilshire to understand the parameters of his role as an Englishman in the Americas; his ability to harness her future not only expanded his patriarchal largesse but also marked his masculinity and emerging whiteness. As a moderately successful planter in colonial Barbados, what differentiated him from his English or even New England counterpart was his ability to harness Judith's future. Aligning Judith with livestock while simultaneously subjecting her, her children, and Pendee, Peter, and Tom to symbolically impossible bodily division both

illuminates and masks the material realities of Wilshire's final months on the island and the indeterminate years that led up to this unconsciously revelatory moment.

While they were typical in some regards, Wilshire and those he enslaved were quite unusual in others. Birth rates in Barbados among the enslaved were low in this period, and Judith's living children made her, and Wilshire's estate, unusual. Nonetheless, in the Barbados of the 1650s, well before enslaved children became a common part of slaveowners' inventoried property, slaveowners began to identify female slaves of childbearing years as "increasers."[45] Terminology such as "pickaninies" was rare—the more common terms such as "increase" and "produce" suggest that slaveowners understood quite early the value of the reproductive lives of laboring women in their evolving conception of themselves as owners of human property. And of course, on some level slaveowners understood fertility as residing primarily in enslaved women rather than men. Daniel McFarland, for example, bequeathed the one slave he owned thus: "My negro wench named Diannah and all her future increase."[46] Diannah's choice of, or access to, fathers for her "future increase" rested primarily with herself. Similarly, when Nicholas Bochet died, after leaving land and unnamed "negroes" to his sons, he left his daughter money and "one Negro Girl named Sarah together with Issue and Increase." Bochet too left the problem of paternity up to Sarah. Moreover, Bochet saw Sarah's sex, and thus her reproductive potential, as an essential aspect of the bequest. For "in case the said Negro Girl should happen to Dye . . . another of about the age of the said Negro Girl named Sarah" would be purchased by his executors.[47] They crafted their bequests in this way despite low rates of childbirth during the early years of settlement and transition to slavery and despite the intersections between their own struggles with infant mortality, imbalanced sex ratios, and desire for heterosexual companionship and those of the women and men they enslaved.

In 1654, ten years after the move to sugar production on the island but ten years before the economic boom that placed Barbados at the pinnacle of England's overseas empire, one visitor to the island claimed that

> thes Negors they doue alow as many wifes as they will have, sume will have 3 or 4 according as they find thayer bodie abell: our english heare doth think a negor child the first day it is born to be worth 05 1., they cost them noething the bringing up, they goe all ways naked: Some planters will have 30 more or les about 4 or 5 years ould: they sete them from one to other as we doue shepe.[48]

While there is no evidence that plantations with thirty or more small children existed outside the writer's imagination, the hyperbole suggests that the planters this visitor observed anticipated wealth in the form of slave children. The metaphor of "shepe" also suggests the overlapping impulses of travelers and slaveowners to connect women's reproductive lives to that of livestock. Slaveowners linked the reproductive lives of men and women to those of their agricultural commodities in gestures that read as efforts either to establish distance from or to distinguish between their own struggles with "increase." In 1654, for example, John James bequeathed two-thirds of his property, which included eight acres of land and "nine negroes young and ould, with one cow with certain stock of Hoggs [and] dunghill Fowles," to his daughter. He reserved the remaining third of his property for the use of his wife during her lifetime. After her mother's death, the daughter would inherit the "said land negroes stock of hoggs fowles and cowes [and] what they shall produce by their increase."[49] James imagined that, along with chicks, foals, and calves, enslaved children might also arrive to buttress the economic position of his wife and daughter. In acknowledging this possibility, he became the first of many Barbadian planters to apply the term "increase" not only to animals but also to African women.[50]

When planters looked to "increase," they crafted real and imagined legacies. In the absence of living slave children, their own children still inherited the promise of future wealth. Slaveowners whose prospects might have seemed somewhat bleak looked to black women's bodies in search of a promising future for their own progeny. With such demographic expectations also came an articulation of the longevity of the slaveowners' enterprises and a greater certainty of a future in and for the colony. Though clearly there was no guarantee, a planter could imagine that a handful of fertile African women might turn his modest holdings into a substantial legacy. Black women's bodies became the vessels in which slaveowners manifested their hopes for the future; they were, in effect, conduits of stability and wealth to the white community. On David Davis's plantation, for example, where eighty-six persons labored, sex ratios were assiduously balanced. Davis knew that he made a profitable investment in these forty-three black female workers (see Table 1 above).[51] Through careful patterns of purchases, he constructed a gender-balanced group of men and women while keeping an eye fixed firmly on the future. Davis behaved rationally when he assumed that by carefully balancing the men and women he purchased to cultivate his land he would also expand his slaveholdings. That

his dreams had not quite come to fruition at the time of the sale of his estate (only three of the twenty-nine adult women are listed with children) may speak to a variety of conditions. No evidence tells us how long the men and women on Davis's land lived together. Nor do we know whether Davis's treatment of them precluded either the development of intimacies or the physical well being to reproduce. Certainly both slaveowners and some enslaved women expected and worked to enact childbirth. But for enslaved women, to do so also meant to open themselves to the emotional dangers of reproduction in a slave society.[52]

As the 1660s unfolded in Barbados, planters worked assiduously to build their labor forces and in the process provide opportunities for sexual contact among the enslaved. Between 1662 and 1664, for example, some 206 slaveowners purchased enslaved Africans from the Company of Royal Adventurers.[53] The buying patterns of these planters reflect a pragmatism regarding female labor. Of these over 200 purchases, 125 purchased groups of slaves that included both women and men. Of these 125, the ratio of men to women was 2:1 or higher in only 22 groups. Sixteen purchased more women than men, thirty-four purchased equal numbers of women and men, and seventy purchased groups such as Richard Chapman did, in which there were eight men and six women. Seventy-nine purchased slaves of one sex. Of that group, forty-nine purchased only men while thirty purchased only women.[54]

These purchasing patterns suggest that, faced with a cargo of men and women, Barbadian slaveowners did not rush to purchase men, which would have left considerable numbers of women behind for the latecomers. Between 1651 and 1675, 46 percent of all enslaved persons arriving to the island were female, and by the 1660s Barbadian slaveowners saw women as valuable laborers whom they easily integrated into their work force.[55]

Indeed, they may also have begun to value them more systematically as potential reproducers. Fifteen slaveowners in the 1660s (18 percent of those who identified women in their bequests) explicitly paired individual men and women in their bequests. In doing so, they attempted to provide their legatees with the promise of the couple's labor and their future offspring. Bequests of a woman with many men or many women with few men do not indicate the same level of mindfulness about the possible future embodied by a male-female pair, but at the same time, a women's reproductive potential remained constant with or without the steadiness of an individual man called, by the slaveowner, her "spouse." Purchases in which

sex ratios were less than perfectly balanced still held the promise of future increase.

