REBELLIOUS AND RESERVED: THE FLUIDITY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN SLAVE MASCULINITY

by

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ABSTRACT

RACHEL RUTH MCMANIMEN. Rebellious and Reserved: The Fluidity of African American Slave Masculinity. (Under the direction of DR. JOHN DAVID SMITH)

Enslaved men, marginalized by their race and class, sought to reclaim their masculinity and fashion a gendered identity within the slave community. Most commonly examined by historians, ex-slaves acted violently, physically engaging either their masters or their peers. While violence constituted a way in which men could reassert their manhood, they also chose other ways to do so, often providing food and materials for their families and rescuing their families from bondage. Select published ex-slave narratives reveal that enslaved men chose both violence and restraint to create a gendered identity, evidencing the fluidity of masculinity within the slave quarters.

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DEDICATION

To my mother and father, whose love and support has made this thesis and my Masters degree possible.

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INTRODUCTION: "I WAS REALLY BEGINNING TO BE A MAN": MASCULINITY AND SLAVERY SCHOLARSHIP

Prior to the publishing of Deborah Gray White's groundbreaking *Ar'n't I a Woman?* revisionist historians writing in the 1970s such as Eugene D. Genovese, John W. Blassingame, and Herbert Gutman labored to correct and refute the theses that dominated slavery studies for three or four decades prior—theses that argued that slavery functioned as a school, civilizing culturally and genetically inferior slaves.[1] Among the first to use sources produced by slaves themselves, Genovese, Blassingame, and Gutman sought to return agency and humanity to the slave community by examining enslaved family patterns, kin networks, folklore and religion, resistance, and slave community behavior.[2] These revisionist historians, though acknowledging the exploitation and abuse of slaves, interpreted the slave community as harmonious, peaceful, and close-knit. However, these interpretations would not last long before being challenged by other scholars who used an unprecedented perspective through which to understand slave life and culture.

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[1] Ulrich Bonnell Phillips' *American Negro Slavery*, published in 1918, dominated slavery historiography until the 1950s when Kenneth M. Stampp published *A Peculiar Institution*. Phillips coined the analogy of slavery as a school but did not admit to the harsh realities endured by slaves, often praising slaveholders for their fair treatment of slaves. Though Stampp agreed with Phillips in that slaves adopted their masters' codes of good behavior, he revealed how masters dehumanized and exploited slave labor.

[2] John David Smith, "Historiography of Slavery," in *Dictionary of Afro-American Slavery*, ed. Randall M. Miller and John David Smith (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1988), 332-33.

Influenced by the second-wave of feminism in the United States throughout the 1960s and 1970s, historian Deborah Gray White dramatically changed the projection of slavery studies in 1985 by using gender as a methodological tool to examine the lives of enslaved women. The examination of topics, people, events, and relationships of power through the prism of gender, and the examination of how gender influences history and social relations, constitutes what scholars consider a "gendered approach." White argued that American slavery consisted of two systems: one for men and one for women due to the different expectations and responsibilities of each gender. One of her most significant contributions to slave and gender scholarship, White asserted that reproductive exploitation became an integral part of the female slave life cycle once slaveholders realized the reproductive capabilities of bondwomen could yield a profit.[3] Furthermore, White contended the female slave culture and relationships created through working together and living in close spaces allowed bondwomen the opportunity to develop a unique network that generated female cooperation and interdependence.

White's ideas inspired further inquiries into the lives of enslaved women but more notably, her use of gender as a methodological tool compelled other historians to question the role of gender in the lives of enslaved men. [4] In 2016, Sergio Lussana, a scholar of southern slave masculinity, developed White's framework to explore the homosocial world of friendships and enslaved men in his text, *My Brother Slaves: Friendship,*

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[3] Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I A Woman?: Females Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1985), 68.

[4] See Emily West, *Enslaved Women in America: From Colonial Times to Emancipation* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015).

Masculinity, and Resistance in the Antebellum South. Lussana argued "homosocial company was integral to the gendered-identity and self-esteem of enslaved men. The emotional landscape they created together offered them a vital mutual support network through which to resist the horrors of slavery."[5] Analyzing homosocial spaces—environments in which only men interacted with one another—Lussana focused on environments of work and leisure to explain how bondmen formed relationships and uplifted one another.

While Lussana focused on the support bondmen offered each other, historian Jeff Forret's *Slave Against Slave: Plantation Violence in the Old South* (2015), took the opposite view, detailing the conflict present within slave communities. Forret sought not to correct the work of Genovese, Blassingame, and Gutman, but rather to illustrate another facet of life within the quarters; the fact that conflict existed within communities and between slaves for a variety of reasons and that violence plagued the lives of slaves, especially in the American south. Though Forret's work centered on conflict, exploring the relationship between violence and the slave economy, slave unions, and slave homicide, Forret devoted a chapter each to violence and enslaved masculinity and violence and enslaved femininity. Examining the reasons for which bondmen would engage in violence to preserve or assert a masculine identity, Forret explained the importance of southern whites' conceptions of masculinity, including preservation of honor, protecting women, providing for families, and behaving aggressively, especially when one's honor or reputation came under attack. He asserted that "the honor codes of

[5] Sergio A. Lussana, *My Brother Slaves: Friendship, Masculinity, and Resistance in the Antebellum South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2016), 18.

whites and slaves in the Old South mirrored one another in many ways," thus highlighting the transferability and application of white ideas of masculinity to slave culture.[6] Despite masculinity being a minor subject in his larger argument, Forret offered a new perspective into slave and masculinity studies, unexamined by Lussana.

In 2018, David Doddington published *Contesting Slave Masculinity in the American South*, in which he "[explored] disputes between enslaved people who prioritized different masculine ideas, as well as the collisions triggered by men who strove to assert their vision of manhood at the expense of others . . . to [highlight] the fluidity of gender within slave communities."[7] Doddington differentiated himself from Lussana by focusing on comparison and competition that constructed bondmen's masculine identities rather than homosocial relationships that uplifted one another. Similar to Forret, Doddington discussed violence, leisure, and masculinity, but highlighted the idea that violence in leisure time (activities that prioritized physical strength, prowess, and dominance) offered a space for masculine identities to be won, but also to be lost.[8] Through an analysis of resistance, authority, discipline, work, violence, leisure, and sex and power, Doddington contended "the comparison to or disavowal of

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[6] Jeff Forret, *Slave Against Slave: Plantation Violence in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 295.

[7] David Stefan Doddington, *Contesting Slave Masculinity in the American South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 2.

[8] Ibid.,172, 175.

other enslaved men's behavior and actions was an important means of determining masculine identity and social standing for black men."[9]

In the last several decades, historians have increasingly used gender as a lens to interpret slavery. What can gender tell scholars that other methodologies cannot? According to historian Joan W. Scott, gender "is a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated."[10]

> Established as an objective set of references, concepts of gender structure perception and the concrete and symbolic organization of all social life to the extent these references establish distributions of power (differential control over access to material and symbolic resources), gender becomes implicated in the conception and construction of power itself.[11]

Ultimately, gender functions as a contested site of power where the winner reaps the benefit of controlling access to material or symbolic resources. For example, an enslaved male that demonstrates his physical strength over another bondman in an organized fight would receive respect from his peers (symbolic resource) and, if he impressed his master enough, may be rewarded with extra food rations or lighter loads of work to keep him well-fed and well-rested for the next prizefight. Analyzing men as gendered beings reveals how gender, and specifically masculinity, reproduces and

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[9] Ibid., 9.

[10] Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (December 1986): 1069.

[11] Ibid.

structures power.[12] Examining the ways in which enslaved men fashioned a masculine identity reveals information about relationships of power within a community that seemingly had no power at all, subjected completely and totally to the white master's will.

According to sociologist Raewyn Connell, masculinity materializes in four configurations defined by status and power. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position, the most culturally exalted forms of masculinity, consisting of characteristics and/or actions that justify dominance and inequality. Opposite of hegemonic masculinity, "subordinated masculinity refers to configurations of masculinity with the least cultural status, power, and influence."[13] Subordinated masculinity may be expressed through political and cultural exclusion, violence, and economic exploitation.[14] Complicit masculinity refers to masculinity that benefits from the overall subordination of women but does not take an active role in the subordination women like hegemonic masculinity does. Complicit masculinities benefit from the system but do not help perpetrate or create power relations. Lastly, marginalized masculinity refers to the interaction of gender with other structures such as class and race—meaning "different masculinities can share some ground with hegemonic configurations, but simultaneously exist as marginalized to and by these forms."[15] As

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[12] C.J. Pascoe and Tristan Bridges, *Exploring Masculinities: Identity, Inequality, Continuity, and Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 3.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid., 18.

[15] Ibid., 19.

argued by Forret and evidenced through published ex-slave narratives and WPA testimony, white ideas of masculinity, such as restraint and passion, transferred to slaves' conceptions of manhood—especially in the South, where honor and black violence reportedly constituted a major part in both white and slave culture. Therefore, because whites and slaves shared similar ideas about masculinity but whites exercised power over slaves (gender intersecting with race), slaves occupied a position of marginalized masculinity whereas whites exerted hegemonic masculinity.

Masculinity's lack of historical stability further complicates interpretations of manhood. Subject to change, masculinity differs across time, space, and cultures. Consequently, different contexts produce different beliefs about manhood and the performance of masculine actions. For example, the image of the genteel patriarch dominated the antebellum South whereas the image of the self-made man dominated northern ideas of masculinity. The unstable nature of masculinity thus makes multiple masculinities approaches appropriate when considering enslaved masculinity. These approaches consider a diversity of masculinities and "masculinities relative to each other in terms of power and cultural prestige."[16] Understanding hegemonic versus marginalized masculinities in combination with multiple masculinities approaches helps to illustrate the fluidity of intragender and intraracial enslaved masculinity in published ex-slave narratives.

Furthermore, masculinity should be viewed as a process rather than as a prescriptive or predetermined set of ideals, traits, or sex roles. "Envisioning manhood as a unified set of traits gives us no way to consider the relations between

[16] Ibid., 124.

[and]…contradictory aspects of…manhood, nor does it give us a way to understand how men themselves negotiated contradictions."[17] A study of enslaved masculinity can reveal the fluidity of masculinity in different contexts: time, place, and region; it can reveal gendered relationships of power within the slave community (men-men relationships, men-women relationships); and it can contribute to the growing scholarship that portrays the multidimensionality of slaves and slave life, rather than the myth of the contented slave community.

The works of Lussana and Doddington represent the most current and groundbreaking research in enslaved masculinity studies and serve as the framework for this thesis. *My Brother Slaves* argued the intertwining of enslaved men's lives created an all-male subculture within which men created gendered identities, constructed ideas of masculinity, and created bonds that served as the vital support network, helping men bolster self-esteem and survive slavery.[18] Examining what he calls the "homosocial spaces" of bondmen, Lussana explained how men constructed masculinity within spaces of work, leisure, and beyond the plantation, for example, when evading slave patrols. Focusing on the activities and spaces men occupied that that bolstered masculine identities and friendships, Lussana concluded that work and organized fighting provided a space for bondmen to prove and rank themselves against their fellow slaves. However, this assessment excluded men who lost or proved unmanly compared to others in these spaces thus offering a one-dimensional interpretation. Though fighting provided men the

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[17] Gail Bederman, "Remaking Manhood Through Race and 'Civilization,'" in *Exploring Masculinities: Identity, Inequality, Continuity, and Change*, 53.

[18] Lussana, *My Brother Slaves,* 9.

opportunity to compete against one another and perform masculine characteristics such as speed and strength, in the end only one man could win.[19]

Furthermore, Lussana did not devote significant attention to the ways in which enslaved men fashioned gendered identities through provider and protector roles. He acknowledged that "male hunters supplemented the diets of enslaved people and provided for their families," but did not provide context to this argument. Did gender influence specific household or familial roles? How did enslaved masculinity define itself against enslaved femininity? Providing no comparison or explanation about the relationship between enslaved masculinity and enslaved femininity within the quarters, Lussana returned to discussion about the process of men hunting in groups as a bonding experience within a homosocial space.[20]

Overall, Lussana's argument that men constructed and affirmed masculine identities in homosocial work and leisure spaces proved persuasive, but it delivered an unrealistic perspective. To rank themselves against one another, some bondmen had to succumb to the strength or power of another, therefore exhibiting his opponent's masculinity as superior to his own. A loser must exist in order for a winner to exist, and thus, Lussana's lack of consideration of competition and comparison within the slave communities conveys an impractical sense of life within the quarters. Furthermore, Lussana devoted little to no discussion of enslaved women or enslaved femininity in the text. According to postmodern philosopher Jacques Derrida, femininity and masculinity supplement one another,

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[19] Ibid., 40, 56.

[20] Ibid., 72.

> meaning that masculinity can exist only by virtue of its dependence on femininity. While masculinity might be defined in language as inherently different from femininity, the very fact that it is the opposite of femininity suggests that its definition requires femininity.[21]

Though Lussana's arguments of certain actions and/or spaces supported the construction of masculinity, he provided no context of enslaved masculinity in relation to enslaved femininity, further producing an impractical interpretation and thus weakening his overall argument.

Lussana's attempt marked the first larger study into enslaved masculinity studies and provided a small historiography for Doddington to situate his work within. The most recent scholarship within the discipline, Doddington's *Contesting Slave Masculinity in the American South* sought to fill some of the gaps left open by *My Brother Slaves*. Doddington's central argument focused on the comparison and competition within slave quarters, left unexamined by Lussana. Contending that competition constituted a major part of masculine identities within slave societies, Doddington argued "enslaved men compared themselves to and competed with one another to establish and validate their manhood, interpreting the range of cultural values and attributes associated with masculinity in different ways."[22] Doddington examined topics ranging from resistant manhood versus non-resistant manhood, to the use of positions of authority to construct masculinity, to sex and domination over women as a means to construct masculinity. In

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[21] Quoted in "Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction by Todd W. Reeser," page 37, https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.librarylink.uncc.edu/doi/pdf/10.1002/9781444317312

[22] Doddington, *Contesting Slave Masculinity,* 19.

each chapter, Doddington explained the multiple ways in which men could fashion a masculine identity.

In his treatment of resistant versus nonresistant manhood, Doddington claimed slaves could either choose to resist their bondage and consequently earn their manhood or continue to remain enslaved and suffer emasculation through such a choice. Therefore, masculinity depends on the action and inaction of bondmen, providing a comparison between the two choices.[23] To argue the construction of masculinity through positions of authority or discipline, Doddington related that men in roles such as an overseer experienced more independence and autonomy than other slaves; "by asserting personal authority and agency in forms of discipline and punishment, enslaved male trustees demonstrated a masculine identity built on comparative power."[24]

Drastically different from the ideas of resistant manhood, Doddington explained that men who sought masculine identities through protector and provider roles sometimes found it necessary or admirable "to reject personal heroism of rebellion to fulfill responsibilities of dependents."[25] These men considered it negligent to assume the heroic masculine identity and more admirable to remain in bondage to care for those who depended upon him.

In addition to nonviolent manhood, Doddington also included a brief discussion of women (not femininity) to describe how men could compare themselves against one another to assert their masculinity. Some bondmen constructed masculine identities

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[23] Ibid., 34.

[24] Ibid., 59.

[25] Ibid., 103.

through breaking up existing relationships, using sex with women to assert or prove their dominance over other men, and linking virility and lack of sexual restraint as a measuring stick for enslaved masculinity.[26] Therefore, as posited by Doddington, women functioned as a site of contestation and construction for bondmen's masculine identities. Depending on their ideas of masculinity, enslaved men created gendered identities through sex in different manners, but still relied on comparison as a way to measure manhood.

Lastly, Doddington followed Lussana's lead by investigating the construction of masculinity through comparison within work and leisure spaces. Noting that sometimes leisure spaces and activities performed within could produce violence and harm, Doddington explained that failure to act in physical competition or violent confrontation in public could serve as a demonstration of weakness and be viewed by the larger slave community as evidence of a lack of manhood. "Leisure time offered a space for identities to be won, but also to be lost."[27] Here, he highlighted a major point overlooked by Lussana's text: masculinity and the construction of masculine identities could not be performed or created within an environment where all men supported one another if the main avenue of construction or performance required competition. Though bondmen did establish friendships and connections that helped contest the emasculation and dehumanization of slavery, competition and comparison to other men (and women, at that) required someone to be the loser.

Challenging Lussana, Doddington warned that positive treatments and depictions of enslaved masculinity as supportive and unifying run the risk of underestimating "how

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[26] Ibid., 154, 158-159, 162.

