

A WHITE MAN'S WORLD: THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF FEMALE SLAVES IN THE URBAN DEEP SOUTH

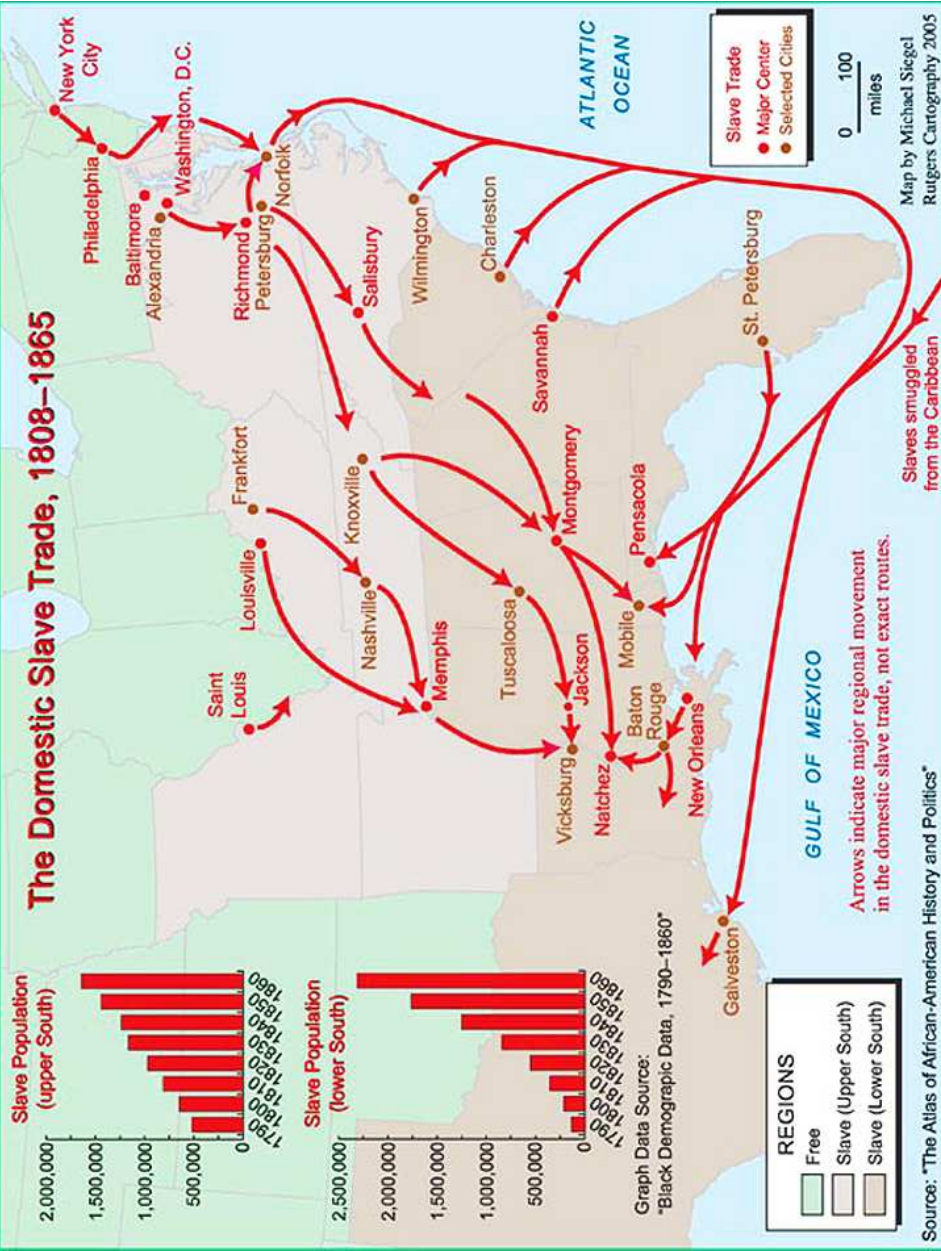
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How did I get here?