Barbadian slaveowners were not alone in their early recognition of the multifaceted benefits that might accrue to them through the bodies of black women. English settlers on Nevis in 1678 enslaved a workforce in which women's presence was ubiquitous: 79 percent of all slaveowning households included adult women. It is more significant that, considering the lack of settler control over the sex ratios of the transatlantic slave trade, 70 percent of those households enslaved women in equal or greater numbers than men. Also, 76 percent of slaveowners who owned women also owned children under the age of fourteen.[56] It would be impossible and indeed illogical for the island's slaveowners to fail to comprehend the particular value that accrued to them through the ownership of African women. Moreover, the fact that so few slaveowners designated the enslaved as paired couples in their wills should not suggest that without such written recognition no such relationships were experienced by the enslaved or imagined by the slaveowner. There is a degree to which the intimate lives of the enslaved simply will not emerge from the colonial archive, but these moments in slaveowners' probate records are suggestive, and should be understood as such.

Probate records are occasional windows into the material and emotional disruption to enslaved women's bodily and familial integrity caused by the deathbed plans of ailing slaveowners. In some cases, a white woman's fertility caused the dispersal of a black woman's family. Judith Mossier, unsure, one supposes, about the fertility of the unnamed enslaved women and men she already owned, set aside money to purchase a "negro woman" who with her "increase" was to be kept for the use of Mossier's baby grandchild.[57] The enslaved women Katherine and Hannah each lost a daughter, Nanny and little Betty respectively, in Roger Peele's will. If Mrs. Peele gave birth to a daughter, Little Betty would return to her mother (who was owned by Roger Peele, II), but if Peele's wife bore a son, that unborn child would retain possession of Hannah's daughter.[58]

By the end of the 1660s, Barbadian planters acknowledged and anticipated conjugal relations among the enslaved even as they acted in ways that violated them. The close proximity of small-scale ownership did not mitigate slaveowners' appropriation of women's reproductive lives. John Redway bequeathed his two adult slaves, both women, to his children at the beginning of the decade. He gave Besse to his daughter, while he gave his son the fertile and therefore more valuable Sibb, along with her two children. Though Sibb had already borne two children, Redway still reaped her

reproductive potential. He stipulated that "all [other] such children as she shall hereafter bring into this world" should also go to John Redway, II.[59] Nicholas Cowell wrote, "I bequeath to my said son two negro slaves by name Mingo and Beauty to have and enjoy the same with their produce and increase to him forever."[60] In 1668, Robert Shepheard also counted on slave children to pad his children's inheritance. He endowed his son with six enslaved women and men and "all such pickininy or Pickininyes as shall come of the said negroes." He left his daughter with "two negroes called by name Hagar and Doll as also to have all such children as shall come of the said two negroes."[61]

Few slaveowners recognized that the enslaved made choices of their own. Thomas Barnes of Christchurch, unlike most of his contemporaries, saw differentiations among the enslaved on his plantation. He described "Joe and Nassy his wife [and] Jude their daughter" as a family unit who stand out from "Peter, Violet, Hagar, and Adam." The former were connected while the latter were simply a gender-balanced group. Even if we take the words of the slaveowner literally, assuming then that the designation of Nassy as "wife" implied a familial connection that Joe and Nassy felt and not one that was simply imposed by Barnes, we are reminded that the penchant of planters for male-female pairings did not always reflect the emotional or sexual desires of the enslaved.[62] For slaveowners, regardless of the emotional realities of the enslaved, such pairings ultimately reflected their own desire to provide consistence support for their spouse, children, and relatives.

In search of stability, some early slaveowners actively engaged in proto-social engineering. Upon his death in 1658, William Baldwin, Sr. of Barbados bequeathed this potential to his godson William Sealy. He stipulated that "one able negro man and one able negro woman . . . be bought and delivered unto [Sealy] within six months" after his death. Baldwin thus provided his godson the "seed" of future slaveholdings (irrespective of the affinity or lack thereof between the two enslaved adults).[63] While there is no evidence here or elsewhere that these two were forced to have sexual relations, Baldwin explicitly treated the pairing of a male and female slave as a proper gift for a young would-be planter. In 1719 a Virginia slaveowner purchased two fifteen-year-old girls and wrote "Nothing is more to the Advantage of my son th[a]n young breeding negroes."[64] Phillip Morgan and Michael Nicholls, in a study concerned with the ways in which large numbers of women and children were enslaved in the Virginia Piedmont, argued that Piedmont slaveowners "almost always" stipulated the purchase

of women rather than men when providing for their own heirs in wills.[65] Slaveowners understood that the colony's future and their own legacies lay in the working bodies of black men and women. The close proximity in which these slaveowners lived with the small numbers of women and men whom they so enumerated in their wills did not militate against their ability and willingness to appropriate infants as property and to treat African women and men as the chattel that slaveowners hoped them to be. For every slaveowner who preserved ties of affection or parentage among those he professed to own, there was a William Browne. In an act that aligned the consumable bodies of cattle with the producing bodies of black women and men, William Browne carefully listed the names of his cattle along with the list of men and women: "Bessie" under "Women" and "Bessy" under "Cows."[66]

Fading Frontiers

By 1675 Governor Atkins estimated a population in which the enslaved outnumbered whites by more than ten thousand, and in which black women outnumbered all other members of the population, both black and white.[67] While slaveowners appeared consistently anxious about the growing African population, they never considered stemming the tide. In the midst of complaints about control, and the bifurcation of a formerly united white identity, planters railed bitterly against the Royal African Company for not supplying adequate numbers of Africans at reasonable prices.[68] Reliance on African labor, both in the fields and throughout the colonial infrastructure, touched all aspects of life on the island. Land consolidation removed the incentive for whites to indenture themselves to Barbadian planters, and planters could "keep three Blacks who work better and cheaper than they can keep one white man."[69]