[27] Ibid., 172.

seriously enslaved men took confrontation, competition, and combat."[28] Furthermore, he added this underestimation of confrontation and competition runs another risk of underplaying the physical and psychological effects of defeat.[29] Though masculine identities could be formed and supported through homosocial spaces, not all homosocial spaces were absent from competition and comparison, both of which afforded men the avenues to create gendered identities.

Though both scholars offer critical and valuable insight into the world of gendered power relations and gender fluidity in the slave community, both overlook several significant aspects that can yield greater knowledge of the quarters. Though more comprehensive than Lussana, Doddington overlooked other subjects such as masculinity and femininity or masculinity in northern states that would give his argument greater depth and dimension.

Secondly, neither text discusses hegemonic versus marginalized masculinity to explain the power relationships between bondmen and masters, bondmen and other bondmen, and bondmen and bondwomen. Doddington highlighted arguments of gender theorists such as Joan Scott and Raewyn Connell but limited the discussion to gender and its usefulness to understanding slave relationships rather than the discussion of power dynamics inherent within gender and gender roles.

Thirdly, both historians overlooked the interplay between enslaved masculinity and enslaved femininity and the power relationship inherent between the two. Doddington's chapter on enslaved men, sex, and dominance constituted the only

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[28] Ibid., 179.

[29] Ibid.,195.

discussion which includes enslaved women. Doddington did not consider women as being capable of agency or as having an active role in shaping their lives or performing gendered responsibilities, consequently limiting his discussion to sex and dominance over women rather than femininity. Though Doddington's readers can assume that men asserted masculinity through activities that only men participated in, such as fighting, his argument could be strengthened through the treatment of enslaved masculinity and its relation to enslaved femininity.

Lastly, both Lussana and Doddington limit their analyses to slaves in the southern United States. Neither explore enslaved masculinity in other regions of the country which could provide significant insight into enslaved masculinity in its entirety. Nineteenth century American historians have discussed in length the differences between northern and southern conceptions of manhood; the "Self-Made Man" existed in the North while the genteel patriarch dominated the south. Both regions had diametrically opposed opinions of what it meant to be a man. In the North, men exercised restraint whereas the idea of honor structured social interactions in the antebellum South. Southern gentlemen participated in duels to defend their reputation. Not all enslaved men acted as the "heroic archetype," exemplifying southern ideas of honor and violence to contest bondage. Some bondmen fashioned masculine identities by choosing to remain in bondage to take care of family and friends who depended on them for food or material items. The difference in masculine conceptions depending upon the slave's opinions of manhood created different masculine responses to slavery and therefore deserve consideration in the larger discussion of enslaved masculinity.

This thesis fills the gaps left open by both *My Brother Slaves* and *Contesting Slave Masculinity*. Using the published narratives written and/or dictated by a number of ex-slaves, it will explore the different ways in which ex-slaves fashioned a masculine identity despite the emasculation they faced as chattel. Discussion of these topics will provide greater insight into power dynamics within the slave community and the fluidity of masculinity, returning multi-dimensionality to the discussion of enslaved masculinity.

Chapter one differentiates between the different categories of slave narratives most commonly analyzed by historians. It describes the ways in which historians have used both types of narratives and defines the concerns and problems scholars should consider when using slave testimony. The chapter then explains how literature scholars use published ex-slave narratives and outlines common arguments within debates of the African American literary tradition. Following this chapter, readers will understand the outside influences, such as target audience and political aims, acting upon the ex-slave authors and their written works.

Chapter two introduces the first type of masculine identity ex-slaves constructed. Beginning with a discussion of white antebellum southern culture, it emphasizes the importance of violence and honor in structuring social interactions. It then explains the complex relationship between hegemonic and marginalized masculinity and describes how violence served as a tool for subordinated individuals and groups to reclaim or gain power. Frederick Douglass' *My Bondage and My Freedom* and Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* serve as examples of how marginalized men accessed and used violence as a means to regain power and bolster their masculine identity. Also included in

this chapter, Charles Ball and his narrative, *Fifty Years in Chains* represents a unique exception.

While Ball engaged violently with another enslaved man to protect his life, overcoming the man and certainly bolstering Ball's self-esteem and masculinity, he did not use violence to construct his identity. Rather, Ball asserted his manhood through positions of authority on the plantation and his ability to hunt and scavenge food for the enslaved family he lived with. The author has chosen to address Ball alongside Douglass and Northup because he understood the use of violence to defend honor and manhood and recounted a physical altercation in his narrative. The former slaves who chose a restrained masculine identity also fashioned it through provider roles but condemned the use of violence. Ball thus represents a special case: understanding how violence can assert manhood, overpowering an attacker—affirming his belief that he could assert his masculinity through violence—and choosing to define his identity through positions of authority and provider roles but never condemning violence. Ultimately, he represents the many ways that enslaved men could fashion a masculine identity.

Chapter three focuses on what the author calls restrained manhood. This type of masculinity did not resort to violence, rather it denounced the use of violence to resolve conflict or hurt others. Combining characteristics of eighteenth-century New England Puritanism's communal manhood and the Self-Made Man, produced by the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth-century, Moses Grandy, Lunsford Lane, Rev. Thomas H. Jones, and Henry Bibb fashioned a masculine identity through their responsibility to and sense of duty owed to their families. These ex-slaves asserted their manhood by working

within the system of slavery, providing for, protecting, and rescuing their families from enslavement.

CHAPTER ONE: TO WRITE HIMSELF INTO BEING: CRITICAL DEBATES AND THE SLAVE NARRATIVE

Since the acceptance of slave testimony as integral to the reconstruction and interpretation of life in bondage, historians and literary scholars alike have argued the importance of critically examining and evaluating the implicit and explicit influences that shaped the content, style, and aims of the narrative. Despite Ulrich Bonnell Phillips' dismissal of slave testimony as untrustworthy and biased, historians have used this testimony since the early twentieth century.[1] However, historian Gilbert Osofsky's *Puttin' on Ole Massa* (1969) marked the beginning of an explosion of texts that used slave testimony as the primary evidence to support interpretations of slave life and community. Historians such as Eugene D. Genovese, Herbert G. Gutman, John W. Blassingame, George P. Rawick, Paul D. Escott, and Norman R. Yetman, among others writing in the 1970s, used Works Progress Administration interviews and published ex-slave narratives to reconstruct life in bondage. The shift in opinion in the 1970s on slave testimony as integral to any interpretation of slavery changed the trajectory of the field and now remains an important aspect of slave scholarship that cannot be overlooked.

The term "slave narratives" has several different meanings. Both the Works Progress Administration (WPA) interviews and published ex-slave narratives have been

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[1] James Ford Rhodes, *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1904); Harrison A. Trexler, *Slavery in Missouri 1804-1865* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1914); Frederic Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South* (Baltimore: J. H. Furst Co., 1931); J. Winston Coleman, Jr. *Slavery Times in Kentucky* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1940).

categorized as narratives by historians. As part of the New Deal and created in response to the mass unemployment produced by the Great Depression, the WPA project collected over 2,000 interviews from surviving ex-slaves between 1936 and 1938 across seventeen different states.[2] Originally, the Federal Writers' Project (FWP) had no intentions of collecting slave testimony and "interviews with former slaves were undertaken spontaneously" until the inauguration of the WPA program by FWP headquarters in 1937.[3] Since the 1970s, historians have largely used this type of narrative to draw conclusions about life in bondage of those enslaved.

Contrasting WPA narratives, published ex-slave narratives include autobiographical accounts either written by the enslaved person or dictated to a white amanuensis. Historians consider Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789) as one of the first American slave narratives to be published but the narratives span from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century. While the WPA narratives recorded information prompted by an interviewer's questions, published ex-slave narratives recounted experiences of the author, often containing more information about an ex-slave's life, time enslaved, and sometimes freedom, if applicable. These

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[2] Paul Escott *Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 13, https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.librarylink.uncc.edu/lib/uncc-ebooks/reader.action?docID=880125&ppg=13l.

[3] "The WPA and the Slave Narrative Collection," Library of Congress, accessed February 5, 2019, https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/articles-and-essays/introduction-to-the-wpa-slave-narratives/wpa-and-the-slave-narrative-collection/.

accounts tend to be significantly longer than WPA testimony, often novel-length. Though some ex-slaves, unable to read and write, dictated their stories to a white editor, these editors did not solicit ex-slaves for interviews or record their testimony in an interview-like format. Literature scholars consider published ex-slave narratives a literary genre within the canon of African American literature because of their use of literary conventions and rhetorical strategies absent in WPA narratives.

Using both WPA and published ex-slave narratives, historians have drawn similar conclusions about the institution of slavery. While published ex-slave narratives might provide a glimpse into the life of exceptional ex-slaves, contrary to WPA narratives that reveal the daily life of more commonplace ex-slaves, both types provide "an understanding of antebellum life, the nature and the effects of the institution of slavery, and the impact of Emancipation and Reconstruction."[4] Additionally, both types of narratives can test historical and social scientific generalizations against the other, suggesting new topics for investigation.[5] Furthermore, WPA and published ex-slave narratives reveal the nature of the plantation system, relationships between enslaved families, friends, and community members, the social hierarchy within the slave community, and slave culture, religion, and resistance.

While historians use both types of narratives to draw larger conclusions regarding enslavement, this thesis examines a select group of published ex-slave narratives to assess the fluidity of masculinity within the slave quarters. The narratives include those

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[4] Norman R. Yetman, "Introduction," in *Voices from Slavery: 100 Authentic Slave Narratives*, ed. Norman R. Yetman (1970; repr., New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2000), 4.

[5] Ibid.

of Frederick Douglass, Solomon Northup, Charles Ball, Moses Grandy, Lunsford Lane, the Reverend Thomas H. Jones, and Henry Bibb. This thesis does not reference, analyze, or draw conclusions from WPA narratives. Any mention of the word "narrative" or "narratives" refers to the published autobiographical accounts written by ex-slaves or dictated to white amanuenses.

While both types of narratives share common themes or tropes, they differ in the questions and concerns historians raise regarding their credibility and use as testimony. For example, historians have expressed several concerns regarding the manner in which WPA interviewers conducted interviews. "The writers employed as interviewers were almost exclusively white—and it is probably that in many instances caste etiquette led ex-slaves to tell white interviewers 'what they wanted to hear.'"[6] Some African Americans served as writers but most commonly whites collected interviews from blacks. Scholars maintain the explicit or implicit social conventions or etiquette of the interviewer-interviewee relationship had possible consequences for the candor of the informant thus swaying the credibility of the testimony collected.

In addition to the interviewer-interviewee relationship, historians have commented on the representation of ex-slaves included in the interviews, ex-slaves' memory and ability to relay accurate information, ex-slaves ages at the time of the interview, and the context in which the interviews took place. Escott, in *Slavery Remembered*, detailed several concerns of representation within WPA narratives that included the occupational distribution of informants noting that "house servants are

[6] "The WPA and the Slave Narrative Collection," Library of Congress.

substantially overrepresented in the slave narratives."[7] The age of ex-slaves interviewed also raised alarms because "almost one-fifth of the informants were less than five years old in 1865."[8] Furthermore, WPA writers questioned ex-slaves most likely in their eighties and nineties at the time of the interview, reflecting concerns regarding the ability to correctly recall memories.

Historians working with WPA testimony raise concerns about memory. Donna J. Spindel has written about the potential problems of memory recall in her article, "Assessing Memory: Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives Reconsidered." Spindel referred to several psychological studies and psychologists who specialized in memory but ultimately concluded that despite the age of elderly ex-slaves, "individuals are likely to recall such 'life-cycle markers' as marriage, childbirth, divorce, widowhood, or poor health."[9] Day-to-day memories might fade with age, but events that have long-lasting or severe consequences had a greater chance of surviving within the ex-slave's memory. Thus, when working with WPA narratives, historians can trust testimony describing such major life-cycle markers, although it still should be scrutinized as any other source would.

More than memory, the context in which WPA writers conducted and elicited ex-slave testimony caused historians to hesitate. "Southern blacks lived in the grip of a system of segregation that was nearly as oppressive as slavery," Escott wrote, and ex-

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[7] Paul Escott, *Slavery Remembered,* 20.

[8] Ibid., 22

[9] Donna J. Spindel, "Assessing Memory: Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives Reconsidered," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 27, no. 2 (1996): 254.

slaves "could not afford to alienate local white people or agents of the federal government, which might provide them with vital relief or an old-age pension."[10] The Great Depression, compounded with the racist and segregationist policies of Jim Crow, placed ex-slaves in a vulnerable position and the interviewees understood this. "Old, poor, and dependent," as Escott described them, ex-slaves did not reveal any information that might offend or transcend the racial etiquette of the time. Like the interviewer-interviewee relationship, the context of the time period also influenced the informant's candor.

Despite the concerns of the veracity, age, and memory of WPA informants, historians since the 1970s have increasingly used this testimony, but not without careful scrutiny. Like published ex-slave narratives, WPA narratives have been used to glean information about general themes throughout slavery: family life, daily chores/tasks, treatment from masters, and have provided substantive information for scholars writing about slave life. Despite the potential discrepancies and problems within WPA narratives and the manner in which historians evaluate and approach them, "the necessary precautions are no more elaborate or burdensome than those required by many other types of sources [the historian] is accustomed to use."[11]

Historians have approached published ex-slave narratives similarly to WPA narratives, treating them thematically or more broadly rather than using them to draw specific conclusions about enslavement. As previously mentioned, Phillips' dismissal of

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[10] Escott, *Slavery Remembered*, 16.

[11] C. Vann Woodward, "The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography by George P. Rawick," *American Historical Review* 79, no. 2 (April 1974): 480.

slave testimony as biased discouraged generations of historians from using these sources to reconstruct bondage. Historians Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates Jr. in *The Slave's Narrative* recalled historian Howard Zinn's urgent cry for a "slave-oriented" history of slavery in 1970, which went unanswered in fine and sustained detail until the publishing of Blassingame's *The Slave Community* and Rawick's *From Sundown to Sunup*.[12] However, since these works, Davis and Gates have pointed out that historians have increasingly used slave testimony to generate slave-oriented interpretations, citing several historians and their corresponding texts.[13]

Exemplifying how historians have approached published ex-slave narratives, Osofsky's *Puttin' on Ole Massa* (1969) discussed four major topics within slavery studies: flight and escape as common themes, a slave's "consciousness" and inner thoughts revealed, attitudes toward religion, the black family in slavery, among several other topics.[14] To expand and support these sub-arguments, Osofsky used specific

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[12] Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Slave's Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), xxxii.

[13] For this list, see Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Slave's Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), xxxii.

[14] Other topics include: "the many class- and color-conscious hatreds that divided slaves among themselves; the discussion of slavery's debasement of their *masters* and corruption of whites generally; the pattern of use and abuse of black women as field hands and as sexual partners; the role of the white mistress on plantations." Gilbert Osofsky, *Puttin' on Ole Massa: The Slave Narratives of Henry Bibb, William Wells Brown, and Solomon Northup* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 43.

examples acquired from slave testimony. For example, he mentioned ex-slaves Nat Turner, Moses Roper, and Henry Bibb to draw conclusions regarding slaves' flight and escape from plantations. "Turner took to the woods after his revolt collapsed and devised ingenious ways of avoiding capture," Osofsky stated. [15] He continued this trend throughout his text to address attitudes toward religions, the black family in slavery, and other broad, overarching topics of enslavement.

Rawick's *From Sundown to Sunup* also drew from slave testimony to generate broad interpretations of life under bondage. He included topics such as the master and slave relationship, African roots, religion, resistance, treatment by the master, and the black family in slavery. In a discussion of the master's treatment of the slave, Rawick quoted testimony from ex-slave Katie Darling, enslaved in Texas: "[The master] would whip the men for half doin' the plowin' or hoein', but if they done it right he'd find something else to whip them for."[16] Rawick analyzed this testimony to draw conclusions regarding punishment within the system of slavery, writing, "slaves were whipped as a lesson for other slaves. Whipping was a part of the entire social structure of slavery."[17] Furthermore, Rawick referenced ex-slaves Cato Carter, Mingo White, Elige Davison, and Sallie Carter to establish the relationship between punishment and social control.[18]

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[15] Osofsky, *Puttin' on Ole Massa*, 15-16.

[16] George P. Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1972), 59.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., 59-61.