- Began with Memphis
- Compare to similar cities in the region
- How different was urban slavery than the more talked about, plantation slavery?
- What was the experience of enslaved women who lived in urban centers of the deep south?

The Domestic Slave Trade, 1808–1865



Thesis

- Due to the living situations associated with urban slavery, enslaved women living in Memphis, Nashville, Vicksburg, and Mobile faced more sexual exploitation explicitly by white slaveholding men than did their plantation counterparts.

Process

- Archival research in Jackson, Vicksburg, Memphis, Nashville, and Mobile
- Online archives
- Frustrations of this type of research
 - *Lack of information*
- Sales Records, census data, first hand accounts

Main forms of exploitation

- Sexual exploitation by white males
- Owners' structural interference into the pregnancy and childbirth practices
- Owners' structural pressures toward high fertility.

Attitudes Towards Enslaved Women

- Domestic slavery relied on a self-sustaining population
- Women viewed as “breeders”
- Ability to reproduce dictated value in the slave trade
- 16 to 19 years old and “large enough to nurse”
 - *“black female slaves were usually sexually assaulted when they were between the ages of thirteen and sixteen.”-*
- Bodies of enslaved women reduced to sexual objects

“As slaves, every incentive was furnished to raise the largest number of children possible. The chief surplus crop...is this natural increase of slaves.”

– W.E.B. DuBois from his 1932 essay “Black Folk and Birth Control”

Attitudes Towards Enslaved Women

- Lighter skinned female slaves views as “delicate”
 - *More expensive and placed in a domestic role*
- “It is well known I suppose to most readers, that a large proportion of the slaves are the offspring of the slaveholders themselves...For this reason I account for the fact, that a greater proportion of the house slaves are of the mixed color than of the field slaves.” –Joseph Henry, 1839

Attitudes Towards Enslaved Women

- “One of the reasons why wicked men in the South uphold slavery is the facility it affords for a licentious life. Negroes tell no tales in courts of law of the violation by white men of colored females.” – Reverend J.D. Long, 1857
- By definition it was “not legally possible for a nonwhite female to be sexually exploited by a white male.” –Wilma Dunaway, *Women, Work and Family*
- Any women who did not “willingly respond to the sexual overture of masters and overseers were brutalized and punished.” - *Ain't I a Woman*

City Living Conditions

- Lived in close proximity to their masters
- In Memphis, slaves were the least residentially segregated group in 1850
- Living close to their masters allowed more opportunities for women to be sexually assaulted

Sales Records

- High prices revealed the sexuality of the slave market and were measures of desire and dominance
- “Servant women sold for \$500 to \$700, and sometimes as high as \$800... A house maid, bright in looks and well formed, would sell for \$1,000 to \$1,200.” -Louis Hughes
- Focus on physical appearance and importance of being “well formed”
 - *Insinuation of sexual maturity and being physically attractive*

Sales Records

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ISAAC L. VAUGS,
ISAAC G. NEWLY.
March 7—6m. } Franklin, Tenn.

55 Negroes for Sale.

I HAVE on hand 55 NEGROES for sale, consisting of men, women and children, amongst them several good Blacksmiths, a No. 1 Fancy Girl. Also several House Girls. These Negroes are bound to go; call immediately.
March 7. REES W. PORTER.