While Barbados's demography was unique in the American colonies—there were equal numbers of enslaved men and women from the start of the island's colonial history—the attitude of the island's slaveowners toward slave "increase" was quite typical. Slaveowners from Jamaica to Johns Island invested their hopes in the reproductive capacities of their human property. In 1678, Willoughby Yeamans helped secure the future for his cousin in the new province of Carolina. He ordered his attorney, Christopher Barrow, to "give my Cozen Mr. John Yeamans a Negro man and a Negro woman." Barrow immediately procured Jack and Aram in Carolina

with "their profitts and increase" for John Yeamans. Barrow did not take Aram's fertility for granted; he purchased Aram and Jack along with their two children, Jack and Namy, ages three and one year, providing John Yeamans with a woman whose reproductive capacity was thus proven. Furthermore, Aram and Jack's established ability as parents meant that Barrow also purchased a couple whose desire to maintain and protect the integrity of their family unit made them a stable source of wealth.[70]

John Yeamans and his descendents would ultimately create a society in which Carolina rice planters, in the words of Richard Dunn, "ha[d] more in common with Barbados sugar planters of the seventeenth century than [just] large gangs of slaves."[71] In 1685 when Governor Joseph West temporarily left Carolina for New England some fifteen years after his arrival in the colony, he enslaved twelve persons, the majority of whom were female: four men, one boy, two women one "younge negroe girl," two "children Negroes" (one a girl, one whose sex is indeterminate), and two "Indian girles."[72] From the very beginning of Carolina's settlement, enslaved women and men from Barbados enriched the mainland colony and created the mainland's only slave society that did not pass through an intermediary stage of reliance on indenture or free labor. Elite society in Carolina would echo that of Barbados in many ways. Indeed, for some observers no separation existed between South Carolina and island colonies. In 1682 Thomas Ashe wrote that "the Discourses of many Ingenious Travellers (who have lately seen *this part of the West Indies*) . . . justly render[s] Carolina Famous."[73] In the face of frequent death, enslaved women from Barbados embodied the hopes of Carolina planters' for wealth. Newly arrived slaveowners in Carolina groped about for agricultural successes, experimenting with cattle, corn, olives, silkworms, and, finally, rice. But throughout they assumed that African women and men would provide labor. More specifically, as planters had in their wills in Barbados, elite planters in South Carolina continued to rely on enslaved couples as "seeds" for future enterprises, understanding that the value of enslaved women resided in their roles both as producers and as potential reproducers.[74]

Whites journeying north from the islands brought enslaved men and women and the assumptions derived from the fact of a reproducing labor force with them, secure in the knowledge that the labor of the enslaved would help build the new settlement. Like slaveowners in Barbados, those in Carolina relied on women and their children, as well as men, to produce commodities and to serve the economic needs of the planter-settler; they recognized the dual value embodied by enslaved women.[75] Their wills,

inventories, and purchase records indicate an early reliance on female laborers and an early recognition of the value of women's "increase." The initial presence of enslaved women in Carolina linked Carolina slaveowners to the Caribbean. Planters' assumptions about the future of their own families and the place of slavery in the new colony continued to be shaped by the women they enslaved. As in Barbados, from the very beginning, planters anticipated and parceled out the actual and potential "increase" of enslaved women. By the 1720s, as Carolina became a full-fledged slave society, Barbados's slave labor force gradually reached a point of self-sufficiency, and both colonies' slaveowners moved toward new stages in their reliance upon, and relationship to, enslaved labor. Four decades later, as mortality rates declined in response to a slowdown in the growth of sugar production on the island, the slave trade to Barbados also declined in the context of the ability, and desire, of enslaved women and men to increase the black population naturally.[76] Faced with the experience of Barbadian slaveowners, with whom Carolina continued to share familial and commercial ties, mainland slaveowners were not indifferent to the value of enslaved woman's reproductive potential.

In the earliest Carolina inventories, the prices assigned enslaved men and women reflect the clash between received notions of masculine value and the pragmatic realities of a reproductive labor force. In relation to adult men, women's value was often calculated at a lower rate. And thus Fibro and Fullis were assessed at £19 each while Jney and Spindile could be had after their owner Richard Fowell's death in 1679 for £21 each. If one looks at Fowell's entire estate, however, another pattern appears. Along with Fibro and Fullis, Fowell enslaved Barbery and her two small boys, Julia and Ginny. The total value of women on his estate was £95, plus £9 for the two children. The remainder of his estate was comprised of only £60 worth of enslaved men.[77] Similarly, John Smith enslaved two adult women and three men. The men were valued at £52 while the two women, along with Maria's four "pickaninies," similarly were assessed at £52—each man at £17, the women at £16, but the children as a group at £20.[78] Enslaved women embodied the growing value of plantation holdings. In a lease of the Thorowgoods plantation at the turn of the eighteenth century, William Hawlett promised John and Elizabeth Lancaster half of all the plantation's profits accrued in a seven-year period. That included "halfe the Rice halfe the pease halfe the Corne halfe the Butter halfe the Cheese ye Calves halfe the Hoggs halfe the Lams and the halfe parte of all the Negro Children that shall be borne."[79] Women were ubiquitous among the human property of

new planters in Carolina, as was the assumption that these women's reproductive lives could or would enrich the slaveowner's progeny. In the first decade of the eighteenth century twenty-one documents identify enslaved persons; only six are all-male transactions (see Table 3). The remaining fifteen, or 71 percent, recorded the presence of both men and women. Hannah Stanyard, for example, purchased Betty and Mingo and "the negro girl called Jenny."[80] Diana and "all and every her Increase" left the household of a cooper for that of a small landowner, necessitating a change not only of "owners" but also of labor regimes—urban to rural.[81] In a family sale that perhaps did not bring with it so much upheaval for those who were moved, Robert Daniel transferred all the men and women he enslaved to his son in 1709.[82] From Daniel's perspective, the six women and eight men he owned all provided valuable labor on his Berkeley County land. Their relationships with one another may have led him to assume that the women would soon provide him, or his son, with additional valuable laborers. If Daniel's characterization of them as spouses carried with it requisite ties of

Table 3. Men, Women, and Children in Slaveowners' Wills and Inventories, South Carolina, 1702–10

Date of probate item	*1702*	*1703*	*1703*	*1704*	*1705*	*1705*	*1708*	*1708*	*1709*	*1709*	*1709*
Men	9	1	1	0	0	0	1*	1*	0	0	1
Women	7	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	3	1	0
Parents	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Children	3	1	1	0**	0	1	0	0	1	0	0

Date of probate item	*1709*	*1709*	*1710*	*1710*	*1710*	*1710*	*1710*	*1710*	*1710*	*1710*
Men	3	8	1	30	0	0	5	1	4	0
Women	2	6	0	29	1	1	5	0	2	2
Parents	0	0	0	3	0	1	0	0	1	0
Children	0	0	0	3	1	1	0	0	0	0

There are 21 surviving inventories from 1699 to the end of the proprietary period. *These documents are sales of one boy. **This document is a sale in which men and women are not individually identified but their "increase" is deemed part of the sale.
Source: Secretary of the Province Records, Miscellaneous Series, South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

affection, "Paw Paw Tom and his wife Nancy [and] Tom Godfrey and his wife Hagar" no doubt felt pleased that they would not be separated from one another in the foreseeable future. The potential that other men and women on Daniel's plantation had for meaningful partnerships among themselves must have equally shaped the ways in which they conceived of their futures.