While Blassingame used similar testimony as Osofsky and Rawick in his work *The Slave Community* (1972), in 1975 he authored an essay aimed at historians using WPA narratives and published ex-slave narratives in which he outlined necessary precautions and evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of both kinds of narratives. The "fundamental problem," wrote Blassingame, "confronting anyone interested in studying black views of bondage is that the slaves had few opportunities to tell what it meant to be chattel."[19] Slaves such as Douglass, Northup, Lane, and Bibb occupied positions that provided them an opportunity most other slaves did not have access to—either writing their own story, or working with a white editor. If most ex-slave authors worked with white editors to transcribe, edit, and publish their testimony, how can scholars trust the information presented? Blassingame noted an "editor's religious beliefs, literary skill, attitudes toward slavery, and occupation all affected how he recorded the account of the slave's life."[20]

However, despite white editors' personal biases, antebellum southerners discredited very few slave narratives—one indication of the narrative's reliability, according to Blassingame.[21] Elements that should be attributed to editors and not enslaved narrators include long dialogues, which Blassingame stated "could only represent approximations of the truth," and direct appeals to white readers.[22] Yet

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[19] John W. Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems," *Journal of Southern History* 41, no. 4 (November 1975): 474.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., 477.

[22] Ibid., 478.

assuming many of the white editors remained faithful to the story of their black narrators, "the major task of the historian, then, is to find ways to separate their rhetoric from the sentiments of the slaves."[23] Blassingame offered several strategies to do this: historians can compare the first edition to the revised editions, compare narratives to autobiographies written by former slaves after the war, and also compare the narratives to other writings of the ex-slave, such as sermons, letters, and speeches, to reveal similarities in style.[24]

Still, despite his belief in the authenticity of published narratives, Blassingame warned against the small sampling size available for examination by historians. Many more accounts exist detailing enslavement in the upper south rather than the lower south, and black women wrote less than twelve percent of the narratives. Additionally, an "overwhelming majority of the narrators were among the most perceptive and gifted of the former slaves."[25] In some instances, WPA interviews might prove more useful for historians wanting information about the day-to-day life of less exceptional slaves, but Blassingame warned against distortion of that testimony as well.[26]

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., 479.

[25] Ibid., 480.

[26] For more information regarding how historians should approach and evaluate WPA narratives, see John W. Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems," *Journal of Southern History* 41, no. 4 (November 1975): 480-490.

Despite the possible alterations from white editors in published narratives, Blassingame concluded the narratives have three "great advantages" over the WPA interviews.

> First, the average narrator was twenty-eight years younger than the average WPA informant when their stories were recorded. Second, an overwhelming majority of the narrators were over twenty years of age when they obtained freedom and could thus tell what slavery was like for adults as well as for black children. Third, all of the book-length narratives were far longer than the WPA interviews. As a consequence of these differences, personality traits appear in sharp relief in the narratives while often being obscured in the interviews.[27]

According to Blassingame, the published ex-slave narrative remained a better source to examine the lives of the men and women who endured slavery. Yet historians must pay close attention to these sources to find the voice of the slave, sometimes masked or revised by the white editor. "But, just as there are some topics on which only the masters can provide reliable information, there are some questions which only the slaves can answer."[28]

Historians have agreed with Blassingame's assertion that the voice of the enslaved must be included in interpretations of slavery. As demonstrated by the several works published in the last fifty years, historians critically analyze this information and use this evidence to draw larger conclusions about the social, political, and cultural climate of the antebellum period, enslavement, and long-term effects, while literature

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[27] Ibid., 490-91.

[28] Ibid., 492.

scholars examine published ex-slave narratives and use these sources to draw conclusions about longstanding literary traditions. Though different scholars use the same sources for different aims, historians and literature scholars work in tandem:

> textual 'resurrection,' as it were, at which the historian is so very adept, enables the literary scholar to compare the discrete uses of language by an author at several places, so that the clash of voices, between the well-intended prefatory or appended attestations of abolitionists about the author's integrity (or indeed his or her intelligence) and the voice of the slave subject, can be more clearly overhead and interpreted.[29]

Thus, an examination of historians' critiques of published ex-slave narratives must appear alongside the critiques of literature scholars as well.

To evaluate slave-produced sources, literature scholars engage in critical debates—called critical literature, in their field—that resemble the literature review for the historian. Analytical in nature and covering a wide variety of subjects, these arguments consider the author's credentials, how and from where authors researched and collected their evidence, disseminated, and presented, whether or not the author's point-of-view could be considered biased—and targeted to whom—why the author might be targeting a specific audience, other factors acting upon or influencing the narrative, and more.[30] While historians have devoted much time and attention to the analysis and

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[29] Davis and Gates, *The Slave's Narrative*, vxiii.

[30] "Organizing your Social Sciences Research Paper: 5. The Literature Review," Research Guides, University of Southern California, accessed February 10, 2019, http://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/literaturereview.

evaluation of WPA narratives, literature experts have focused on published ex-slave narratives. Literature scholars might agree with historians that WPA interviews provide valuable information regarding the slave community and enslaved life, however, they lack the conventions and elements that typically mark a text as literature. Therefore, literature scholars focus on published ex-slave narratives as the WPA narratives qualify more as black folklore.

Traditionally, literature scholars examined the structure, patterns, narration, and archetypes within published ex-slave narratives. James Olney and William L. Andrews did important work identifying and outlining the literary conventions and patterns that most published narratives include. Most recently, however, common themes analyzed by literature scholars in critical literature debates include ex-slave narratives as a model of African American literary tradition and how these texts connect to other cultural texts such as novels. Other common themes include investigations of gender, visual culture and material production of narratives, and lastly, the use of literary conventions and rhetorical strategies of anti-slavery discourse and how it counters or responds to pro-slavery discourse. While historians examine ex-slave narratives to draw conclusions about social, political, and cultural history from the overarching themes of enslavement, literature experts examine narratives for literary history, traditions, and conventions that shaped the canon of African American literature as a genre. Literature scholars do not examine broad topics or themes within the narratives, rather they analyze specific rhetorical strategies and how the use of these strategies affect the presentation of the text by the author and the reception of the text by the audience.

Considering literature scholars' unique perspective of literary techniques and strategies foreign to the trained historian's eye, the remainder of this chapter outlines critical literature of published ex-slave narratives written by literature experts. These arguments examine the patterns and development of ex-slave narratives, the abolitionist arguments that shaped or influenced the narratives, the political aims of the narratives, and the visual culture, material production, and dissemination of the texts. Consequently, this chapter highlights the main arguments of literature scholars while also providing the reader tools to examine and analyze the ex-slave narratives presented later in this thesis.

Though each ex-slave recalls different events and memories, all narratives share common elements; so common, that literary scholar James Olney proposed a master outline for the narrative.[31] "Slave narratives tend to exhibit a highly conventional, rigidly fixed form," wrote Olney, comparing the creativity of this form to that of "painting by numbers."[32] Shared features of published ex-slave narratives included an engraved portrait or photograph of the enslaved author, authenticating testimonials, poetic epigraphs, and illustrations before, in the middle of, or after the narrative. Further common elements included documents that appear before the text, in the text itself, or after the text, and speeches and essays at the end of the narrative that demonstrate post-narrative activities of the narrator.[33]

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[31] See James Olney, "'I Was Born': Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature," *Callaloo,* no. 20 (Winter 1984): 50-1, for Olney's master outline of ex-slave narratives.

[32] James Olney, "'I Was Born,'" 48.

[33] Ibid., 49.

Olney observed most narratives included a portrait accompanied by the titular tag "Written by Himself," preceding the text of the narrative. Especially significant, the phrase "Written by Himself" demonstrated the very qualities and/or skills whites assumed slaves could not possess because of their status as chattel. Not only could the ex-slave write, but he could do so articulately, proclaiming ownership over his body, his labor, his family, and his life story. This key phrase struck slavery at its core, revealing the irony of human property.

Furthermore, most narratives begin with the standard opening statement "I was born," which Olney suggested attested to the real existence of the author. Assuming the status of the narrative would be continually called into doubt, Olney maintained narratives could not begin until the narrator firmly established his real existence. "Photographs, portraits, signatures, authenticating letters all make the same claim: 'this man exists.' Only then can the narrative begin. And how do most of them actually begin? They begin with the existential claim repeated. 'I was born.'"[34] Such claims, and the addition of letters and portraits, reveal that enslaved authors knew their existence and testimony would be called into question by white readers. Influenced by concerns of their pro-slavery readership's opinions, enslaved authors went to great lengths to prove their existence and trustworthiness.

While enslaved authors' awareness of their white readership's skepticism influenced the outline and appendages to their texts, abolitionist discourse influenced the content and style of published ex-slave narratives. English and African American Literature scholars Dwight A. McBride and Justin A. Joyce explained what they termed

[34] Ibid., 52.

as the "discursive terrain" of abolitionist literature, its function, effect on and meaning to the enslaved narrator.[35] By discursive terrain, McBride and Joyce mean the body of abolitionist literature and its use of language, rhetorical strategy, and audience. "The discursive terrain does not simply function to create a kind of overdetermined telling of an experience," wrote McBride and Joyce, "it creates very codes through which those who would be the readers of the slave narrative understand the experience of slavery. If language enables articulations, language also enables us to read, decipher, or interpret those articulations."[36] As a result of the pervasiveness of the abolitionist discourse, McBride and Joyce concluded, it became important for the enslaved narrator to be able to understand and speak the codes and language that preexist the telling of his or her story.[37]

Discourse and discursive terrain include the similar themes, arguments, and debates in which published ex-slave narratives appeared alongside, reinforced, and supported. These debates could be formal or informal, be verbal conversations or written text, and participated in by ex-slaves, former abolitionists, and sympathetic white readers. Discourse in the literature field can be compared to historiography. Current events, debates, publications, sermons and/or speeches, and themes espoused by abolitionists, white sympathizers, and ex-slaves formed the body of literature and discussion in which ex-slave narratives appeared. This body of discourse had a certain set of rhetorical

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[35] Dwight A. McBride and Justin A. Joyce, "Reading Communities: Slave Narratives and the Discursive Reader," in *The Oxford Handbook of the African American Slave Narrative,* ed. John Ernest (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 166.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

strategies and expectations, understood by those active within these debates, which influenced the events recalled in ex-slave narratives, and the presentation and political aims of the narrative.

If the enslaved person understood the codes in which he or she must write, he or she also constructed and implied the intended reader, active within and aware of the common arguments and rhetorical strategies of the discourse, in their text. McBride and Joyce defined the discursive reader as "a confluence of political, moral, and social discursive concerns that animate, necessitate, and indeed make possible slave testimony itself."[38] The reader consisted of a complex combination of political opinions regarding antislavery, moral values and feelings of abhorrence of the idea of human property, and social codes of conduct which instructed him or her to protest enslavement. This reader, then, established the need for the ex-slave narrative, influenced its outline and content, and provided a readership to which the ex-slave could disseminate the narrative to. The discursive reader, therefore, also understood the codes and language that defined former abolitionist discourse.

McBride and Joyce argued that focusing historians' and literary scholars' attention on how the discursive reader "is constructed implicitly in [slave narratives], [provides] perhaps the clearest picture yet of the complex discursive terrain that is abolitionist discourse and the numerous demands it [placed] on the rhetorical strategies used in slave testimony."[39] If an ex-slave published a narrative for the anti-slavery cause, then, he or she wrote within strict limitations such as themes and events described to

[38] Ibid., 167.

[39] Ibid., 171.

language and syntax that conformed to the codes of abolitionist discourse, describing in great detail, for example, the cruelty of white masters or the destruction of family bonds. In conclusion, the abolitionist discursive terrain and the discursive reader implied in the narrative greatly influence the content, structure, and rhetorical strategies related in ex-slave narratives, circumscribing former slave's authorial freedom.

Similar to McBride and Joyce, English scholar Philip Gould highlighted the development of the slave narrative and the discourses that shaped it in his essay, "The Rise, Development, and Circulation of the Slave Narrative," (2007). Charting the slave narrative's development between the 1770s and the 1830s, Gould claimed a genre arose "not only from religious and popular contexts but also along important kinds of political writing that directly took up the issues of race and slavery."[40] Emerging alongside these growing discourses, the United States experienced the rise of the anti-slavery cause which "significantly generated a great deal of anti-slavery literature: books, pamphlets, epistles, institutional reports and proceedings, published sermons and orations, as well as a lot of visual and iconic materials meant to sentimentalize the plight of African slaves."[41] This print culture, asserted Gould, "provided the slave narrative with flexible rhetorical strategies and helped to sharpen its political focus," echoing back to McBride

[40] Philip Gould, "The Rise, Development, and Circulation of the Slave Narrative," in *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, ed. Audrey Fisch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 13.

[41] Ibid., 16.

and Joyce's argument that the abolitionist discursive terrain provided codes and language for the enslaved author's use.[42]

"Antebellum slave narratives became an increasingly popular and effective political means of fighting slavery," Gould added, and abolitionists and slaves knew this.[43] Therefore, the reader must understand that narratives published prior to 1865 appeared in a context and body of literature with specific political aims: the abolishment of slavery. This fact does not change the events described by the slave narrator but affects the author's motivation for writing. The political climate and discursive terrain in which antebellum narratives appeared both influenced and reinforced one another. Antebellum slave narratives cannot be stripped of their subliminal political goals but instead must be read and interpreted by historians as testimonies of slavery directly influenced by the codes, language, and themes of abolitionist arguments and political goals.

Describing the ex-slave narrative's contribution to the understanding of American history, Dickson D. Bruce also commented on the political aims of the published ex-slave narrative and its efforts to attract new adherents to the anti-slavery cause. Slave narratives intended to "shape the ideas and motives of those who became involved with [the anti-slavery cause] as, it should be said, many of the movement's white activists understood at the time."[44] The African American voice, representing first-hand accounts of the institution, wrote Bruce, "was as a result central to the abolitionist effort, even as African

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[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., 12.

[44] Dickson D. Bruce, "Slave Narratives and Historical Understanding," in *The Oxford Handbook of the African American Slave Narrative,* 65.

American participants were crucial to the definition and spread of the anti-slavery movement."[45] Dickson's comments regarding the influence of abolitionist literature and context of their similarly reflect those of McBride, Joyce, and Gould.

Just as the discursive terrain acted upon slave narrators and their texts, the material context—defined by nineteenth century literature scholar Teresa A. Goddu as the production, distribution and consumption—also shaped the meaning of the narrative. The production of the narrative included the act of writing or dictating the story and the revision of the story by a white editor; in short, the work necessary to produce the narrative. For Goddu, the distribution of the narrative included the selling of the text and disseminating it to interested readers, and the consumption entailed the act of reading and understanding the text by readers. Arguing the production, distribution, and consumption of texts resulted in a "richer understanding of the historical conditions under which the slave narrative was produced," Goddu provided a brief material history of the slave narrative, arguing the "white envelope" of white editors and common statements such as "written by himself" reveal the "range of authorial arrangements and varied amounts of textual control" within a narrative.[46] Examining the material histories of specific texts—the progression of the narrative through production, distribution, and consumption—reveals its "geographical diversity, its multiple editions and printed forms, its varied

[45] Ibid.

[46] Teresa A. Goddu, "The Slave Narrative as Material Text," in *The Oxford Handbook of the African American Slave Narrative,* 151.

publishing and distributional practices—that in turn, trouble the truisms of the broader tradition," she asserted.[47]

For example, Goddu explained the ex-slave narrative circulated in a "multiplicity of material forms: in sheets, pamphlets, or volumes, each creating a different circulation context."[48] These different modes of circulation affected the meaning of the narrative. "What is the difference between reading a slave narrative in a gift book versus a newspaper of an almanac?" questioned Goddu.[49] Ultimately, she encouraged scholars to consider how the material form and discursive context frame the meanings of former slave narratives. While the events the ex-slave narrator chose to recollect gave meaning to the text, so too did the mode in which it reached the reader.

In addition to the material production, the authorial portraiture presented in slave narratives set a precedent that influenced how the author envisioned and presented him or herself. In his essay, "The Slave Narrative and Visual Culture," Marcus Wood argued "the importance, and indigenous development, of the author portrait within subsequent slave narratives, and the level of autonomy that ex-slave authors exerted over their imagistic construction" must also be considered when evaluating the meaning of a text.[50] Few slave narratives had any imagery at all within their pages, and the ones that did

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[47] Ibid., 150.

[48] Ibid., 157.

[49] Ibid., 160.

[50] Marcus Wood, "The Slave Narrative and Visual Culture," in *The Oxford Handbook of the African American Slave Narrative,* 197.

usually only had a portrait of the enslaved author.[51] "Much of abolition thought and publication in North America was directing at controlling aggressive representations of the slave," wrote Wood, "and in particular taking discussion away from slave violence."[52] Enslaved and formerly enslaved authors and their editors understood the power of the author and used it to their advantage to communicate their subliminal political goals.