CALL SOON

AND make payment of your notes or accounts to the late firm of STEVENSON & BIRTHWRIGHT, which are in the hands of the undersigned, or they will be placed

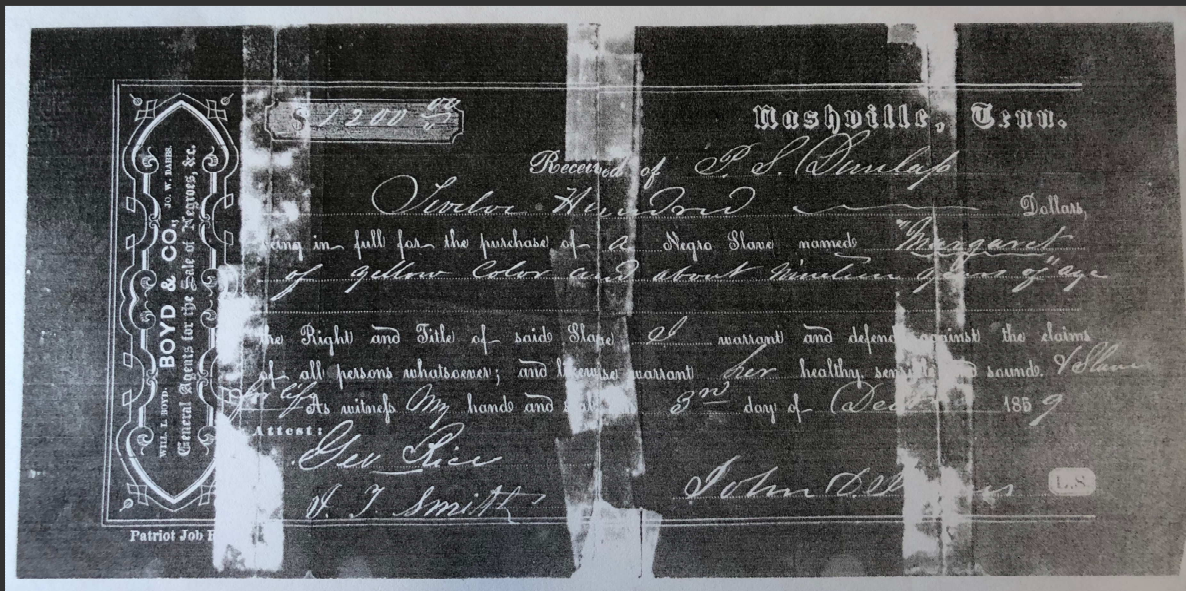
The Tennessean, March 8, 1856

- Buying slaves solely for sexual companionship not uncommon
- Slaves described as “house girls”, cooks, domestics
 - *Insinuation of sexual relations*

List of Negroes sold by Bolton Dickens				List of Negroes						
1	Rufus	Cost	12	1000.00	200	William	Cost 1025	1225	215	
2	Julia	"	900	1125	225	"	James	" 1050	1225	195
3	Mary	"	150	1300	150	"	Daniel	" 960	1225	255
4	John	"	1050	1300	210	"	Jack	" 1080	1350	300
5	Elizabeth	"	920	1100	180	"	Assanda	900	1100	200
6	Robert	"	930	1125	195	"	John	" 1100	1250	150
7	Walter	"	1100	1350	225	"	Stephen	925	1125	200
8	William	"	1075	1300	205	"	Mary	1100	1325	225
9	Mary	"	1050	1150	100	"	Robert	1100	1325	225
10	Joseph	"	920	1150	210	"	William	1200	1500	200
11	John	"	900	1125	200	"	John	" 1000	1250	250
12	Thomas	"	925	1150	210	"	Rachel	" 1000	1200	200
13	John	"	955	1100	105	"	John	900	1000	200
14	Sally	"	950	1125	200	"	John	1100	1300	200
15	Fred	"	775	850	110	"	Stephen	900	1125	225
16	Mary	"	775	850	112	"	Jenny	775	1125	200
17	Bob	"	1000	1200	200	"	John	1050	1225	175
18	Robert	"	975	1125	200	"	John	1140	1300	225
19	Arthur	"	1005	1250	245	"	David	1050	1300	250
20	Walter	"	1050	1250	200	"	John	1235	1250	225
21	Robert	"	1050	1250	200	"	Mary	1050	1250	225
22	William	"	1100	1250	150	"	John	1100	1300	200
23	Frederick	"	1100	1250	150	"	John	1050	1300	225
24	Thomas	"	1050	1250	200	"	John	975	1050	175
25	John	"	1050	1250	200	"	John	1000	1000	100
26	Stephen	"	1050	1250	200	"	John	865	1125	210
27	Robert	"	1050	1250	200	"	John	825	1025	200
28	John	"	950	1125	150	"	John	800	1000	200
29	Henry	"	1075	1225	150	"	John	950	1200	250
30	John	"	975	1150	150	"				
31	Thomas	"	810	900	100	"				
32	John	"	1110	1275	165	"				
33	William	"	1075	1225	150	"				
34	John	"	1015	1200	100	"				