Essentially, as they surveyed their property and imagined their deaths, slaveowners supplemented the present value of enslaved persons with the speculative value of a woman's reproductive potential, doing so with relatively little regard to the behavior, or the sentiment, of the women they enslaved. On the Boowatt plantation, George Dearsley enslaved sixteen persons, including seven women. He bequeathed all of them in male-female pairings to his heirs. In doing so, he signaled hope more than certainty. While he left "one Negro man name James one Negro woman name Sarah one negro girle name Quasheba one boy name Harry," he did not link Quasheba and Harry to Sarah as family but rather as well-ordered sets. Only one of the seven women, Nancy, had given birth to a surviving child, Charles; her reproductive successes became part of Dearsley's most valuable—sex-balanced—bequest. The other couples remained childless.[83] Though their owner carefully provided the opportunity for his slaves to reproduce, these men and women either had fallen victim to the high rates of infertility, miscarriage, and infant death endemic among the enslaved or had availed themselves of emmenagogues or abortifacients to interrupt pregnancies.

When Richard Harris died in Carolina in 1711, he provided each of his children with coupled enslaved men and women. His eldest son received land and the house with Pompey, Catharina, and "her increase." His younger daughters each received a man and a woman with some livestock: "To my daughter Anne one slave boy named Jack and a slave girle named Flora and her increase and ten cows and calves and their increase."[84] Richard Harris's bequests are quite telling. Even though he was a small-scale slaveowner in the first decade of the eighteenth century, Harris's fortune—he enslaved eight people and owned more than thirty head of cattle—was considerable. He would have likely counted himself as part of a community of small-scale slaveowners in the process of slowly accruing wealth by borrowing against their holdings to acquire more land and more slaves.[85] At his death, Harris had not attained the vast fortune of his dreams, but black women's bodies lay at the center of his earthly achievements. As he looked forward to his family's future, he probably felt a certain sense of

accomplishment that he had provided so well for his children by linking their futures to the future unborn children of his human property.

In the early life of the colony, however, the immediate realities of long-term survival on the sometimes-brutal colonial frontier would often override the need for stability that acquiring enslaved children might satisfy. Slaveowners with a precarious foothold in colonial settlements lived in close proximity to those they enslaved, but continued to hope that their coffers would be enriched by the birth of enslaved children. They were not the lords of vast plantation workforces isolated from laborers by their wealth and imposing plantation houses. Rather, they worked beside those they enslaved, sharing food and shelter out of necessity. But the "tenuous equalitarianism" of the pre-staple crop economy did not stop them from engaging in a most hierarchical display of immoral arithmetic. They paid close attention to the growth opportunities—rather than ties of affection—that sprang from the wombs of enslaved women. Only through a black woman's body could a struggling slaveowner construct munificent bequests to family and friends. By using the term and concept of "increase," he created a larger bequest than he actually possessed. Only the black mother embodied both productive and reproductive potential.[86] And recognition of her potential was not limited to those slaveowners struggling to become successful large-scale planters. Almost a hundred years after the moment at which Flora's future became linked to her reproductive behavior, Thomas Jefferson wrote that he "consider[ed] a woman who brings a child every two years as more profitable than the best man of the farm, what she produces is an addition to the capital, while his labors disappear in mere consumption."[87]

Pacifying Rebellious Negroes

Early slaveowning settlers' reliance on both the reproductive and manual labor of enslaved women was no anomaly. The rhythms of the slave trade and the policies of the colonial enterprise supported their assumptions about the literal and symbolic value of women workers. In 1665, the Proprietors of the colony of South Carolina wrote that land would be granted in parcels of up to 150 acres per settler, his dependents, and his servants. A group of men investing in Carolina known as the Barbadian Adventurers demanded that the law that required "one man armed" per fifty acres of land be changed to require "one person white or black" per 100 acres. The

gender-neutral wording reflected the fact that female-only slaveholdings were not uncommon. Barbadian planters also knew that their interest lay in a land grant system that rewarded the introduction of slaves and servants equally. The Proprietors also understood this. In a 1670 letter, they clarified their language by claiming that "man-servant" always "means negroes as well as Christians." Moreover, by 1682, once settlement had begun and the amount of land grants had diminished to fifty acres per servant or slave, the Proprietors altered assumptions about both male and female laborers and quantities of land. The first white settlers received 150 acres for men servants or slaves, and 100 acres for women. After a decade of settlement, the gendered labor distinctions vanished as the authorities provided equal landgrants for the transport of male and females alike.[88]

Transplanted Barbadian slaveowners, known as "Goose Creek Men" for the community in which they settled, dominated local politics in the mainland colony's first generation. These legislators passed the first Carolina slave law in 1690. In crafting the "Act for the Better Ordering of Slaves," they borrowed extensively from the 1688 Barbados slave code.[89] As in Barbados and other West Indian slave societies, lawmakers in Carolina defined slaves as all those who had been "to all Intents and Purposes" slaves.[90] By using the ambiguous language of custom, they skirted the systematic realities of racial slavery that surrounded them. Slaveowners' legislation located the defining condition of enslavement in circular logic: one is a slave because one has been a slave. Carolina slaveowners' legislative language highlights their assumptions about the particular roles of enslaved women. Customary slavery is rooted in the bodies of women. If one is a slave because one has been a slave, *becoming* a slave takes place in the act of birth. For those who were transported to the colony as slaves, capture and transport had fixed their status. The need to further define those who were enslaved occurred only when Africans in the Americas began to have children. The language of customary slavery became important only with the birth of children whose status needed to be codified and articulated, and thus only through the bodies of women. As Kathleen Brown has argued, women "became a means for naturalizing slave status with a concept of race."[91] In Virginia, the statute stating that the child of a slave should be a slave was explicated in 1662: "children got by an Englishman upon a Negro woman shall be bond or free according to the condition of the mother."[92] In a contrast more apparent than real, no explicit law in Carolina stated that the child of a slave should be a slave. From the perspective of an enslaved childbearing woman, however, the reality was tangible. For her,

no ambiguity surrounded the certainty of her child's future as a slave; despite the vagueness of the statute, it left no real hope that her offspring would be free. Legislators developed the definition of slavery within her very body. Their linguistic pretense of "customary" slavery in the seventeenth century carried little meaning for the enslaved black woman who knew precisely how systematic racial "custom" could be.