Referencing *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb* (1850) as an example of strategic use of author portraiture, Wood claimed "Bibb's frontispiece portrait was set up in dialogue with another image that called to mind the icon used in runaway slave advertisements, thus making a shocking statement about slave individuality and autonomy."[53] The photographs within slave narratives create a "visual archive" not of bloody insurrection, but of men and women insisting on their right to a free life: "they are also images that demand the anonymous and disempowered little icons of male and female runaway slave be replaced by lasting pictures of real, strong intelligent free beings, with names, identities, and occupations."[54] The portrait of the slave narrator as an intelligent, credible, and articulate human being empowered him or her, influencing not only the content presented but how the reader understood the narrative.

The material and visual culture worked together to influence the events and content slave narrators related in their texts. Literary scholars and historians have noted the differences in experiences related in narratives published prior to the war and post-

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[51] Ibid., 198.

[52] Ibid., 211.

[53] Ibid., 203.

[54] Ibid., 216.

1865. African American literature scholar William L. Andrews' examination of prewar and postwar narratives in his essay, "Slave narratives, 1865-1900," reveal the full extent of their differences. Describing the shift in slave narratives in the mid-1860s, Williams wrote, "because most postwar slave narrators did not violently rebel against or engineer escapes from their enslavement, standards of exemplary behavior, in slavery as well as freedom, inevitably underwent revision after 1865 in order that a new type of ex-slave autobiographer could emerge."[55] Narratives written prior to 1865 include ex-slaves' recollections of running away, disobeying or rebelling against the master, and the harsh punishment and cruel, subhuman treatment slaves experienced while in bondage. Douglass, Northup, and Ball—their narratives published in 1855, 1853, and 1837, respectively—all related events that align with Andrews' observation, but each man used these events to bolster his manhood and self-esteem.

While slaves writing prior to 1865 found empowerment and dignity in their violent rebellions or altercations, "in the postwar narrative, the right to claim a sense of empowering honor often [derived] from diligence in one's duties and pride in a task well done."[56] Postwar narrators, no longer bound to their chains, could not claim dignity through violence. Rather, "industry, responsibility, perseverance, religious faith, and honesty say as much or more about a black man's manhood, and respectability as running away, especially if that man is also a family man," argued Williams.[57] Ex-slaves

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[55] William L. Andrews, "Slave Narratives, 1865-1900," in *The Oxford Handbook of the African American Slave Narrative,* 220.

[56] Ibid., 221.

[57] Ibid.

demonstrated manhood and dignity differently in postwar narratives, priding themselves on their roles as family men or identified themselves as stewards of the welfare of a larger group, such as a church, school, or socioeconomic class.[58]

Grandy, Lane, Jones, and Bibb all describe themselves and reclaim their manhood through action similar to postwar ex-slave authors. However, these men published their narratives in 1843, 1842, 1862, and 1849, respectively. While Williams' generalization applies to most published ex-slave narratives, those of Grandy, Lane, Jones, and Bibb represent an anomaly and deserve further exploration by historians of slavery, gender scholars, and African American literature scholars to examine and critique the appearance of themes most commonly found in postwar narratives.

There exists a large body of scholarship dedicated to the study of published ex-slave narratives as a literary genre and a historical primary source. Historians and literary scholars alike have written across vastly different subjects, from shared elements present in narratives, to the influence of abolitionist discourse, each encompassing a different facet of critical debates. Taken together, the critical assessments of these experts enhance the interpretations of other scholars working with the testimony of ex-slaves. The production, circulation, and content of slave narratives matter and will only enhance interpretations of the slave community, slave masculinity, and slave testimony generally.

The remainder of this thesis examines the fluidity of masculinity through a select group of published ex-slave narratives. Beginning first with an investigation of southern honor, violence, and the heroic slave archetype, and then concluding with an assessment of Puritan ideas of communal manhood and enslaved masculinity that prioritized

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[58] Ibid., 223.

restraint, the author illustrates the many ways in which enslaved men could fashion a masculine identity.

CHAPTER TWO: "HE ROARED FOR MERCY, AND BEGGED ME NOT TO KILL HIM": MASCULINITY AND VIOLENT RESISTANCE

Though the nineteenth century antebellum South and North shared some common beliefs regarding masculinity, their unique cultures led to distinct ideas about manhood. Southern masculinity emphasized violence and honor whereas Northern masculinity emphasized the "Self-Made Man" and restraint. Though these ideas of masculinity influenced white culture, slaves absorbed similar beliefs and values. In *Slave Against Slave* (2015), Jeff Forret argued that through slaves' routine contacts with whites, especially poor whites, "slaves absorbed lower-class white definitions and expressions of honor," engaging in a process of cultural exchange.[1] In order to understand southern slaves' displays of masculinity then, this process of cultural exchange becomes imperative; if whites supplied the beliefs and measurements slaves used to evaluate themselves and one another, analyzing southern whites' conceptions of masculinity helps frame southern bondmen's masculinity, too. Influenced by southern white ideas of honor and denied access to resources that constructed hegemonic masculinity, slaves such as Frederick Douglass, Solomon Northup, and Charles Ball turned to violence to reclaim their manhood. An examination of the language used in their narratives through close-reading strategies reveals how these men understood the emasculation inherent in slavery, their ideas of a masculine identity, and what they saw as an acceptable avenue to reclaim their masculinity despite their marginalized status. This chapter begins with an assessment of major works concerned with antebellum southern culture and beliefs about

[1] Jeff Forret, *Slave Against Slave: Plantation Violence in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 312.

masculinity and then discusses three ex-slaves whose narratives describe violence and physical action, exemplifying the heroic slave archetype, as the primary means to reclaim and assert their masculine identities.

Intertwined intimately with masculinity, honor and its accompanying code of ethics dominated every aspect of southern life, including politics, economics, religion, and relationships. Historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown argued the importance of honor in structuring southern life in his text, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (1982). As defined by Wyatt-Brown, honor served as the cluster of ethical rules by which judgments of behavior were ratified by community consensus; honor served all members of society, not just whites.[2] Southern honor valued the protection of women, family and property; physical appearance and a fierce attitude; defense of male integrity; and masculine headship of the family, among other values.[3] Further, Wyatt-Brown argued "the internal and external aspects of honor [were] inalienably connected because honor [served] as an ethical mediator between the individual and the community by which he [was] assessed and in which he [located] himself in relation to others."[4] The community's judgment upon the southern man informed his own opinions of himself and, because the community rendered such judgments upon its members, explains why men jumped so quickly to defend their reputation and their honor.

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[2] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), xv.

[3] Ibid., 34, 35, 235.

[4] Ibid., 14.

According to Wyatt-Brown, because the ethics of honor gave meaning to life, it therefore existed as a vital code rather than a myth.[5] These ethical codes existed in both white and slave society. In 1839, German professor of philosophy at South Carolina College Francis Lieber wrote that "'even a slave could manifest the nobility of gentle conduct despite his lowliness, gaining esteem from those below and above himself no less than a master could,'" foreshadowing the thoughts of Forret over a century later.[6] Understanding honor as integral to white southern masculinity, then, provides a lens through which scholars can begin to understand the actions of enslaved men who physically resisted their master in defense of their own honor and reputation.

Closely linked to ideas of honor, violence also served as a method to navigate personal relationships and defend reputations in the Old South. Exploring the essential qualities of violence—its meaning, implications, and sources, Dickson Bruce argued that the belief in passion constituted another governing tenet of southern life: "referring essentially to irrational, selfish motivations, the idea of 'passion' informed thinking about everything from private morals to political economy and was a constant in theories about human nature."[7] However, passions posed a unique problem because they could very easily become excessive and thus do more harm than good.[8] Bruce continued by stating, "since man was naturally passionate, most people believed that the only thing which

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[5] Ibid., 114.

[6] Quoted in Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 103.

[7] Dickson D. Bruce, *Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 11.

[8] Ibid.

would hold [passions] in check was the thin wall of restraint provided by civilization and manners."[9] Though southerners relied on these rules to govern society and maintain man's passions, sometimes passions could not be controlled. In such cases, men turned to acceptable forms of violence, such as duels, to resolve their disputes and ultimately navigate the interwoven concepts of honor and violence that plagued the antebellum South.

Duels became a main form of violence in defense of honor practiced by elite southerners. The poorer classes, or "plain folk," as Bruce described them, also participated in duels, illustrating the widespread use and acceptance of violence to resolve social conflicts: rather than valuing violence or viewing it as an act of virility, violence served as one available form of action in southern society.[10] Referencing the work of Hans Toch, Bruce explained that "where people see human relations as power-centered and one-way, they tend to view violence as an acceptable form of social conduct."[11] How, then, did slaves—marginalized by their class and race—view and use violence?

Like honor, ideas of violence also transferred into slave society and helped govern interactions with fellow slaves and sometimes white masters. Bruce argued the question "was therefore, not whether violence should play a role in the slave system, but rather that its role should be."[12] Violence structured the masters' interactions with slaves but

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., 97.

[11] Ibid., 70.

[12] Ibid., 115.

also informed the slaves' interactions with themselves. "Violence was a part of life—the ultimate fact of a social system based on conflict—and living with violence, not escaping it, had to be a goal in the slave community."[13] Whites' use of violence to defend honor transferred to slave society, making violence a significant avenue for bondmen to defend their reputation and reclaim their masculinity.

In more recent scholarship, Forret has argued the significance of violence within the slave community, helping to structure relationships between slaves but also helping to create gendered identities. "[Violence] could be used to delineate differences among the occupants of the quarters, establish rank, and clarify hierarchies. It also provided an outlet for the expression of masculine and feminine priorities, a display of bondmen's and bondwomen's gendered identities."[14] Predicated on a system of honor, slaves turned to violence to uphold their reputations when they came under question by fellow slaves or white masters. Forret asserted bondmen laid claim to a system of honor invisible to southern white men but one that coincided with white notions of honor.[15]

Furthermore, Forret argued southern white honor depended on the degradation of black enslaved honor. "Slaveholders' domination over their chattel—slaves' dishonor—contributed to the construction of southern white men's senses of honor and mastery."[16] Acutely aware of their emasculation by white men, bondmen constantly compared themselves to others and became quick to respond to any threats against their reputation

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[13] Ibid., 145.

[14] Forret, *Slave Against Slave*, 25.

[15] Ibid., 288.

[16] Ibid., 289.

or manhood.[17] "Violent, aggressive behaviors were crucial to the construction of masculinity and the functioning of the honor code for southern men, whether white or black."[18] For example, "For some enslaved men, violence in the quarters afforded one means to construct a masculine identity within the context of a white society that routinely denied their manhood."[19]

In addition to honor and violence, characteristics such as autonomy and independence formed fundamental, traditional conceptions of white American manhood and thus comprised the hegemonic masculinity that existed throughout the antebellum South.[20] A fluid character type, hegemonic masculinity occupies the dominant position in a given pattern of gender relations, despite how masculinity differs across time and space.[21] Hegemonic masculinities "can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women."[22] However, there must be a correspondence between cultural ideal and

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[17] Ibid., 288.

[18] Ibid., 292.

[19] Ibid., 293.

[20] John F. Kasson, "Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man—Introduction," in *Exploring Masculinities: Identity, Inequality, Continuity, and Change*, ed. C.J. Pascoe and Tristan Bridges (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 70.

[21] C.J. Pascoe and Tristan Bridges, ibid., 139.

[22] Raewyn Connell, "The Social Organization of Masculinity," ibid., 139.

institutional power, collective if not individual, for hegemony to be established.[23] In the antebellum South, owning slaves served as a cultural ideal and gave white men institutional power while simultaneously depriving black males of the resources to achieve hegemonic masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinities exist in tension with other masculinities, especially marginalized masculinities. Marginalized masculinities "can share some ground with hegemonic configurations, but simultaneously exist as marginalized by and to these forms."[24] Differing from other forms of masculinity—for example, complicit or subordinated—marginalized masculinities intersect with other structures such as race and class. Since gender structures social interaction and power relationships, and hegemonic masculinity maintains the dominant position, hegemonic masculinity then exerts power over both women and other men.[25] Therefore, "race relations may also become an integral part of the dynamics between masculinities. In a white supremacist context, black masculinities play symbolic roles for gender construction,"[26] making the subjugation of black slaves integral to the construction of southern white manhood.

Constantly reminded of their subhuman and marginalized status, enslaved men often suffered effeminization by white men; in an essay discussing how slaveholders withheld pants from enslaved boys, historian Keri Leigh Merritt argued "by forcing young African American boys and men to wear dress-like shirts, the owners of flesh

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[23] Ibid.

[24] C.J. Pascoe and Tristan Bridges, ibid., 19.

[25] James W. Messerschmidt, "Masculinities as Structured Action," ibid., 211.

[26] Connell, "The Social Organization of Masculinity," ibid., 141.

attempted to feminize and humiliate enslaved males on a daily basis."[27] As a common practice throughout the South, Merritt claimed white masters used this practice to reinforce that they were the most masculine men on the plantation. In addition to withholding pants, white enslavers often abused the wives and daughters of bondmen, implicitly demonstrating their position of authority and masculinity over slaves. For example, in his narrative, ex-slave Charles Ball recalled, "the idea that I was utterly unable to afford protection and safeguard to my own family . . . tormented my bosom with alternate throbs of affection and fear."[28] The effeminization of bondmen served to bolster white men's masculinity and reinforce slaves' marginalized masculinity.

Men who lacked the resources, through suppression or otherwise, that constructed and upheld hegemonic masculinity, used "toughness, dominance and the willingness to resort to physical violence to resolve interpersonal conflicts" to demonstrate their manliness despite their marginalized position. These actions functioned as central resources for men less able to acquire mainstream masculinity-making resources. For those in marginalized positions or positions that lack hegemonic power, violence becomes "a way of claiming or asserting masculinity in group struggles."[29] As a system of domination, where men that occupy the hegemonic position exert authority, violence

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[27] Keri Leigh Merritt, "Men Without Pants: Masculinity and the Enslaved," accessed November 1, 2018, https://www.aaihs.org/men-without-pants-masculinity-and-the-enslaved/.

[28] Charles Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains; or, The Life of an American Slave* (New York: H. Dayton, 1850), 217.

[29] Raewyn Connell, "The Social Organization of Masculinity," in *Exploring Masculinities: Identity, Inequality, Continuity, and Change*, 168, 142.

offers a unique avenue for marginalized men to regain their claims to manhood and exercise authority. Sociologist Raewyn Connell argued for the importance of violence in gender politics among men, explaining most episodes of major violence occur between men. Enslaved black men's lack of autonomy and independence made explicit the conclusion that African American males, unlike whites, were less than men, and thus, occupied a marginalized masculine position.[30]

Two defining characteristics of the heroic slave archetype, honor and violence, shaped the avenues that slaves—occupying a position of marginalized masculinity—decided to use to regain or create a masculine identity. The heroic slave, modeled after the hero "monomyth," follows the myth of the hero as posited by literary scholar Joseph Campbell. In *The Power of Myth* (1988), Campbell defined a hero as someone who gives his or her life to something bigger than oneself and goes on one of two deeds or quests: a physical quest in which the hero performs a courageous act, or the spiritual quest, in which the hero learns to "experience the supernatural range of human spiritual life and then" returns with a message.[31] The usual adventure or quest first begins with someone from whom something has been taken or "who feels as if there is something lacking in the normal experiences available or permitted to the members of his society."[32] In the case of the heroic slave, freedom constituted something that had been taken from the hero and slavery constituted the lack in normal experiences permitted to the slave community.

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[30] Ibid.

[31] Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth,* ed. Betty Sue Flowers (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 123.

[32] Ibid.

The moral objective of the hero's quest requires either saving a people or person, or supporting an idea; in any case, the hero sacrifices himself for something.[33]

Applying the hero monomyth to published ex-slave narratives, the heroic slave can be defined as one who uses violence and aggression to defend their honor and reclaim their masculinity in the face of their emasculators, or their white masters. Most commonly a component of narratives published prior to the onset of the Civil War, these slaves' moral quest consisted of achieving freedom and autonomy. The heroic slave archetype can be identified through bondmen's use of violence against their enslavers to protest punishment or whipping and defend themselves, or, in some cases, bondmen's use of violence against other black men—such as in the case of Ball—to defend and assert themselves as manlier than their peer(s). However, in each instance in the narratives of Douglass, Northup, and Ball regarding a violent encounter between master and slave, the ex-slave acted in self-defense only. Each time bondman and master engaged one another, the enslaved man acted in defense of his life either because he feared his master would render a deadly blow, or simply because he had grown tired of repeated beatings and attempted to make a stand. In no instance does an ex-slave seek out his master to perpetrate unantagonized violence or harm.