Bolton Dickens and Company Averages

- Slave Ledger provides an idea of the market price for “desirable” slaves
- 1856-1858
- Average price for women
 - Memphis: \$1,126
 - Vicksburg: \$1,145



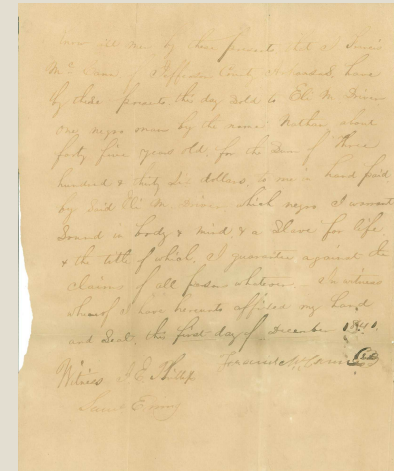
Nashville Sale

- “Margaret”
- \$1,200
- 19 years old
- “Of yellow complexion”

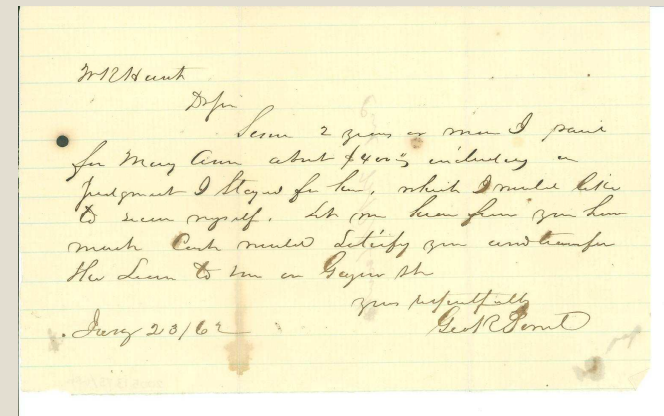
Low Price Bills of Sale

- "Nathan"
 - 45 year old man
 - \$335

- "Mary Ann"
 - No age given
 - \$400



Two copies of this paper, all of which
the same, being that released here
by this paper the day, 20th of June
one year, one by the name Nathan above
forty five years old, for the sum of three
hundred and thirty five dollars, to me in hand paid
by said N. to said John, which paper I cannot
found in body & mind, & a slave for life
& the title of said N. against the
claim of all persons whom I believe
should be hereunto, unless my hand
and seal, the first day of June 1862
Wm. S. D. King, Treasurer, Jan. 1862
John E. King



W. S. D. King
Dear Sir
I have 2 years or more I paid
for Mary Ann about \$400, including a
judgment I litigate for her, which I would like
to see myself. It can be seen from your
month book would satisfy you and transfer
the same to you in Georgetown
yours respectfully
Wm. S. D. King
July 20/62

Mulatto Slave Population

- Presence of mulatto slaves was the tangible evidence of the abuse of enslaved females
 - *Mulatto children result of non-consensual relations between white master and enslaved women*
- The practice of using enslaved women as concubines “pervaded the entire society”
- Sexual relations between slaveholding white men and their female slaves “was the thing we can’t name”
- “Every lady tells you who is the father of all the mulatto children in everybody’s household, but those in her own she seems to think dropped from the clouds or so pretends to think” –Mary Chestnut