While slaveowners understood the growing African population in terms of both economic gain and societal menace, they perceived the women they enslaved as a preventative against social unrest. In the 1650s, Richard Ligon advised all those interested in establishing a plantation on Barbados to enslave equal numbers of black men and women. By doing so, he suggested, the planter would avoid becoming besieged by African men who claimed to be unable to "live without Wives."[93] In fact, planters exhibited considerable inclination to construct slave communities ordered upon conjugal units of men and women.

Slaveowners in both Virginia and Carolina similarly believed that black women's sexual lives worked in their favor. In 1715, at the beginning of the Yamasee War, Carolina legislators arranged for a bargain. Threatened by a Native American offensive, South Carolina looked to Virginia for assistance. The Virginia legislators demanded that Carolina pay 30 shillings per month and "a Negro Woman to be sent to Virginia in lieu of Each Man Sent to Carolina to Work till their Returne." Virginia's slaveowning legislators apparently saw laboring black women as proper recompense for fighting white men. After brief consideration, the anxious South Carolina legislators responded that they deemed it "impracticable to Send Negro women . . . by reason of the Discontent such Usage would have given their husbands to have their Wives taken from them wch might have occasioned a Revolt also of the Slaves."[94] Virginia's request for women did not seem to surprise Carolina's legislators. The Carolinians understood that their military vulnerability necessitated a valuable exchange. After deliberation, however, they rejected Virginia's terms. For each of the 130 "poor ragged fellows . . . just handed from England and Ireland," Carolina legislators sent four pounds Carolina money, and no women, and then proceeded to turn to enslaved men to augment the ranks of the colonial militia. Negotiations around the military vulnerability of the colonies required a careful assessment of the derivation of multiple dangers; for Carolina's slaveowners, the dangers posed by the absence of black women, unruly black men, and presumably the loss of reproductive property, precluded allegiance to other Englishmen.

By 1715, then, enslaved women already constituted a critical site of negotiation with regard to both their sexuality and their labor. The exchange so angered Virginia legislators that they sent word to Carolina that in the future Carolina "shall perish before they shall have any assistance from [us]."[95] Virginia legislators couched their request in the language of labor, but they too may have sought the stabilizing effects of black women's sexual services, as did legislators in Carolina, who explicitly linked issues of sex, labor, and social control in their response to Virginia. Black women's value lay not only in the work of their hands but also in their potent ability to render volatile black men passive and restrained. By referring to the enslaved as "Husbands" and "Wives," Carolina legislators made it clear that they perceived virtually all adult slave women in the colony as coupled to men and acknowledged a certain dependency on the social networks of the enslaved. In the process, they revealed their precarious control of the young colony, conceding that they could not remove scores of these women without risking rebellion in the slave quarters. Evidence of such equations should no longer surprise readers well versed in the slippery linguistics of colonization and white supremacy. It can, however, point to the confluence at which the slaveowner met enslaved black men through literal and metaphorical enslaved black women. When slaveowners defined black women as pacifiers of black men's rebelliousness, they constructed a symbolic counterweight to the volatile environment of the early eighteenth-century mainland.

Carolina legislators didn't question the legitimacy of Virginia's request for women but countered with a lament about the inadequacy of their own numbers of black women. As they softened their refusal through a multivalent gesture, one that both paternalistically acknowledged the "human" needs of enslaved men and contributed to an emerging stereotype of black males who showed strong sexual needs and threatened unspeakable violence when their appetites were denied, they avoided expressing a more selfish motive. Carolina planters themselves, like their Virginia brethren, valued the presence of these women, who promised to combine plantation labor with sexual gratification, reproductive gain, and an inexplicit level of social control over an enslaved population that was rapidly outnumbering colonial slaveowners.

Plantation Regimes

By 1708, South Carolina was home to the only black majority on the mainland and by 1725, rice culture had taken over, bringing with it an explosion

in slave imports and in the size and domination of plantation culture in the lowcountry. Similarly, in Barbados, by the end of the 1660s, the sugar revolution was in full swing, the white population of Barbados had leveled off at approximately 20,000 (from a high of 35,000 in the 1640s), and black Barbadians outnumbered whites by at least two to one. Sugar plantations totally dominated the geographical, economic, and social landscapes.[96] As slaveholdings became larger, the interplay between intimacy and dependency that characterized race relations in the frontier periods gave way to the drudgery and danger of monoculture cultivation regimes and the autonomy of black majorities and large plantations.

In 1683, there were 358 sugar plantations large enough to support their own sugar works on the island. (Some seventy-five more had been established by 1710.) These "slave villages" covered Barbados and were interspersed with more than 2,500 small farms with fewer than thirty acres; 72 percent of those small landowners were also slaveowners.[97] The size and terrain of the island, which was densely populated and relatively easily traversed, made it probable that families separated by probate could maintain some contact. The burgeoning population of enslaved creoles itself indicates the growing ability of men and women to navigate the social terrain of the island. Artisans and other creoles (mostly men) took advantage of slaveowners' faith in their "loyalty" to obtain incrementally more generous access to independent mobility. Indeed, as early as the late seventeenth century, some members of the enslaved community communicated with one another through written English.[98] Others relied on the ties of friendship and family that resulted from slavery's expansion across the island, which transformed disparate small slaveholdings into larger communities of family and friends.

The symbolic importance of black women's role in controlling growing populations of unruly black men did not contradict the eagerness with which slaveowners turned toward the male and female progeny of these women as unencumbered capitol. Planters sacrificed the relationship between mother and child to the economics of legacies. In the context of a slave society increasingly defined by the anonymity of absentee owners and large-scale property in persons, the intimacies embedded in the close quarters of speculative reproductive futures could be fully exposed in the terms of a slaveowner's will.

As property owners in Barbados felt increasingly committed to the permanence of the colonial venture, more and more of them went to the trouble and expense of writing wills that confined the wealth they accumulated to members of their family. When slaveowners considered their own

mortality, the attention they paid to their human property did not, of course, extend to the realities of rising mortality and declining fertility rates among those women and men they enslaved. Enslaved women consistently constituted a central element of slaveowners' wealth, but proportionately fewer wills itemized children in the 1670s than did so in the previous decade (see Table 2 above). The sugar revolution was taking its toll on the small bodies of the island's most vulnerable inhabitants. Only 22 percent (thirty-five) of wills that mentioned women also mentioned children. Certainly the increased regimentation and concomitant violence of the plantation economy by the 1670s resulted in declining birth rates. That regimentation may have caused planters to neglect identifying "children," thereby distancing themselves from the evidence of the roles of enslaved women and men as parents and family members. At the same time, perhaps in an effort to shield themselves from the emotional and familial realities of life in the slave quarters, the number of planters who evoked enslaved women's fertility through the distancing notion of "increase" rose from 13 to 20 percent.