For example, both Douglass and Northup acted in self-defense in an altercation with their masters. Douglass, resolved to stop the abuse suffered at the hands of Edward Covey, wrestled with his master until he overpowered the white man in protest of the severe whippings he received daily. Northup, also contesting his master's cruel treatment, wrestled with John Tibeats until Tibeats grew tired and gave up. After these violent

[33] Ibid., 127.

altercations, both Douglass and Northup reaped the intangible benefits of overpowering a white man; both ex-slaves received a sense of pride and returned self-esteem after asserting their autonomy and regaining a sense of manhood in the face of those who sought to emasculate them.

Contrasting Douglass and Northup, Ball acted in self-defense in a physical fight with another black man, hired by whites to capture runaway slaves. Though Ball sought different avenues to construct his masculinity, he overpowered his peer, and beat the man until he begged Ball "not to kill him."[34] Despite acting in defense of his life and his freedom, demonstrating his masculine superiority to his fellow bondmen bolstered Ball's manhood. Douglass, Northup, and Ball each acted violently to protect their honor, autonomy, and masculine identity. The identity and actions of the heroic slave might differ across narratives, but those who refused to be subjugated or emasculated by others and respond through violent means exemplify the heroic slave archetype.

Arguably the most famous ex-slave, Frederick Douglass was born Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey, in February 1818 in Talbot County, Maryland. The son of an enslaved woman and most likely her white master, Douglass spent most of his enslaved childhood in the home of his maternal grandmother. As a young man, he spent two years on the nearby plantation of Colonel Edward Lloyd until Lloyd sent him to Baltimore to serve Hugh and Sophia Auld. Though illegal, Douglass asked Mrs. Auld to teach him how to read, and later began a secret school to teach his fellow slaves. However, shortly after he began his secret school, white men discovered and disassembled it. As a consequence, Thomas Auld, Hugh's brother and Douglass' master

[34] Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 212.

at the time, sent Douglass to the heinous slave breaker, Edward Covey. Douglass' violent altercation with Covey served as a major turning point in his life and would also become one of the most famous interactions between bondman and master in the genre of ex-slave narratives. Years later, Douglass would escape slavery and become a prominent figure in the public eye; an outspoken abolitionist and orator, "Douglass levied an irresistible indictment against slavery and racism, provided an indomitable voice of hope for his people, embraced antislavery politics, and preached his own brand of American ideals."[35]

An approach used by scholars of literature, close reading strategies constitute the process of reading a text alone, in a vacuum, paying attention to the author's word choice, syntax, prose, and other literary elements of the sort. In published ex-slave narratives, evaluating how an enslaved man depicts himself, his community, and his masters through his language reveals his awareness of his subjugation, how he views himself, his identity, and his position in the slave community compared against fellow slaves. When used in combination with critical assessments of narratives as a literary genre, this approach further underscores that slaves understood how white slave owners and abolitionists saw them—as either a threat or a political tool—and the political ramifications their narratives could have in their potential to abolish slavery.

Close reading strategies and an analysis of Douglass' language reveals his acute awareness of the emasculation by his status as a slave and also illustrates his

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[35] David W. Blight, "Frederick Douglass," Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, accessed, October 4, 2018, https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/bio.html.

understanding of masculinity and gendered identities. Throughout *My Bondage and My Freedom* (2003), Douglass made subtle comments that suggest his ideas concerning masculinity. He believed manhood meant regaining autonomy over oneself through violent or physical means and escaping slavery. As a young boy, Douglass recalled slavery had made him to fear somebody above all else on this earth; that somebody being the white master.[36] "The slave is a subject," wrote Douglass, "subjected by others; the slaveholder is a subject, but he is the author of his own subjection."[37] Recognizing the slaveholder's ability to control his own life and make choices for himself, Douglass equated manhood to self-determination. Aware of his subordinated position within society, Douglass knew he lacked autonomy but still made claims to manhood despite his circumscribed identity. Douglass recalled:

> The old doctrine that submission is the best cure for outrage and wrong, does not hold good on the slave plantation. He is oftenest, who is whipped easiest; and that slave who has the courage to stand up for himself against the overseer, although he may have many hard stripes at the first, becomes, in the end, a freeman, even though he sustains the formal relation of the slave.[38]

By asserting oneself to the master, a slave could reclaim his masculinity despite his status as chattel; in this example, the words "freedman" or "slave" do not determine manhood,

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[36] Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, ed. John David Smith (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 37.

[37] Ibid., 80.

[38] Ibid., 72.

rather, the action to speak up and to claim autonomy in the face of emasculation made a slave a man.

Furthermore, violent action in defense of honor and reputation constructed bondmen's gendered identities. In the chapter titled "The Last Flogging," Douglass described the pivotal moment in his life as an enslaved man, his physical altercation with his white master. Edward Covey had a reputation as a "slave breaker"; a man who could break, or conquer, the most stubborn and troubling slaves. While under Covey's possession, Douglass suffered incessant abuse at the hands of his cruel, sneaky master. Covey beat Douglass until "blood flowed freely, and wales were left on [his] back as large as [his] little finger."[39] Douglass admitted Covey's success in breaking him, stating, "I was sometimes prompted to take my life, and that of Covey, but was prevented by a combination of hope and fear," and admitted Covey exerted complete control over him.[40] After escaping to Thomas Auld's plantation, in hope Auld would protect Douglass from Covey—which Auld refused—Douglass returned to Covey's determined to fight back; "Master Thomas's indifference had served the last link."[41]

While preparing the horses to be taken to the field, Covey snuck into the stable and attacked Douglass when he did not expect it. Douglass described how Covey brought him to the floor, but then, Douglass remembered his pledge to stand up in his own defense, asserting, "*I was resolved to fight.*"[42] Douglass grasped Covey by the neck and

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[39]Ibid., 152.

[40] Ibid., 160, 167.

[41] Ibid., 177.

[42] Ibid.

expressed how in that moment, he and Covey "stood as equals."[43] After struggling for a while, Covey could not overcome Douglass and called for his cousin, Hughes, to help. Douglass struck Hughes when he approached the quarrel, and Douglass continued to fight with Covey for two hours, describing how he seized Covey by his throat and threw Covey clean on the ground in self-defense.[44] Finally, after Covey had enough, he let go of Douglass, not having whipped or harmed Douglass at all.

Writing to the reader, Douglass claimed his fierce battle with Covey became the turning point in his life as a slave. Rekindling the smouldering embers of liberty within his breast, he became a changed man after the fight, asserting, "I was *nothing* before; I WAS A MAN NOW."[45] This altercation revived Douglass' sense of self-confidence, self-respect, and honor. Unafraid to die at the hands of a white master, Douglass explained his "long-cowed spirit was roused to an attitude of manly independence…[his] spirit made him a freeman."[46] From this point on, Douglass used violence as a means to assert his masculinity, whether it be violence with fellow bondmen or other white men.

Douglass also fashioned his masculine identity by setting an example for fellow slaves. Douglass claimed he "did not fail to inspire others with the same [feelings], wherever and whenever an opportunity was presented," making him a "marked lad among the slaves," and thus allowing him to compare his manhood to others'.[47] Further

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., 179-80.

[45] Ibid., 180.

[46] Ibid., 181.

[47] Ibid., 174.

comparing himself to other enslaved men, Douglass declared that although slaves often died at the hands of one another, "there [were] few who [were] not held in awe by a white man."[48] This demonstrates that not only did Douglass assert and define masculinity through violence, he assessed his fellow slaves' manhood by their action or inaction in the face of white masters.

Like Douglass, Northup engaged his white master twice in violent altercations. Though he did not advocate for violence as a way to contest or even escape bondage like Douglass did, Northup used violence in the face of hegemonic masculinity to reclaim his masculinity and his autonomy. Additionally, he fashioned a masculine identity through occupying positions of authority and leadership among his fellow slaves. Though Northup was born a freeman in Minerva, New York, in 1808, his father was enslaved in Rhode Island to the Northup family. On December 25, 1829, Northup married Anne Hampton and together they had three children, Elizabeth, Margaret, and Alonzo. As a young man, Northup worked in industry, first building canals and then chopping wood.[49] He knew how to play the violin well and this talent earned him a widely-respected reputation, however, this talent also cost him his freedom.

One day in 1841, two men claiming to be part of a circus approached Northup and inquired about his violin skills, requesting a performance. Northup, thinking he would not be gone long, agreed to accompany the men to the circus. On the journey, the men

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[48] Ibid., 183.

[49] Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Kevin M. Burke (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2017), 18, 19.

drugged and kidnapped Northup with the intentions of selling him into slavery.[50] Driven down to the New Orleans slave market and bought by a man named John Tibeats, Northup would a spend short time with Tibeats until being sold to Edwin Epps. Northup spent the majority of his time enslaved by Epps and consequently, the majority of his narrative revolves around his time spent at Epps' plantation.[51] *Twelve Years a Slave* (2017) serves as a measurement of the archetypical southern masculinity, inundated with violence and honor, but simultaneously illustrates the other ways in which slaves could fashion a gendered identity through the honor and reputation earned in leadership roles and positions of authority within the slave community.

As a freeman kidnapped into slavery, Northup had a different perspective than many of his fellow bondmen;

> Having all my life breathed the free air of the North, and conscious that I possessed the same feelings and affections that find a place in the white man's breast; conscious, moreover, of an intelligence equal to that of some men, at least, with a fairer skin, I was too ignorant, perhaps too independent, to conceive how anyone could be content to live in the abject condition of a slave.[52]

Northup knew what it felt like to be a free man with independence and control over his own life. A new feeling to him, the loss of power he experienced as an enslaved person marginalized his manhood and thus he sought other avenues in order to maintain his masculinity and honor. First, most similar to Douglass, Northup used violence as a means

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[50] Ibid., 25, 27.

[51] Ibid., 56.

[52] Ibid., 20.

to maintain his dignity in the face of his master Tibeats. One morning, while installing weatherboards on the weaving house, Tibeats became furious with Northup because Northup did not procure the correct nail size for the boards. Aggressively, Tibeats grabbed a whip and tried to beat him—the first punishment he received as an enslaved man. As Tibeats made his way to him, Northup "made up [his] mind fully not to be whipped, let the result be life or death."[53] Resolute in his decision to defend his life, Northup engaged Tibeats in a vicious brawl, pinning Tibeats to the ground with his foot at Tibeats' neck. "I cannot tell how many times I struck him," Northup recalled, "Blow after blow fell fast on his wriggling form. At length he screamed . . . But he who had never shown mercy did not receive it."[54] He had Tibeats "completely in [his] power," and eventually Tibeats gave up and the brawl ceased.[55] Northup, feeling he had been faithful to Tibeats and did nothing wrong, chose to defend his honor through violence, exert autonomy over himself, and bolstered his masculinity through his resistance to Tibeats.[56]

In addition to Northup's victory over Tibeats, praise from his peers reinforced his masculine identity.

> The cabin was full of slaves. They gathered round me, asking many questions about the difficulty with Tibeats in the morning—and the particulars of all the occurrences of the day. Then Rachel came in, and in her simple language,

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[53] Ibid., 67.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

> repeated it over again—dwelling emphatically on the kick that sent Tibeats rolling over on the ground.[57]

After visiting in a friend's cabin, his friend already having heard of his brawl with Tibeats, Northup guessed the word of their encounter had spread far and wide, rendering him, "somewhat notorious," in his words.[58] Northup's acknowledgement of his peers' praise and the reputation he gained from his victory reveals his understanding of his own honor, reputation, and masculinity. This encounter, coupled with his peers' response, helped him fashion and bolster his masculine identity.

Further defining his manhood, Northup maintained leadership roles within the slave community that brought him status and honor among his fellow slaves. Often Epps hired him out to sugar planters during the cane-cutting season and "for three successive years, [he] held the lead row at Hawkins' [plantation], leading a gang of from fifty to a hundred hands."[59] Serving as the lead hand brought recognition and status to the lucky enslaved person chosen to occupy this position; it implicitly recognized his physical skills and abilities superior to his peers'. Epps also made Northup a driver on the plantation, a job Northup regarded as a "distinguished honor."[60] Again in charge of fellow slaves, Northup bragged about his dexterity and precision in throwing the whip, stating he could throw "the lash within a hair's breadth of the back, the ear, the nose, without, however,

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[57] Ibid., 74.

[58] Ibid., 76.

[59] Ibid., 118.

[60] Ibid., 128.

touching either of them."[61] This statement highlights the sense of pride Northup felt from being in a position of authority and his skill in handling the whip yet protecting his fellow slaves; Northup could preserve his reputation of being a reliable bondman in the eyes of Epps, but also maintain his honor and sense of autonomy in choosing not to whip others, and the rapport of the slave community by being a sympathetic driver. *Twelve Years a Slave* illustrates how enslaved men could choose the avenue of the heroic slave, using violence to bolster manhood, but could assert their masculinity in other ways, such as occupying positions of power and leadership within the slave community.

Ball, enslaved in Georgia and South Carolina, does not represent the heroic archetype completely, but understood the function of violence within the system of slavery as tool to regain power and assert manhood. Rather, he represents the dynamic nature of masculinity within the slave quarters. In his narrative, Ball recalled fighting and overpowering another man, surely bolstering his masculinity, but chose to define his identity through serving as a provider within the slave community and holding positions of authority over his fellow slaves. However, because of his acceptance and understanding of violence to defend one's manhood and honor, he resembles the heroic slave more closely than restrained masculinity. Restrained manhood, discussed in the following chapter, also includes the condemnation of violence and hesitation to resort to it. As an overseer, Ball understood that his ability to whip other slaves and cause physical harm afforded him superiority over the enslaved men and women working in his field. Regardless of whether he resorted to it frequently or not, Ball had access to violence to help bolster his masculine identity.

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[61] Ibid.

Born in 1780 into slavery in Maryland, Ball lived with his grandfather after his master sold his mother to Georgia.[62] Enslaved by John Cox, Ball came under the ownership of Cox's father after Cox's passing. As a young man, Ball married a woman named Judah and together they had one child. Ball's wife and child lived on a separate plantation, that of Mr. Symmes.[63] Throughout his lifetime, Ball lived under several different masters and made multiple attempts to escape north until he finally escaped on the fourth attempt after finding employment on a ship and hiding aboard as it left port for Philadelphia. [64] Upon escaping to the North, Ball returned to his wife's home only to find she and his child had been taken shortly after his departure. Ball demonstrates the fluidity of enslaved masculinity by reclaiming his manhood through other avenues such as providing for the enslaved family he lived with and his leadership roles within the slave quarters.

Differing from both Douglass and Northup, Ball never engaged a white man in violence. However, he understood fully his marginalized position in relation to his white master, noting his "subsequent experience proved that without the possession of slaves, no man could never arrive at, or hope to rise to any honorable station in society."[65] The ownership of slaves served as a tangible marker of a white man's masculinity and honor; masculinity and honor those such as Ball could never obtain because of their subhuman status as chattel. Furthermore, Ball understood the function of violence in southern

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[62] Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains,* 12, 14.

[63] Ibid., 18.

[64] Ibid., 233, 236.

[65] Ibid., 39.

society. He used the term "frolicking" to describe fighting or brawling between southern men.[66] A word defined as running about or playing happily or merrily, Ball's use of the term "frolick" illustrates the widespread acceptance of violence to defend honor or resolve conflicts in southern society.

Though Ball understood the function of violence to defend one's reputation, he did not use violence as a means to construct a masculine identity. In his narrative, he recounts one instance of violence between himself and a black man; however, Ball did not use this opportunity to reclaim his masculinity despite overpowering the other man.

While on his journey North after escaping Mr. Symmes' plantation, a mulatto man stepped out of the woods onto the path Ball had been walking along. Suspicious of his new companion from the beginning, Ball watched the mulatto man carefully, wary that the man followed closely behind him.

> He carried his club under his left arm, and at length raised his right hand gently, took the stick by the end, and drawing it slowly over his head was in the very act of striking a blow at me, when springing backward, and raising my own staff at the same moment, I brought him to the ground by a stroke on his forehead; and when I had him down, beat him over the back and sides with my weapon, until he roared for mercy and begged me not to kill him.[67]

Ball determined the mulatto man had been employed by white men to kidnap and betray escaped slaves. Though he resorted to violence on this occasion, this altercation should not be confused with Douglass' or Northup's use of violence to defend their honor and

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[66] Ibid., 27-28.