Mulatto Slave Population

- Presence of Mulatto slaves an indicator of sexual exploitation, but cannot show all types of sexual assault that enslaved women faced

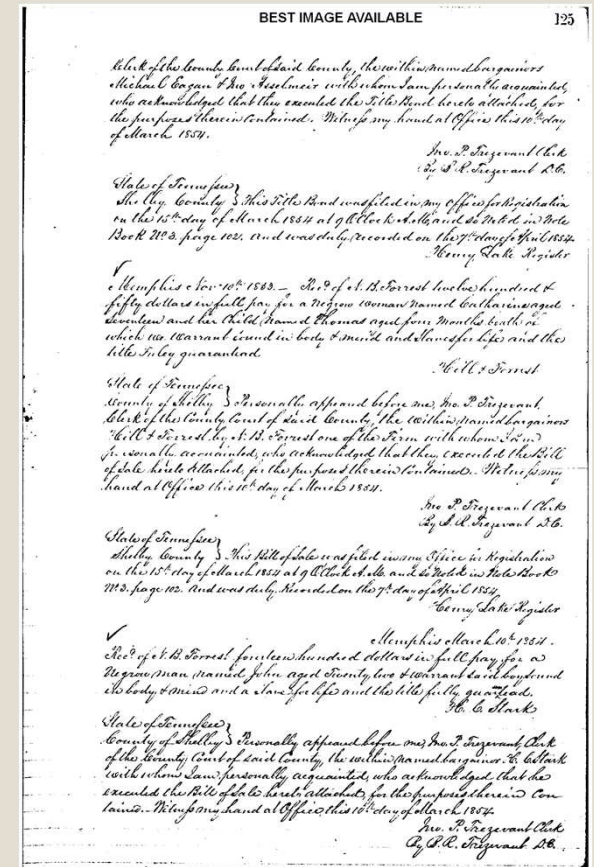
Percentage of Slave Population Recorded as “Mulatto”		
Location	1850	1860
Alabama	6.3%	
Tennessee	8.5%	
Mississippi	6.36%	
Memphis, TN	26.33%	32.56%
Nashville, TN	33.92%	24.14%
Vicksburg, MS	25%	34.4%
Mobile, AL	18.98%	20.84%

Mulatto Slave Population

Percentage of Mulatto Population 10 years old and younger		
City	1850	1860
Memphis, TN	33.16%	32.09%
Nashville, TN	30.08%	29.68%
Vicksburg, MS	36.05%	31.35%
Mobile, AL	31%	26.54%

Master-Slave Relationship

- Nathan Bedford Forrest
- November 10, 1853
- Catherine, age 17, and her 4 month old son, Thomas
- \$1,250





1864 Chicago Tribune Article

- “The Butcher Forrest and His Family
- Claims Forrest had two wives
 - *”One White, the other colored (Catherine) by which he had two children. His patriarchal wife, Catherine, and his white wife had frequent quarrels or domestic jars”*
- Emphasis on the name Catherine

1870 Census Data- Catherine and Child

- 1870 Memphis Census 4th ward
- Listing of a female, Cath. Forrest, aged 36, from Tennessee
- Listing of a girl, Narcissa Forrest, aged 13
 - *Listed as mulatto*
- Time line starting with the 1853 bill of sale
- Evidence of sexual relations between elite white men and their female slaves

“It was so common for female slaves to have white children, that little or nothing is ever said about it”

– Theodore Weld, *Slavery as it is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses*

In the Deep South slaveholding states, women held in urban slavery were subject to more sexual exploitation and abuse directly at the hands of their white male owners, than compared to their rural counterparts who faced more reproductive exploitation and manipulation.



Slave wedding at Jefferson Davis's Brierfield plantation

“Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women”

- former slave Harriet Jacobs