The act of bequeathing couples or women "with their produce" allowed the slaveowner surrounded by the increasingly inhumane rhythms of monoculture export to momentarily replace the image of female workers stooped over rows of ground with that of black mothers enriching the genteel lives of his children. In 1674 Robert Gretton of St. Michaels owned thirty-three enslaved women and men "both small and great" on his fifty-acre plantation. He wished to pass his success as a planter along to his children, and, in accordance with the social conventions of his day, he transferred the lion's share of his plantation to his son Robert. He similarly designed his daughter's gift to cushion her entry into the world—"two young negroes vizt. one youth a boy of about 14 or 16 years of age and one negro girl of the said age to be bought of a ship and delivered my said daughter at ye day of marriage."[99] Miles Brathwaite was also a representative provider. After his death in 1674, his daughters acquired "three negroe girles namely to each of them one." The remainder of his large estate—including enslaved male and female workers—went to his sons Nathaniell and John.[100] Some years later, the extraordinarily successful Robert "King" Carter made a similar gesture when he proposed that three enslaved girls should be purchased for his three male grandchildren—not his primary heirs, but boys he wanted to school in the mechanics of managing valuable property.[101] The boys appear to be the same age as the female recipients of such bequests in Carolina. Even small-scale owners such as Phillip Lovell followed similar conventions in parceling out enslaved women to daugh-

ters. He respectively bequeathed the enslaved girls Mary and Doll "together with all [their] increase" to his daughters Mary and Elizabeth. His son Edward received the land, one enslaved woman, and three enslaved men. Perhaps Lovell did this with the assumption that the produce of the plantation itself would ultimately generate the resources for Edward to acquire the new slaves who would naturally fall to Elizabeth and Mary—both of whom were in need of dower—from Mary and Doll.[102]

Ellis Rycroft owned Jugg and Tony, Nanny and Thom, and Peter and Peg—all "Negro boys and girls" who worked on his Christchurch plantation. He willed the six youngsters in pairs to his three younger children along with "their produce." His eldest son received three adults, Sambo, Rose, and Maria, "with their produce." As the eldest child and the one who bore his father's name, he should not have to wait quite so long for his property to begin to accrue.[103] In Barbados in 1676, William Death offered manumission only to his "negroe wench," after she had "fower children all liveing at one tyme." The children are pointedly not included in the promise of manumission under the assumption that this "negroe wench" would be so grateful for her freedom that she would easily walk away from the four children she offered in exchange. He also instructed that a "lusty able negroe either a man or a woman" be purchased for his heir George Harlow. He exhorted his executors to provide "a wife or a husband" for the "lusty negroe." This pair would presumably then provide the "seed" for Harlow's future riches.[104]

William Death's contemporaries shared his assumption that wealth in the form of children accrued from the ownership of slave women. That assumption was not misguided. Early in 1662 for example, William and Ann Duces sold their plantation and sixteen enslaved adults, eleven of them women. Of those eleven women, only two, Joane and Burch, were childless. Lily had four children, Mary and Susana each had three, Abigal, Judith, Nancy and Jane had two children each, and Bess had one.[105] High infant and childhood mortality rates certainly meant that many born on the Duces plantation would not survive their childhood. Nonetheless, enslaved women bore children, some of who survived to adulthood, lived among parents and kin, and in fact became parents themselves.

These children became part of the slaveowners' economy, and as such they also became part of the future of the slaveowners' family. When John Mullivax stipulated in 1675 that the "first negro child that shall happen to be born of the bodys of either . . . Bess or Maria shall be delivered unto" his grandson—he did so with an eye toward *his* future, not theirs.[106] At the

time of his death, the men and women enslaved by Mullivax had no children, but he hoped for the arrival of an enslaved child to expand both his largesse—he enslaved only five people at the time he wrote his will—and the fondness of his grandchild's memory of him. Jenny and her children Nann and Cuffee were all that existed of Thomas Lee's estate. Her children, who were likely emblematic of her exposure and vulnerability as the only adult owned by Lee, were already part of his equation. Lee divided Jenny's children among his own offspring and in the deposition given by his commander hoped that "if it should happen that ever the negroe girle should have a child . . . it should be for his daughter Margarett."[107] Margaret Ellacott's desire to provide money for her own daughter not only overrode recognition that enslaved mothers had similar maternal feelings but equated any such feeling with that of cattle: "One negro girle by name Doll and her encrease one cow by name Lilly and her encrease to be kept on my plantation . . . untill each of them shall be a year old and then sold (that is to say the encrease) and [the money] delivered to my said daughter Lucretia."[108] Edmond Dyne, well aware of the ties linking Hagar, her adult son Jacker, and her grandson, bequeathed Hagar and Jacker to two of his own sons, leaving Jacker's namesake Jack and Jack's mother to his own two daughters.[109] As their predecessors had since the 1650s, slaveowners acted to protect and ensure the future for their own progeny without regard to enslaved women's ability to reproduce, their relationship to enslaved men, or their relationship to their children.

This suggestion that slaveowners purposely attempted to create couples for the reproductive benefit of a planter's progeny was both common and significant in colonial Barbados. William Trattle saw his familial duty in terms similar to those of Robert Gratton. In 1674, Trattle left £100 to each of his two nephews. He ordered the money to be "layd out in young negro women, the said negro women with their offspring (if any) to be at [the nephews] disposall when [they] shall attaine the age of twenty one yeares."[110] He too was involved in a speculative gesture that embraced a notion of livestock breeding even as he cannot be said to be engaged in forcibly demanding that sexual intercourse take place between the "young Negro women" and unnamed, random, enslaved (or free) men. Despite his parenthetical disclaimer, Trattle saw black *female* bodies as the most valuable and ongoing reward for his beloved nephews. His assumption reflected both the experiences and expectations of other planters. William Lesley, for example, enslaved a woman named Dot who had had the dubious fortune of bearing five living children before his death in 1674.[111]