[67] Ibid., 212.

reassert their masculine identities. However, Ball's description of the man roaring for mercy illustrated just how powerfully he overcame the man, beating him so badly the man begged Ball to spare his life. In this instance, Ball used violence to defend his life but simultaneously exhibited and reasserted his manhood, superior to that of his attacker. Though Ball chose not to fashion his identity through violence, this interaction bolstered his self-esteem, making Ball aware that he could access violence, if he needed or wanted to, to reassert his manhood and construct his gendered identity.

Despite violently engaging and overpowering another man, Ball fashioned a masculine identity as a provider and through positions of authority in his work. When first put to work in a cotton field, Ball could not procure more cotton than the other men or women working in the field. Embarrassed by his poor performance, Ball stated, "I hung down my head, and felt very much ashamed of myself when I found that my cotton was so far behind that of many, even the women, who had heretofore regarded me as the strongest and most powerful man of the whole gang."[68] This acknowledgement of his failure to live up to his community's impressions of him demonstrates Ball's awareness of his marginalized masculinity and reputation in comparison to other men and in the eyes of bondwomen. Unable to outpick other slaves in the field, Ball sought a different avenue to reassert his masculinity.

Several times in his narrative, Ball described the extra food and/or clothing he contributed to his family's needs in relation to other enslaved men. While Ball lived with enslaved woman Lydia, her husband, and their children, he generally trapped raccoons, opossums, and rabbits to last for two to three meals a week but made sure to mention that

[68] Ibid., 88.

Lydia's husband "procured little or nothing for the sustenance of their families."[69] At another point in time Ball resided with the family of slaves Nero and Dinah, for whom he also procured foodstuffs and clothing. Ball described his ability to keep their family supplied with luxuries such as molasses and with the help of Nero, provided six coarse blankets to be made into blanket-coats for himself, Nero, Dinah, and the children.[70] Rather than using violence as a means to create a masculine identity, Ball provided extra sustenance and materials to take care of other slaves and compared his efforts against those of other bondmen. The comparison between himself and fellow slaves helped Ball rank himself as a provider and helped construct his masculinity.

In addition to serving as a provider, Ball used positions of authority, and, again, comparison, over other enslaved men to bolster his masculinity. In the beginning of his narrative, discussing one of the first times he had been sold to a new master, Ball described being marched by a Mr. Ballard to his new home. Comparing his physique to other men, Ball called himself the strongest and the stoutest; his opinion reinforced by his new masters' decision to remove him from the middle of the chain to the front of the line—a position Ball referred to as "a post of honor."[71] Though the leader of the line does not necessarily constitute a position of authority, Ball considered his position as the first in line as affirmation of his identity as the strongest and stoutest man in the lot.

Throughout his enslavement, Ball's masters trusted him to lead his fellow slaves as overseer of a plantation and a fishery. While living with Lydia and her husband, Ball's

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[69] Ibid., 112-113.

[70] Ibid., 79.

[71] Ibid., 22, 24.

master sent him to work with other slaves at his master's fishery. Though a difficult job, he regained self-esteem in being the head man at the new fishery, having command of the other hands.[72] Working at night time, Ball struck a deal with the white overseer that he would receive "authority to keep the other hands at work" overnight so the overseer could go home and sleep.[73] Comparing himself to the men who followed his orders, Ball's position as head of the fishery helped reinforce his masculine identity.

After the death of his master, Ball became the property of his deceased master's young son who moved to Georgia and took twelve slaves with them, including Ball. He became "warmly attached" to his new master, who had begun to treat Ball as the foreman of the other slaves. His master, favoring him over his peers, entrusted Ball to the superintendence of the plantation, making it necessary for Ball to "assume the authority of an overseer to [his] fellow slaves," and frequently he found it "proper to punish them with stripes to compel them to perform their work."[74] Even though Ball disliked the hickory whip, he felt empowered by it, evidenced by the fact that as he became more familiar with the practice of whipping slaves, he became less offended by it.[75] As an overseer, Ball had access to resources, mainly violence, similar to those of white men which established hegemonic masculinity over enslaved blacks. Though still marginalized by his position, Ball could exhibit his superior manhood or status over his black peers by whipping them.

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[72] Ibid., 121-122.

[73] Ibid., 124.

[74] Ibid., 169.

[75] Ibid.

Ball's position as overseer of the plantation and his duties to whip slaves to perform their work serve as an example of how he fashioned a masculine identity through positions of authority and comparison to others. Somewhat of an anomaly compared to Douglass and Northup, Ball represents a different form of southern masculinity. While he understood the importance and potential of violence to defend honor and construct a masculine identity, Ball chose other ways to define and fashion his identity. His position of authority over others bolstered his manhood, but he found greater empowerment in his ability to provide more food and materials for enslaved families than his peers could.

Deeply ingrained in antebellum southern society, ideas of violence, honor, and defense of reputation constituted major traits of manhood. Additionally, violence, autonomy, and independence served as resources that upheld and maintained white hegemonic masculinity. Enslaved black men, who lacked access to such resources, remained in a marginalized position, subordinated to and by white men and hegemonic masculinity. Yet enslaved men sought to reclaim and fashion their masculine identity through violence and in defense of honor, acting in accordance with the heroic slave archetype. Douglass, tired of incessant and unwarranted beatings by Covey, one day resolved to never be beaten by Covey again. Rather than submitting, he engaged Covey in a violent altercation in which he overpowered his white master, consequently reclaiming his manhood. Northup, also steadfast in his decision to resist physical abuse, confronted Tibeats until he grew tired of wrestling his slave. Deeply influenced by southern ideas of manhood, both Douglass and Northup resorted to physical violence to restore their masculine identity, despite their marginalized position and inability to secure resources that upheld hegemonic masculinity.

Rather than resorting to violence, however, enslaved men could claim manhood through other methods or actions that did not involve physical altercations. Ball, fighting and overcoming another black man, resorted to violence to defend his freedom but did not use it to create a masculine identity. Overcoming and exerting dominance over a peer certainly strengthened his self-esteem, but he did not exercise violence as Douglass and Northup did. As evidenced by the emphasis he placed on procuring extra food and materials for fellow slaves and his dexterity in throwing the hickory whip, Ball defined manhood through positions of authority and providing for others.

Influenced by southern conceptions of manhood, each ex-slave acted violently to assert autonomy and masculinity in some way; however, the example of Ball highlights the fluidity and choices available to enslaved men to fashion a masculine identity. Violence, defense of honor, and positions of authority served as main avenues for men to reclaim manhood within their marginalized status but they were not the only options. In addition to physical altercations, provider and protector roles served to reinforce masculine identities, revealing the different ways in which men inspired by southern ideas could fashion a gendered identity.

CHAPTER THREE: "THE SOUL OF A FATHER AND HUSBAND": RESTRAINED MANHOOD

Like the antebellum southerner, antebellum northerners also had certain ideas regarding the characteristics that constituted manliness. Derived from Puritan New England ideas about communal manhood, northern masculinity emphasized restraint, piety, duty, and responsibility to community. Men's roles in their community as providers and protectors bolstered their masculine identity, making their social relationships integral to their sense of self. This type of manhood remained relatively stable until the Industrial Revolution transformed the ways men worked and how they socialized with others. At the turn of the nineteenth century, white men's identity relied not on their service to the community; rather men became engrossed in their jobs as the economy grew and industrialized the northern states. This new type of manhood, the "Self-Made Man," fashioned his identity through the marketplace, political and economic freedom, and self-interest. As the Self-Made Man became the dominant masculine identity white northerners embraced, bondmen's lack of access to the marketplace and political and economic freedom limited their ability to create a gendered identity through the resources that made the Self-Made Man.

Instead, enslaved men embraced qualities of communal manhood to bolster masculinity. This type of manhood explicitly denounced violence as a manly characteristic. The Self-Made Man and communal manhood required that men reject violence as a means to resolve conflict. By engaging in violent altercation or hurting others, men compromised the very values and qualities that made them masculine. As a

result, men striving to create a masculine identity within the constraints of the Self-Made man and communal manhood detested violence and advocated against it.

Enslaved men combined characteristics of the self-made man with the ideas of communal manhood to fashion what the author calls “restrained” manhood. The slaves who chose this route, as opposed to violence or physical action, found masculine identities through their responsibility to their families and slave communities. Moses Grandy, Lunsford Lane, Reverend Thomas H. Jones, and Henry Bibb provided extra food and materials for their families, protected their loved ones from the physical and emotional pains of slavery, and purchased the freedom of their families. Each of these actions bolstered Grandy, Lane, Jones, and Bibb’s self-esteem and manhood. By fashioning a gendered identity through means absent of violence, these men demonstrate the multiple ways that enslaved men could reclaim masculinity. This chapter outlines the development of communal manhood and the self-made man, connecting these ideas to the narratives of Grandy, Lane, Jones, and Bibb, and ultimately illustrating the fluidity enslaved manhood.

As the subfield of enslaved masculinity has grown, scholars have devoted much attention to southern white ideas of masculinity and the heroic slave. Only recently have scholars interpreted and addressed provider and protector roles as a claim to manhood, too. While at times it may be challenging for historians to discern reclamations of manhood of those who do so more subtly than Douglass or Northup, this thesis deems any indication of responsibility as a father or husband as an assertion of manliness. In defining restrained manhood this way, the author reveals the choices available to bondmen to fashion a masculine identity. Furthermore, this chapter highlights the

different roles men could adopt that also lacked violence, illustrating the fluidity of restrained manhood as well.

Central to New England Puritan ideas of manhood, acquiring competence and/or independence constituted two main tenets of masculinity. Historian Anne S. Lombard, author of *Making Manhood: Growing Up Male in Colonial New England* (2003), described the best source of independence or competence as owning land which secured white men's livelihood and political privileges. However, "man could also become competent by acquiring the skills and capital that would allow him, with the assistance of a wife and other helpers, to provide a comfortable level of economic independence for himself and his family."[1] Early New England Puritan manhood revolved around familial responsibility; the English who settled New England came mostly in family groups, contrasting the young, single men who made up the majority of European colonizers in the Americas. The nuclear family became the main labor source for settlers in order to prosper and survive, lacking access to any other available labor source. [2] This dependence on the nuclear family as the center of economic life, Lombard argued, produced an unusual set of family dynamics.[3]

According to Lombard, "the manly Puritan was no rugged individualist, no self-made entrepreneur, pursuing his own dreams of success on the frontier or in the marketplace." The manly Puritan allegedly "was a sober, conservative father, responsible

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[1] Anne S. Lombard, *Making Manhood: Growing Up Male in Colonial New England* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), 4.

[2] Ibid., 6.

[3] Ibid., 7.

for a household of dependents."[4] Therefore, a man who depended on others—a father, master, or employer—would be considered less manly than one who achieved the status of an independent household head.[5] This construction of manhood dominated colonial New England ideas, Lombard asserted, but remained prominent "well into the eighteenth century, long after Puritan control over governments had ended."[6] Echoing Lombard, in 1993 historian E. Anthony Rotundo defined duty as a "crucial word for manhood," with social relationships at the center of societal roles governed by a set of duties owed to others.[7] Rotundo argued that the ideal man "was pleasant, mild-mannered, and devoted to the good of the community. He performed his duties faithfully, governed his passions rationally, submitted to his fate and to his place and society, and treated his dependents with firm but affectionate wisdom."[8] This ideal man possessed qualities such as piety, responsibility, and restraint. Although this type of manhood dominated ideas of masculinity prevalent in the northern states well into the eighteenth century, eventually it would be shaken to its core and replaced by a new hegemonic masculinity, the self-made man.

The Industrial Revolution at the turn of the nineteenth century drastically changed the ways that men saw themselves and created a masculine identity. "American men

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[4] Ibid., 9.

[5] Ibid., 10.

[6] Ibid., 13.

[7] E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 12.

[8] Ibid., 13-4.

began to link their sense of themselves as men to their position in the volatile marketplace, to their economic success—a far less stable yet far more exciting and potentially rewarding peg upon which to hang one's identity."[9] Contrasting earlier ideas of communal manhood, masculinity in the nineteenth century revolved around economic independence and success, reflecting the growing marketplace and industrial economy. Furthermore, corroborating Lombard and Rotundo's ideas surrounding communal manhood, historian Michael Kimmel asserted that "being a man also meant not being a boy. A man was independent, self-controlled, responsible; a boy was dependent, irresponsible and lacked control."[10] Put quite plainly, loss of autonomy—politically, economically, or otherwise—equaled emasculation.[11] For enslaved men, who lacked any degree of autonomy or sovereignty and thus the access to resources that maintained hegemonic masculinity, manhood by these standards seemed impossible. However, despite such limitations, bondmen cultivated masculine qualities derived both from Puritan communal manhood and the Self-Made Man.

Although the ex-slaves discussed in this chapter bolstered their manhood through actions similar to those of white northern men, neither Grandy, Lane, Jones, or Bibb worked or lived in the antebellum North. Grandy, Lane, and the Rev. Thomas H. Jones remained in North Carolina, while Bibb remained in Newcastle, Kentucky. However, each of these men constructed a masculine identity diametrically opposed to southern

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[9] Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 9.

[10] Ibid., 18.

[11] Ibid., 31.

ideas of masculinity, held by white and black men. Historians can merely speculate as to why bondmen chose to reassert their masculinity either through restraint or violence, but it must be noted that each of the men discussed in this chapter had family enslaved; whether it be a wife and children or their parents, brothers, or sisters. Douglass, Northup, and Ball either had no family enslaved or had their families forced apart by the slave trade and accepted they would never see their loved ones again.

This observation highlights a distinct question regarding bondmen's self of sense and manhood. How did enslaved family, or lack thereof, influence the type of masculine identity enslaved men sought to create? Did enslaved men feel freer to choose a more volatile, physical avenue because the repercussions of their actions would not affect family members? Did enslaved men with family feel obligated to restrain themselves and remain in bondage to protect and provide for their loved ones? Although nearly impossible to generalize the motivations for the type of masculine identities men created for themselves, this unique coincidence deserves consideration.

Born in Camden County, North Carolina, circa 1787, the youngest of at least eight children, Moses Grandy worked for several different men in and around Camden County.[12] As a young man, Grandy learned a variety of skills while circulating among different masters; he learned how to keep ferries and drive lumber, making him "industrious and preserving."[13] He married an unnamed woman, belonging to Mr. Enoch

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[12] Moses Grandy, "The Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy," in *North Carolina Slave Narratives: The Lives of Moses Roper, Lunsford Lane, Moses Grandy, and Thomas H. Jones,* ed. William L. Andrews (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 159, 160.

[13] Ibid., 160-61.

Sawyer, until Sawyer sold her away eight months later. Despite their short marriage, Grandy loved his wife very much, and gave her all the money he had when she was taken away, never to see her again.[14] Grandy worked on canal boats and saved $600 to give to his master, James Grandy, as payment for his freedom. Master James, however, violated his agreement with Grandy, taking the money and selling Grandy to a Mr. Trewitt. Trewitt also struck a deal with Grandy, promising to free him for a sum of money, but did so only after Grandy petitioned him several times. Grandy continued to work on vessels, saving money to purchase his enslaved wife and children's freedom.[15]

Crafting a comprehensive overview of Grandy's life, historian Andrea Williams highlighted key moments in his *Narrative* but placed it within the larger discussion of "nineteenth-century debates about nature and proper status of African Americans."[16] She emphasized that Grandy's narrative portrayed himself as "a model of black men's worthiness," and that he believed to be equal to the white man and therefore "may justly demand the rights and responsibilities of American manhood."[17] Furthermore, Williams claimed, readers saw Grandy as a family man, an earnest Christian, and a diligent worker.[18] His narrative intended to show that African American men could be capable

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[14] Ibid., 162.

[15] "Moses Grandy," Documenting the American South, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, accessed December 19, 2018, https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/grandy/summary.html.

[16] Andrea N. Williams, "Introduction," in *North Carolina Slave Narratives: The Lives of Moses Roper, Lunsford Lane, Moses Grandy, and Thomas H. Jones,* 133.

[17] Ibid., 134.

[18] Ibid.

contributors to free society, Williams also argued, demonstrating qualities of manhood valued by whites in the nineteenth century.[19] Similar to Douglass, Northup, and Ball, Grandy compared himself to other men to bolster his own manhood. However, Grandy did not resort to violence or physical strength as the medium for comparison. Rather, "The narrator of *The Narrative of the Life of Moses* Grandy [seemed] very deliberately to avoid the association between asserting one's manhood and using physical violence."[20] Instead, Grandy's work ethic served as one of the strongest points for fashioning his masculine identity.[21] Known among his masters for his diligent and responsible work ethic, Grandy's masters trusted him, often assigning him to positions of authority such as overseer. Demonstrating ideas of middle-class masculine restraint, Grandy created a gendered identity through his devotion to his family, his esteemed maritime jobs, and his tireless work ethic, illustrating the fluidity of masculinity within slave communities.