As in Barbados, when intensive rice cultivation took hold of the colony of South Carolina, slaveowners faced with the tremendous growth of their slaveholdings looked to black women to both bolster their property and mitigate against quotidian violations. Although during the initial years of the rice boom the colony had entered a period during which birth rates fell, planters responded to an environment in which enslaved women's reproductive role in slavery had already been (and continued to be) evident. In 1737, an observer in North Carolina suggested that planters were quite mindful of enslaved women's reproductive value, writing that "a fruitful woman amongst them [is] very much valued by the planters, and a numberous Issue esteemed the greatest Riches in this country." He went on to suggest that slaveowners interfered in the lives of enslaved couples by obliging a woman to take a "second, third, fourth, fifth and more Husbands or Bedfellows" if children did not appear after a "year or two."[112] It is important to note that the manipulation of fertility here, as elsewhere, was perceived to be located in the body of the fruitful or fruitless woman, whose multiple husbands bore no reproductive responsibility. Thus, it was enslaved women who bore the burden and pain of slaveowners' clumsy manipulations and scrutiny. The particularized language of some slaveowners' wills elucidates slaveholding patterns. During the 1730s in South Carolina 13 percent of slaveowners who identified individual slaves in their wills brought specific men and women together in their bequests (see Table 4).

Table 4. Women and Children in Slaveowners' Wills, South Carolina, 1730–49

	1730–39	*1740–49*
Total number of wills	418	440
Wills containing slaves	132	149
Wills that name slaves	110	135
Wills that identify women	98	120
Wills that identify children	25	36
Wills that use term "increase"	27*	42*
Wills that identify a parent	22	35
Wills that "couple" slave men and women	15	23
Wills that use term "spouse"	2	4
Wills that identify siblings	1	3

*In both decades, two slaveowners use the term "increase" without specifying any women.
Source: Will Books, Records of the Secretary of State, South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

John Mortimer, for example, bequeathed two men, Simon and Sambo, and two women, Aedgi and Dido, to his wife. He split all other (unspecified in number) men and women among his children.[113] Isaac Child, a wealthy man who passed down land, slaves, and personal property to his sons, knew his sons would accumulate more with what he left them. To his grandson John, however, Isaac left "two negro children named Nanny and Sam," a gift that promised growth during John's minority and might even help to inculcate him into the mechanisms of slaveownership and the desire for capital accumulation at an early age.[114] Thus, the benevolence of an aging grandfather became the seed for a white child's future wealth. As for Nanny and Sam, there is no telling whether their relationship to one another produced the desired results.

Slaveowning men not only inscribed gendered value on the bodies of black women as they parceled out their holdings, they also used black women to confer attention on white women. Enslaved women were made visible through gender conventions that pertained to slaveowners' wives and daughters. The "mulatto girl called Jenny" became a talisman of Arthur Hall's love for, or sense of obligation to, his wife. Upon his death in 1732, among all those he enslaved, he named only Jenny. He bequeathed to his wife both property in Charlestown and Jenny "to her own separate use and behoof forever." His plantation and the other enslaved men and women went to his son, although until the son came of age, the "sixteen negroes to be kept with their Issue and Increase on the said Plantation and there to be employed and Ecercised under the Government of my said wife . . . for the purpose of maintaining and educating my young children."[115] Thus, while Arthur Hall must have owned other women, his desire to provide his wife with the particular gift of a "serving girl" unearths Jenny from archival obscurity. Jenny, and other women singled out from among the unnamed "negroes" divided among wives, sons, and daughters, suggest the particular primacy of place enslaved women held in the conscience and daily lives of South Carolina's slaveowners.

Black women found themselves used to signify largesse and particular attention or disapproval. When Robert Hume died in possession of more than eighty black men and women, he bequeathed only "a Negro Carpenter named Hampton" to his son, while giving to his daughter the slave Castor and his wife Diana, plus Antony, Clarinda, and her sons Will and Prince. The profits from his land also fell to his son and daughter, but Hume's brothers inherited the bulk of the enslaved men and women.[116] Hampton, Castor, Diana, Anthony, and Clarinda and her sons, became, in effect, the

signs of a husband or father's particular and personal *gift* that was distinguishable from the inheritance share a wife or descendent of a slaveowner expected. In most cases, that gift took the form of a female body; women as a personalized message from the deceased.

One wonders about the extent to which Nanny, Sam, and other "gifts" like themselves were aware of slaveowners' cynical matchmaking.[117] Probate records suggest that most owners of large plantations passed the bulk of the enslaved as a unit to the eldest son. Younger children received single enslaved couples or individuals. Often, gendered ideology pertaining to white sons and daughters shaped the terms of those bequests. White daughters frequently inherited single enslaved women or girls—presumably with a nod to sociosexual conventions pertaining to gender and the "mastering" of African men.[118] When James Goodbe died, he shaped the terms of his bequests along conventional lines of gender hierarchy in a slave society. Goodbe gave each of his four sons land and slaves. To each of his daughters, however, whose futures as brides demanded a mobility that might be hindered by the possession of land, he left only cattle and slaves. Bequests such as Goodbe's suggest that, while they were inclined to bequeath slave property to all children, Carolina slaveowners reinforced the primacy of particular legatees through paired giving. Ultimately, of course, enslaved women did not embody isolated value. The Goodbe men each received a valuable couple—Toney and Phebe, Billy and Lena, Quaco and Linda, and Hercules and Judith. Murrial, Lucy, Sarah, Kary, Jena, Abigaie, and Grace went to the three daughters. The only white woman to receive the more valuable male-female pairing was his wife, who inherited Phebe and Primus.[119]

As the black populations of South Carolina grew, creating bonds of affection and kin as slaveowners bought, sold, and hired black women and men across county lines, the interplay between black desire for emotional sustenance and white desire for economic sustenance remains largely unreadable. How could Toney and Phebe, for example, not have recognized the implication of their pairing? Could they have been unaware of the explicitly sexualized dimension of their assigned labors? How must they have felt to know that their conjugal happiness represented a bulwark to the system that enslaved them? To the enslaved men and women who worked amid a large group of laborers, slaveowners' attempts to maintain a particular sex balance among them may have remained relatively invisible. The effect that Goodbe's legacies had on Toney and Phebe's affections for one another, assuming that they did not previously see themselves as a couple, is unknowable. But for those owned by men who emulated Noah,

shackling them two by two, the slaveowner's intention could hardly have been opaque. If she actually cared for Toney, Phebe's gratitude for Goodbe's recognition of that emotional bond must have been shaded by the tacit understanding that the private life she shared with Toney supported the public life of the man who owned her. Should she ever bear a child, the baby would reinforce the economics that underpinned her emotional life.