Grandy began his narrative with a quick description of his birth and described the multiple jobs he held and masters he worked for. As a young boy, Grandy had the opportunity to work for himself—Mr. Furley wrote him passes, allowing him to escape physical abuse from a plantation master or overseer. Through his various jobs driving lumber and manning canal boats, Grandy demonstrated his industrious and preserving nature to his young master, whom, when he finally came of age, owned and controlled all

[19] Ibid., 138.

[20] Ibid., 143.

[21] Ibid., 140.

slaves belonging to him. Seeing that Grandy "obtained plenty of work," his young master made Grandy pay almost twice as much as Mr. Furley demanded.[22]

Supporting Grandy's sense of self gained through his work ethic, he recounted in his narrative a conversation with his master and mistress in which his mistress described a Captain Cormack offering one thousand dollars for Grandy, saying, "Moses, we would not take any money for you."[23] Cormack wanted Grandy to be his overseer in the Dismal Swamp. Grandy quickly brushed off his mistress, claiming Cormack only made the offer to impress her daughter, whom he wished to marry. However, hearing that Cormack specifically selected Grandy for a position of authority and for such an amount must have reassured him of his self-worth and his characteristics that signified manhood. Illustrated by Grandy's awareness of his master's approval of his work ethic and diligence, he fashioned a masculine identity defined by his perseverance and industriousness rather than through violence.

In addition to his attentive and obedient work ethic, Grandy defined his masculinity through his responsibility and duty to his family. In the first few pages of his narrative, Grandy described his first wife, their marriage lasting only eight months until her master sold her away. Despite their short-lived relationship, Grandy detailed the last time he saw her, stating, "I gave her the little money I had in my pocket, and bid her

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[22] Moses Grandy, "The Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy," in *North Carolina Slave Narratives: The Lives of Moses Roper, Lunsford Lane, Moses Grandy, and Thomas H. Jones,* 161.

[23] Ibid., 168.

farewell."[24] He would never see his wife again but, by giving her all the money he had, he performed one last act of caregiving or responsibility to his wife, fulfilling the role of the providing husband. After being separated from his first wife for quite some time, Grandy remarried an enslaved woman on his plantation and together they had several children.

Throughout the remainder of his narrative, Grandy described the great pain he experienced to first buy his own freedom and then to purchase the freedom of his wife and children. After securing his freedom and relocating to Boston, Grandy worked several odd jobs, laboring in the coal yards, loading and unloading vessels, and went on several different voyages working for months to purchase his wife. Once he earned three hundred dollars, his entire savings upon the return from his last voyage, Grandy sent the money to Virginia and purchased his wife, who then came to Boston to be with Grandy.[25] Soon after purchasing his wife's freedom, Grandy received a letter from his son's master in Norfolk, saying Grandy could purchase his fifteen-year-old son's freedom for 450 dollars. However, Grandy had only 300 dollars saved, but knew his son's master was a "drinking man," writing,

> I was very anxious to get my son out of his hands. I went to Norfolk, running the risk of my liberty, and took my 300 dollars with me, to make the best bargain I could. Many gentlemen, my friends, in Boston, advised me not to go myself: but I was anxious to get my boy's freedom, and I knew that nobody in Virginia had any

[24] Ibid., 162.

[25] Ibid., 173.

> cause of complaint against me; so, notwithstanding their advice, I determined to go.[26]

Despite risking his own freedom by traveling through slave states and his willingness to spend all of his savings, Grandy demonstrated his devotion to his family by purchasing and rescuing his son from slavery.

Furthermore, Grandy mentioned his eldest sister and his four other children, all enslaved. Grandy knew where his sister lived and worked, and often visited her, supplying her with such provisions as he could. He wished to purchase her freedom from a cruel master who beat her brutally. [27] He never knew where his other children were enslaved, but blatantly stated at the end of his narrative that "whatever profit may be obtained by the sale of this book, and all donation in which I may be favored, will be faithfully employed in redeeming my remaining children and relatives from the dreadful condition of slavery," illustrating his unwavering devotion to the care of his family.[28] Acting as his family's provider and protector through purchasing their freedom, and relentlessly working to secure his relatives' freedom, Grandy fashioned a masculine identity through nonviolent means.

Born on May 30, 1803, in Raleigh, North Carolina, Lunsford Lane worked on his master's plantation cutting wood, driving carriages, and became a successful

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[26] Ibid., 172.

[27] Ibid., 176-77.

[28] Ibid., 183.

tobacconist.[29] By 1834, Lane had saved enough money to buy his freedom but was forced to leave North Carolina in 1840 due to a North Carolina law barring free blacks from entering or residing in the state, therefore separating Lane from his still-enslaved family.[30] When returning to Raleigh in 1842 to purchase his family's freedom, a mob attacked and arrested him on charges of delivering abolitionist lectures. The following morning, Lane bought his family's freedom and they escaped temporarily to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, until relocating to Boston. There, Lane published his *Narrative*. Lane's life after freedom, however, remains somewhat of a mystery. "There is some evidence that he continued to speak publicly about his experiences. Austin Willey, for instance, names him among the speakers at an 1848 Massachusetts state anniversary. According to William Hawkins' 1863 biography, Lane had practiced as a physician while still living in Raleigh, and after his arrival in Boston he began to market herbal medicines. The 1870 census, the last to include him, lists Lane as a physician and a resident of Cambridge, Massachusetts."[31]

Beginning with an introduction similar to Grandy's, Lane's *Narrative* opens with the remarks of historian Tampathia Evans, who drew conclusions similar to those of Williams. Evans claimed that Lane portrayed himself as the "personification of the

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[29] Lunsford Lane, "The Narrative of Lunsford Lane," in *North Carolina Slave Narratives: The Lives of Moses Roper, Lunsford Lane, Moses Grandy, and Thomas H. Jones,* 101-2.

[30] Erin Bartels, "Lunsford Lane Summary," Documenting the American South, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, accessed December 19, 2018, https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/lanelunsford/summary.html.

[31] Ibid.

Protestant work ethic," possessing a self-image as the "quintessential self-made man," allying him ideologically with his targeted audience and, additionally, providing answers to proslavery concerns about the slave's preparation for freedom.[32] Further differentiating Lane from slaves such as Douglass and Northup, Evans noted the lack of physically violent and emotionally scarring atrocities usually reported within slave narratives. Rather, wrote Evans, "the most profound thesis of Lane's narrative testifies to his determination, as a slave, to work within the system imposed by whites in the South," a trait shared by the enslaved men in this chapter.[33] Again, instead of discussing physical abuse suffered at the hands of white masters, Lane chose to relate his experiences in slavery that revolve around his family.

Evans credited Lane's father, Edward, for providing him with the key to economic independence, after giving him the means to generate his first income. Lane's father gifted him a basket of peaches which he sold for thirty cents apiece, the first money he had ever earned in his life.[34] This experience, argued Evans, impressed upon Lane that economic independence paved the way to freedom from bondage.[35] For the remainder of his life, Lane worked multiple jobs and ultimately purchased his wife and children's freedom. Lastly, Evans provided insight into reasons why Lane—and potentially the other men in this chapter—chose not to escape bondage. Running away

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[32] Tampathia Evans, "Introduction," in *North Carolina Slave Narratives: The Lives of Moses Roper, Lunsford Lane, Moses Grandy, and Thomas H. Jones,* 81.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., 81.

[35] Ibid., 84.

might have been "considered shameful and humiliating, a concession to racist myths that branded African Americans as unreliable, shifty, deceitful, and unappreciative of good treatment."[36] Whether Lane's master treated him well or not, if slaves considered it shameful for a man to run away and abandon his family, then staying to provide for and protect loved ones must be brave and praiseworthy. Despite the brevity of Lane's narrative, the events he chose to relate highlighted his understanding of manhood and how he chose to fashion a masculine identity.

The *Narrative of Lunsford Lane* consisted of two sections: the first nine pages described Lane's enslaved life and the remaining twenty pages detailed his life as a free man, including letters illustrating a legal battle between Lane and the General Assembly of North Carolina regarding Lane's request to remain in the state. Lane's quick recount of enslaved life revolved around his family and his pursuit to secure basic living necessities for them. Lane worked to "procure such small articles of extra comfort," for his family. Highlighting his master's irony of owning human property but choosing to not to care for his slaves, Lane wrote, "so that, both as to food and clothing, I had in fact to support both my wife and the children, while [master] claimed them as his property, and received all their labor."[37] Lane clearly designated himself as the sole provider of his family, despite his master's supposed obligation to provide for his slaves. Furthermore, because Lane procured so much for his family, he had little to spare to save to purchase their freedom;

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[36] Ibid., 86.

[37] Lunsford Lane, "The Narrative of Lunsford Lane," in *North Carolina Slave Narratives: The Lives of Moses Roper, Lunsford Lane, Moses Grandy, and Thomas H. Jones,* 104.

he wrote, "all the money I had earned and could earn by my night labor was consumed," demonstrating how hard he worked to secure basic necessities for his loved ones.[38]

Finally, illustrating Lane's deep devotion to the care of his family despite the difficulty of meeting their needs, he declared

> I discovered myself, as though I had never known it before, a husband, the father of two children, a family looking up to me for bread, and I a slave, penniless, and well watched by my master, his wife and his children, lest I should perchance, catch the friendly light of the stars to make something in order to supply the cravings of nature in those with whom my soul was bound up.[39]

Lane never hesitated to fulfill his duties as a father and accept the responsibility to ensure his wife and children had the food and clothing they needed to survive slavery. Evidenced by the lack of physical violence in his narrative, and his choice to relate stories regarding his family and his efforts to provide for them, Lane fashioned a masculine identity working within the constraints of slavery. Continuously pursuing economic freedom for himself and his family, his restraint and sense of responsibility—among other ideas of white, communal masculinity—bolstered his manhood and self-esteem. Lane's choice to provide for his family rather than to escape bondage or violently engage his white master illustrates a different avenue that enslaved men could pursue to fashion a gendered identity, highlighting the fluidity of masculinity within slavery.

Born into slavery in Wilmington, North Carolina, circa 1806, Rev. Thomas H. Jones worked on the plantation of John Hawes until 1815, when Hawes sold him to a

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[38] Ibid., 105.

[39] Ibid.

Wilmington storekeeper named Jones. Under his new master, Jones worked as a house servant and a storekeeper, where he received a basic education. He married Lucilla Smith, with whom he had three children. They stayed together until Lucilla's mistress moved to Alabama, taking Lucilla with her and ending the marriage. By 1829, Jones worked as a stevedore, owned by Owen Holmes, and remarried. He and his second wife, Mary, had several children together, and lived in a free black community in Wilmington after Jones purchased her freedom. In 1849, a white friend of Jones alerted him of plans to re-enslave his children, compelling Jones to send two of his children and his wife to safety in the free states. Shortly after, Jones devised a plan to escape enslavement and hid in the brig of the *Bell*, a ship sailing the eastern coastline, reuniting with his family in New York. After reaching the north, Jones delivered antislavery lectures and in 1852 had the opportunity to purchase his son's freedom. Around this time Jones wrote his *Narrative*, stating the funds earned by its sale would be used to purchase his son's freedom. His narrative sold well, but no records survive detailing when or if Jones purchased his son.[40]

In the narrative's introduction printed in *North Carolina Slave Narratives*, historian David A. Davis described that Jones, like Douglass, equated manhood with literacy. Jones wrote, "I felt . . . that I was really beginning to be a man," when he learned

[40] "Thomas H. Jones," from C. Peter Ripley et al., ed., *The Black Abolitionist Paper*, found in Documenting the American South, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, accessed December 19, 2018, https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jones/support3.html.

how to read and write.[41] Davis asserted that Jones, rather than resorting to violence or truancy, uplifted himself by "learning to read, becoming a minister, escaping to the North, and agitating for abolition."[42] Furthermore, Davis explained,

> The distinction Jones makes between a literate man and an ignorant slave indicates that learning to read gave Jones a sense of intrinsic value that helped to liberate his self-estimate from the artificial economic value of the master class, who assessed his worth based solely on his laboring ability.[43]

Literacy empowered Jones and his abilities to read and write bolstered his self-esteem and manhood. In addition to literacy, Jones provided for his family, buying his wife and children's freedom after he escaped to the North. Unlike Lane, his narrative does not revolve around his family; instead Jones spent several pages recounting the troubles he experienced learning how to read, underscoring his equation of literacy to freedom. Regardless of whether or not Jones saw taking care of his family as more masculine than learning to read, his roles as provider and as a literate slave helped him form a gendered identity without using violence. A slight deviation from Grandy's or Lane's ideas about masculinity and freedom, Jones's pursuit to reclaim manhood through literacy illustrates the fluidity of masculinity within the slave quarters.

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[41] Thomas H. Jones, "The Experience of Rev. Thomas H. Jones," in *North Carolina Slave Narratives: The Lives of Moses Roper, Lunsford Lane, Moses Grandy, and Thomas H. Jones,* 221.

[42] David A. Davis, "Introduction," in *North Carolina Slave Narratives: The Lives of Moses Roper, Lunsford Lane, Moses Grandy, and Thomas H. Jones,* 189.

[43] Ibid., 193.

Jones spent the first few pages of his narrative recollecting his birth, his master, Mr. Jones, the conditions on the plantation and the type of work he did. As a young boy, he swept the Jones' store—a consequence of disobedience, as his mistress claimed.[44] While working in the store, he met the clerk, a poor boy named James Dixon. Each day Jones saw Dixon engaged with his books and Jones would ask to see his books. Often Dixon showed Jones the books and answered any questions he had about school and learning. "He told me that a man who had learning would always find friends," Jones wrote, "and get along very well in the world without having to work hard, while those who had no learning would have no friends and be compelled to work very hard for a poor living all their days."[45] Thus, Jones developed "an intense burning desire to learn to read and write," one which "took possession of [his] mind, occupying [him] wholly in waking hours, and stirring up earnest thoughts in [his] soul even when [he] slept."[46] Jones, then, at a very early age, understood the connection between literacy and freedom. He believed that learning how to read and write could not only help contest the degradation he suffered at the hands of white men, but also could open a path to freedom, and Jones relentlessly pursued this path.

He wanted to learn how to read so much so that he dishonestly asked for a book from Dixon's brother, claiming he wanted it for a white boy. This spelling book opened

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[44] Thomas H. Jones, "The Experience of Rev. Thomas H. Jones" in *North Carolina Slave Narratives: The Lives of Moses Roper, Lunsford Lane, Moses Grandy, and Thomas H. Jones,* 216.

[45] Ibid., 217.

[46] Ibid.

a new era of his life, Jones exclaimed, that awakened new thoughts, hopes and purposes, illustrating how empowered the book made him feel.[47] Learning to read and write empowered Jones so much, he wrote, "I felt at night, as I went to my rest, that I was really beginning to be a *man*, preparing myself for a condition in life better and higher and happier than could belong to the ignorant *slave*."[48] Jones saw an intimate connection between masculinity and literacy; a man could read, a slave could not. Consequently, reading and writing helped Jones reassert his manhood despite his status as chattel. "I was determined to die, if I could possibly bear the pain, rather than give up my dear book," said Jones, demonstrating his understanding of freedom, masculinity, and literacy.[49]

In addition to literacy, Jones fashioned a masculine identity through providing for his family and rescuing them from bondage. Jones and his first wife, Lucilla Smith, had three children. Deeply aware of the heartache and trouble enslaved parents often endured after having children, Jones claimed he sought to become a husband and father in spite of it, because he "could live no longer unloved and unloving." [50] Jones wrote lovingly of his children in his narrative, calling them precious babes, and maintained he and Lucilla "were never tired of planning to improve their condition."[51] Unfortunately Mrs. Moore sold Lucilla away, ending their marriage. Shortly after, Jones remarried Mary R. Moore

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[47] Ibid., 218.

[48] Ibid., 221.

[49] Ibid., 222.

[50] Ibid., 229.