The importance of women as reproductive property might be signaled in other ways as well. Twenty years after receiving slave couples from his father, Robert Daniel died. Tom Godfrey and Hagar and Pawpaw Tom and Nancy (transformed into Old Tom and Old Nanny) were the only survivors of the original fifteen Daniel inherited from his father. Over the years Daniel carefully replaced each dead, sold, or escaped enslaved woman or man with another of the same sex. Bess herself replaced one of the dead or gone females with her daughter Mareah, the only person marked as an offspring of one of the six enslaved women. When he wrote his will in 1732, seven years before his death, Daniel still owned fifteen slaves—eight men and six women.[120] The carefully prescribed gender parity, which he maintained over twenty years of slaveholding and reinforced by his bequests, furnishes evidence of his faith in the reproductive potential of his human property. Any frustration he may have felt at the absence of surviving children on the estate despite decades of care did not cause his plans to flag. Daniel ordered the executors of his estate to purchase for his wife, in addition to the bequest of the aforementioned fifteen men and women, "a negro boy and girl," a horse, and a featherbed; the boy and girl a message of regard, or obligation, to his wife from beyond the grave and a reflection of his lifelong conviction that an essential aspect of the value of the men and women he enslaved rested in their reproductive potential.

Although fewer children find their way into Carolina slaveowners' records in the 1730s, those records show that 25 percent of slaveowners' named children alongside women (see Table 3 above). In 1733, for example, Cato, Will, Cretia, and Phillis, the children of Carinda, along with Cloe, the child of Celia, were passed to the wife of their deceased owner together with their mothers.[121] In 1737, an unnamed child with her mother Venus passed to Phillip Combe's wife Martha.[122] In the inventory of Robert Hume's plantation, twenty-eight children were listed, only three motherless. Cyrus, his brother Will, and his sisters Diana and Mary lived with their mother Moll. Mindoe and her brother March lived with their mother Belinda. Only Cuffee, Minos, and Cudjoe appear on the inventory unlinked to a parent's

name, and because African children constituted between 10 and 17 percent of the total number of African persons imported between 1735 and 1737, it is quite possible that they had been imported from West Africa.[123] In any case, these children populated the terrain of colonial South Carolina and stood as living testaments to the humanity and commodity of enslaved Africans. For Carolina slaveowners, Cloe, Mindo, and March and their counterparts personified slaveownership's exponential wealth and its foundational desecration. Well before the latter part of the century, when slaveowners in the Chesapeake, Carolina, and Georgia began to fuel the expansion of the lower South with the children born on coastal plantations, the understanding that enslaved children constituted a tangible and separable source of plantation wealth had taken root among the earliest setters in the colonies.

Shortly after the middle of the eighteenth century, birthrates in South Carolina surpassed mortality rates and the black population began to grow as a result of births rather than imports. Philip Morgan has found that by the second half of the eighteenth century the majority of slave sales in the colony involved groups, more than three-fourths of which were designated as family members either explicitly or implicitly.[124] An examination of slaveowners' inventories shows that a high proportion of slaveowners who enslaved women in the 1730s and 1740s also enslaved children and that by the beginning second half of the 1740s, while there was a small decrease in the percentage of households enslaving children, nearly all documents that identify children attach them to specific parents (see Table 5). This suggests a stability for enslaved families in the lowcountry that nonetheless grows out of a long-standing willingness of slaveowners to appropriate family formation among the enslaved along far more disruptive lines. Despite the fact

Table 5. Women and Children in Slaveowners' Inventories, South Carolina, 1736–45

	1736–40	*1741–45*
Total number of inventories—514		
Inventories containing slaves	106	201
Inventories containing women	95	192
Inventories containing children	67 (70%)*	122 (63%)*
Inventories identifying parents	61	118

*Percentage of all inventories containing women.

Source: Charleston Inventories, WPA Transcripts 102, 104, 105, 113, 114, 115, 120, 121, South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

that Henry Laurens wrote of the immorality of "separating and tareing asunder" slave families, enslaved women gave birth to many children prior to the development of the rice economy, and slaveowners had long ago forsaken an association between birth and humanity.[125] The connection between family formation and behavior that might reflect a mutual recognition of shared humanity between a slaveowner and the woman he enslaved seems tenuous at best.

As we saw in Chapter 1, childbirth became part of a series of symbolic icons mobilized by slaveowners that ultimately attempted to sever a black woman's hold on her humanity. Some slaveowners transformed childbirth, which they reduced to an inconsequential and painless act in between tilling rows of soil, into evidence of black people's connection to animals. In much the same way that Walter Johnson found for the antebellum period, colonial slaveowners made "a direct connection between the bodily capacity of the woman [they enslaved] and [their] own happiness."[126] Slaveowners "coupled" men and women, named them husband and wife, and foresaw their own future in the bellies of enslaved workers. Childbirth, then, needs to stand alongside the more ubiquitously evoked scene of violence and brutality at the end of a slaveowner's lash or branding iron. The scars from whippings or brandings stood as a visible "advertisement" that slaveowners equated human beings with chattel.

But as Kirsten Fischer argues, the connection between slaves and livestock was always predicated not on the belief that Africans were animals but rather in the evocation of a degraded but fully present humanity.[127] In other words, an enslaved person was branded "like" an animal in order to humiliate, not because she was an animal and was insensate. Thus, just as both Bessie and Bessy populated inventories and slaveowners assessed women's fertility on their balance sheets, they did so fully apprised of their own connections to their human property. Those connections found their way into colonial legislation almost immediately and attest to the particularly chilling balance between sex and racial slavery. It seems, then, that the ultimate contradiction—if we can even call it that—in the system of slavery was the banal, even thoughtless, coexistence of humanity (in the recognition of marital bonds) and inhumanity (in the appropriation of children and the unborn). This juxtaposition shaped the ways in which enslaved women and men could hope to articulate their own sense of family, parenting, or culture formation—all the things that constituted their lexicon of humanity. Each time a slaveowner's will was made public, or an enslaved woman overheard reference to a white child's ultimate interest in her own

swelling belly or suckling infant, she responded by repositioning her self in relation to her child, her lover, and her reproductive capacity. Enslaved women and men were clearly not just the objects of slaveowners' probate records; they were also forced to respond to planters' ideas about their intimate decisions in immediate and painful ways. The decisions that slaveowners made directly affected the lives enslaved women and men led. As slaveowners composed their wills and ordered their inventories, enslaved women and men positioned themselves in relation to those who owned them, to the work they were forced to undertake, to one another, and to the children who died and survived their infancies.