[51] Ibid., 230.

and purchased her freedom for $350 with the help of a white friend. Jones and his new wife saved money in a box to purchase Jones's children, as he "could not bear another cruel separation from [his] wife and children."[52] After purchasing his children, Jones exclaimed,

> Oh, how my crushed heart was uplifted in its pride and joy, as I took them in my arms and thought they were not slaves! These three children are with me and their mother now, where the slave's chains and whips are heard no more. Oh, how sweet freedom is to man! But doubly dear is the consciousness of the father's heart, made bitter in its incurable woe by the degradation of slavery, that his dear child is never to be a slave![53]

This proclamation overtly reveals Jones's deep love for his children, but covertly communicates Jones's sense of self—as a man—for rescuing his children from the chains of bondage.

Although Jones chose a different type of restrained manhood than Grandy or Lane, he fashioned a masculine identity absent of violence. First and foremost, literacy provided an avenue for Jones to establish a gendered identity. As he understood it, literate men were free men, and, harkening back to nineteenth-century ideas of masculinity, free men were masculine. His deep care for his family and his devotion to rescue his children from slavery also served to bolster his self-image. Despite inherently emasculating conditions, Jones worked within the system of slavery to fashion a masculine identity

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[52] Ibid., 232.

[53] Ibid., 233.

through learning to read and caring for his family, highlighting the multiple avenues which enslaved men could choose to create a gendered identity.

Born into slavery in 1815 to Mildred Jackson in Shelby County, Tennessee, in 1815, Bibb had a history of running away as a child.[54] In 1833, he married an enslaved woman from Oldham County, Kentucky, named Malinda, with whom he had one child, Mary Frances.[55] Bibb passed through a number of white masters and finally escaped slavery after his fourth attempt. Though he escaped alone (except for one occurrence, when he devised a plan with fellow slave, Jack[56]), Bibb never abandoned his family and went back to rescue them from bondage. However, after failed attempts to rescue his wife, Bibb considered them to be divorced, their marriage nullified through separation under slavery. Prior to creating Canada's first black newspaper in 1851, *Voice of the Fugitive*—a publication that encouraged slaves to relocate to Canada—Bibb began lecturing on antislavery in 1842 and would continue to do so for the remainder of his life.[57] Bibb's narrative concluded by recounting his time as an abolitionist, including an appendix with examples of his work.

In the introduction, historian Charles J. Heglar called the narrative "a triumphant vindication of the slave's manhood and mental dignity," highlighting Bibb's reclamation

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[54] Henry Bibb, *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 14, 16.

[55] Ibid., 33, 42.

[56] Ibid., 135.

[57] "Henry Bibb," Documenting the American South, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, accessed December 19, 2018, https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/bibb/summary.html.

of manhood through rescuing his family from bondage.[58] Rather than commenting on the larger themes that underpin Bibb's narrative, Heglar assessed *Life and Adventures* as literature, framing it within other texts such as *My Father's Shadow*, written by David Dudley. However, like Grandy, Lane, and Jones, Bibb understood his responsibility to provide for and rescue his family from their shackles. Differing from the three, though, he escaped slavery more than once, but returned after multiple successful attempts due to his sense of duty as a father and a husband. Illustrating the fluidity of masculinity within the slave quarters, Bibb fashioned a gendered identity founded upon the care of and devotion to his wife and child.

Bibb introduced his readers to his narrative by recalling his childhood, his multiple attempts at escape, and his longing desire to be free. He lamented,

> I believed then, as I believe now, that every man has a right to wages for his labor; a right to his own wife and children; a right to liberty and the pursuit of happiness; and a right to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience. But here in the light of these truths, I was a slave, a prisoner for life; I could possess nothing nor acquire anything but what must belong to my keeper[59]

Acutely aware of his imprisonment, Bibb devoted his life to breaking free of his bonds, claiming he "would be free or die."[60] So devoted to the cause, he refused to take a wife unless she shared similar ideas of freedom. Despite his initial hesitation, his family brought him the greatest joy and affection and ultimately shifted Bibb's life mission—

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[58] Charles J. Heglar, "Introduction," in *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb,* 1.

[59] Henry Bibb, *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb,* 17.

[60] Ibid., 33.

one from freeing himself to also rescuing his family. Similar to Lane, Bibb reclaimed his masculinity through protecting his family from the horrors of slavery and much of his narrative revolved around his sense of duty to his wife and child.

Throughout *Life and Adventures*, Bibb made subtle comments regarding his lack of ability to protect his family against cruel white masters—hinting at his inability to fulfill his obligations as a father and husband to protect Malinda and Frances. "Who can imagine the feelings of a father and mother, when looking upon their infant child whipped," when they could afford it no protection.[61] He understood his marginalized position and inability to act in defense of his family. Rather than reclaiming his masculinity within the system of slavery, Bibb opted to remove his family from the south, to a place where he could ensure their protection from white slaveowners. Escaping solo multiple times, Bibb returned to his family in the middle of the night to find Malinda and little Frances, "whom [he] was then seeking to rescue from perpetual slavery."[62] Unfortunately, this visit cost Bibb his freedom temporarily. "But oh!" Bibb exclaimed, "the dreadful thought, that after all my sacrifice and struggling to rescue my family from the hands of the oppressor; that I should be dragged back into cruel bondage to suffer the penalty of a tyrant's law."[63] Despite his successful attempt at freeing himself, Bibb's sense of responsibility to his family—his duty which made him a man—compelled him to risk his chance at liberty by returning to rescue them. Consequently, slave patrollers captured Bibb shortly after his return to the south and imprisoned him.

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[61] Ibid., 43.

[62] Ibid., 58.

[63] Ibid., 62.

However, Bibb's misfortune lasted but a short time; he managed to escape his imprisonment to Cincinnati and then Lake Erie, where he and Malinda agreed to meet in two months. Bibb escaped first, and Malinda and the child followed after the excitement died down. He made it to Ohio, but his family did not; writing

> I had waited eight or nine months without hearing from my family. I felt it to be my duty, as a husband, and a father, to make one more effort. I felt as if I could not give them up to be scarified on the bloody altar of slavery. I felt as if love, duty, humanity, and justice, required that I should go back.[64]

Compelled by his responsibility to his family to ensure their care and safety, Bibb resolved to try once more. While imprisoned in Louisville after being captured by slave patrollers, Bibb's white cellmates, who felt sympathetic to his attempts at freedom, offered to teach him to read and write so that he might write himself a pass after being taken out of prison. They also suggested Bibb break out of the prison but leave his family. "I consented to engage in this plot," Bibb began, "but not to leave my family."[65] Once a single young man, hesitant to marry and have children, Bibb transformed into a man whose identity rested upon his sense of duty to his family. His determination to rescue his family from perpetual slavery and his responsibilities as a husband and father shaped his life and the masculine identity he created for himself.

"I thought if I must die, I would die striving to protect my little family from destruction, die striving to escape from slavery," stated Bibb. His sense of self derived from his unwavering and relentless desire to free his family from bondage, something he

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[64] Ibid., 83.

[65] Ibid., 95.

believed—as a father and husband—was his obligation. Like Grandy, Lane, and Jones, Bibb fashioned a masculine identity without resorting to violence. His reclamation of manhood defined by his duty to his wife and child illustrate the multiple ways in which enslaved men could fashion a masculine identity.

Bibb and Lane's narratives, while focusing heavily on the wellbeing of their families, represent only one form of restrained manhood. Grandy and Jones, while concerned for their families' status as chattel, found other avenues, also absent of violence, through which they constructed and understood their manhood. These four men, while relating different experiences and emphasizing different themes, each fashioned a masculine identity without resorting to violence against another black or white man, highlighting the fluidity of not just enslaved masculinity in general, but especially avenues of restrained manhood. Interestingly enough, each of the enslaved men representative of a type of restrained masculinity had a family to whom they felt responsible whereas Douglass, Northup, and Ball did not have enslaved family to care for, and opted to construct a masculine identity through violence. This observation reveals the correlation between a bondmen's chosen type of masculinity and his immediate circumstances and responsibilities—whether or not he had bodies to clothe and mouths to feed—that, should he abandon them, would cause others to suffer. Though hard to decipher an enslaved man's reasoning through his narrative, historians should investigate if and how a man's family, or lack thereof, proved a motivator for how he understood and asserted his manhood. The narratives of Grandy, Lane, Jones, and Bibb illustrate masculinity's fluidity within the slave quarters, but also encourage new inquiry into the connection between restrained manhood and familial obligation.

CONCLUSION: "I WAS NOTHING BEFORE; I WAS A MAN NOW": SIGNIFICANCE OF ENSLAVED MASCULINITY STUDIES

"The great God, who knoweth all the secrets of the heart," lamented Rev. Thomas Jones, "knows the bitter sorrow I now feel when I think of my four dear children who are slaves, torn from me and consigned to hopeless servitude by the iron hand of ruthless wrong."[1] Jones continued expressing his fatherly love for his children and the sadness he felt that his brother, the white man, "took them from [him]."[2] Filled with grief and hopelessness, Jones, like other enslaved fathers, did whatever he could to procure small luxuries and extra materials for his family, to try to keep them fed, protected, and loved. By doing so, he not only served as a provider for his family, but also constructed, defined, and understood his masculine identity through actions such as these.

Jones, like Lunsford Lane, Moses Grandy, and Henry Bibb fashioned a masculine identity based on restraint rather than violence, providing for and resolving to protect and rescue their loved ones from the cruel chains of bondage rather than rebel and fight back. The narratives and personal letters, sermons, speeches, and other writings of these men provide scholars a glimpse of the ex-slave's consciousness, inner thoughts and feelings, and his deep awareness of his subhuman position. The testimony of these men also contributes to the growing scholarship of masculinity within slavery studies, helping historians draw conclusions about enslaved manhood from the words of former slaves.

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[1] Thomas H. Jones, *"The Experience of Rev. Thomas H. Jones,"* in *North Carolina Slave Narratives: The Lives of Moses Roper, Lunsford Lane, Moses Grandy, and Thomas H. Jones,* ed. William L. Andrews (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 212.

[2] Ibid.

Ex-slaves, occupying a position of marginalized masculinity, fashioned a gendered identity several different ways. While acts of violence and physical altercations constitute the most obvious ways an ex-slave reclaimed his manhood, others created their identities through roles that prioritized restraint. In the narratives examined in this thesis, each ex-slave that used violence to assert his manhood lacked familial responsibilities to provide for and protect his children, while those who chose to reaffirm their manhood through nonviolent means did have families they wanted to provide for, protect, and ultimately rescue from their shackles. This idea of communal manhood, prioritizing the wellbeing of the family and community closely resembles New England Puritans' ideas of masculinity in the eighteenth century, while ideas of violence and honor characterized white manhood in the antebellum South. Investigating different types of enslaved masculinity—violent versus nonviolent—scholars can gather more evidence and information regarding white community, culture, and social conventions, and how these ideas and values transferred to slave society.

For the larger body of scholarship of slavery studies, investigating gender, and its intersection with class and race, reveals the complexities of relationships of power and social hierarchies within the slave community. Examining gender and masculinity uncovers how slaves interacted with one another, what slaves thought to be most important or worthwhile, whether it be survival, freedom, the safety of the nuclear family. Through the use of ex-slave testimony and ex-slave narratives, the voice of the ex-slave trumps that of the white planter and reveals their deep emotions and humanity, the irony of human property. An analysis of the creation of gendered identities also

illustrates their acute awareness of their subhuman and sub-man status and the ex-slave's desire to reclaim or control even the smallest aspect of their lives.

While this thesis only examined two avenues that ex-slaves sought to create a gendered identity using the published narratives of seven ex-slaves, it invites and encourages other scholars to further investigate enslaved masculinity. First and foremost might be the inclusion of WPA narrative testimony to understand manhood from the perspectives of lesser known slaves, though the researcher must be aware of the representation concerns of the WPA sampling size raised by historians. While recent interpretations of enslaved masculinity incorporate a few WPA interviews with published ex-slave narratives, to date there has not been a significant integration of both sources to draw conclusions regarding enslaved masculinity from the perspectives of either men or women.[3]

The work written regarding slavery and gender thus far also lacks the voice of enslaved women, their perspective of enslaved masculinity, and an examination of the interplay between enslaved masculinity and enslaved femininity. Masculinity does not exist in a vacuum and thus must be examined in its relation to and interaction with enslaved femininity. This dichotomy might further historians' interpretations of gender roles within the slave quarters or might possibly reveal the egalitarian relationship between enslaved men and women.

In addition to the inclusion of testimony of enslaved women, historians might also consider the voices of enslaved children and how they defined their relationship with the

[3] See David S. Doddington, *Contesting Slave Masculinity in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

important men in their lives. WPA testimony might better serve these aims due to the high percentage of informants that experienced slavery as a child. However, such an inquiry might expand on the fashioning of a masculine identity through the ex-slave's role as father. Assuming the family remained intact and unaffected by forced sale, scholars might ask the relationship between father and children, and, more specifically, the relationship between father and son. Did enslaved fathers try to set an example of and instill values of manhood in their sons? How did ex-slaves' own fathers, or community elders that they saw as father figures, influence their ideas of manhood, if at all?

Further investigation might include the role of the family in an ex-slave's choice of masculine identity. Did a sense of responsibility circumscribe or influence the ways in which the ex-slave constructed his identity? Much scholarship of enslaved masculinity has included an interpretation evaluating violence as a central way to reclaim manhood. Less scholarship, though, has been dedicated to the analysis of nonviolent manhood. Did ideas of communal manhood actually exist in slave culture? Can scholars define acts such as providing for and protecting loved ones as a way in which men constructed a gendered identity? More than manhood associated with violence, manhood associated with nonviolence deserves more attention than scholars have given it thus far.

Furthermore, scholars should pursue an interpretation of enslaved masculinity that uncovers the support and strife within the community, rather than focusing on just one. How did fractured relationships or competition affect men's sense of self? How did brotherhood or friendship serve as a tool of survival? While recent interpretations have focused on either the friendship of enslaved men or the competition between them, choosing to examine only one of the two presents an unrealistic view of enslaved

masculinity, denying the ex-slave's full range of emotions and multitude of relationships within the slave community.

Lastly, historians might consider using the testimony of enslaved people in other states. This thesis examined the testimony of ex-slaves in the upper south, almost exclusively. Did white and black ideas of masculinity change dependent on regional context? What did enslaved masculinity look like in Arkansas as compared to North Carolina? Is hegemonic masculinity different in different regions of the country and if so, how does this change the ideas of marginalized masculinity? While the historian limiting him or herself to the narratives of slaves in a specific region might yield insights about the culture and values of that region, it will remain limited in scope rather than contributing to the overarching understanding of enslaved masculinity. To do this, historians might either consider case studies of specific states or region, but either way should compare masculinity across regions.

Honor, violence, and the accompanying code of ethics, values, and social conventions dominated white antebellum southern life. It instructed southern gentlemen on how to interact with one another. Central to the idea of what it meant to be a man, southern gentlemen dueled with one another when they felt as if their manhood had been questioned or come under attack. Historian Jeff Forret has argued that white constructions of manhood and societal values transferred to the slave community and provided slaves with social codes and guides which also instructed them on how to interact with one another. Douglass, Northup, and Ball each resorted to violence when their manhood came under attack. Rather than remaining complacent and accepting treatment from white masters that positioned them as less than men, these ex-slaves

fought back, determined to reclaim their status as men. Evidenced by phrases within their narratives such as "he who had never known mercy did not receive it,"[4] and "I beat him over the back and sides with my weapon,"[5] resisting abuse and punishment at the hands of their white masters and overcoming them empowered ex-slaves. It gave them a sense of control and defied their position as chattel and subhuman.

Also defying their position as subhuman, other enslaved men combined characteristics of the Self-Made Man with communal manhood to fashion a masculine identity. The Self-Made Man emphasized political and economic freedom and self-interest, while communal manhood emphasized the responsibility to family and community. Economic freedom and the ability to provide extra food and materials to loved ones, and in some cases, buy their freedom, constituted another way bondmen sought to create a gendered identity. Slaves such as Grandy, Lane, Jones, and Bibb fashioned a masculine identity based off their abilities to provide for their families, protect their families from harsh treatment from white masters, and rescue them from bondage, often times saving up money to purchase their families' freedom.

Though this thesis has examined only seven published ex-slave narratives, written exclusively by men, the examination of the ways in which bondmen chose to fashion a masculine identity contributes to greater discussions of slave community and relationships, slaves' humanity and agency in the face of such dehumanization, and the

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[4] Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Kevin M. Burke (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2017), 67.

[5] Charles Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains; or, The Life of an American Slave* (New York: H. Dayton, 1850), 212.

ways in which ex-slaves fought back, whether violently or not, to regain and maintain some semblance of the life they desperately wanted—economic and political independence, the freedom to have families and to protect and love their families, and the ability to live a life without abuse and cruelty.

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