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## Sexuality and the Slave Community

SINCE WORLD WAR II, and especially during the past two decades, historians of United States slavery have begun to examine the role of blacks within the slave environment. Scholars previously concentrated upon whites and concerned themselves with such questions as the profitability of the institution, the hegemony of the white South, the role that slavery played in the conflict between the North and the South, and the careers and attitudes of white abolitionists. But during the past twenty years, as societal conflicts and the civil rights movement became increasingly prominent, the focus of concern broadened. Researchers have been inspired to investigate the actions and reactions of slaves. The current generation of historians recognizes that blacks, as well as whites, significantly contributed to slave culture and they are now subjecting slaves and slave society to extensive analysis.<sup>1</sup>

Two decades ago, Stanley Elkins published *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life*, a contribution to the study of slavery that heralded a new era in the slavery debate. Elkins introduced ideas concerning blacks that have been criticized extensively and refined. One of the most influential of Elkins' beliefs was that under the conditions of North American slavery, slaves were effectively stripped of an active personality, and that they passively endured the rigors of their status—that is, slaves fulfilled the stereotyped Sambo image of docile beings acting only under orders from their masters.<sup>2</sup> Historians intent upon revising Elkins' conclusion, for a number of motives, have indicated that slaves not only retained personality initiative, but that they were able to endure the vicissitudes of slavery pre-

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<sup>1</sup> Reviews of the ongoing debate include David Brion Davis, "Slavery and the Post World War II Historians," *Daedalus* 103 (Spring 1974): 1-16; Stanley M. Elkins, "The Slavery Debate," *Commentary* 60 (December 1975): 40-54. Two recent studies emphasizing the role of slaves are Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordon, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974); Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York, 1976).

<sup>2</sup> (New York, 1963; first published by University of Chicago Press, 1959), Ch. 3, esp. pp. 82-7.

cisely because of their ability to construct a viable black community within the confines of the "peculiar institution."<sup>3</sup>

All Americans, according to numerous historians, have continually longed for the establishment of community.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps blacks, because of restrictions inherent in their lives as slaves, were more successful than whites in forming one. If a community is defined as a body of people with a shared set of mores and values, can such a term be applied to slaves? While speculative inquiry into the existence of a slave community could appropriately focus upon a number of diverse characteristics, a crucial aspect of any community setting must involve attitudes toward sexuality. If historians are to arrive at an understanding of slave life, sexual relationships and attitudes must be fully explored. If slaves possessed identifiable norms pertaining to sexuality, then the idea of a viable slave community is enhanced. If slaves were able to establish sexual mores, then this accomplishment would indicate that slaves were also able to develop norms guiding other aspects of conduct. Slaves who actively participated in establishing a set of values may also have been capable of developing a genuine community. Three sources are particularly valuable in gaining an understanding of the attitudes slaves harbored toward sexual relations — slave narratives, slave autobiographies, and excerpts from judicial cases.<sup>5</sup> The focus herein is the nineteenth century, since the sources are most numerous during that time span. Hopefully, an analysis of sexuality and its many ramifications will begin to indicate the nature and extent of community development among slaves during this era.

Sexual relations are most commonly associated with marriage. Since marital customs reflect community attitudes, a better understanding of

<sup>3</sup> Two prominent critics of Elkins' Sambo image are George P. Rawick, *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography, Volume I, From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community* (Westport, Ct., 1972); and John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1972). Blassingame's work is criticized in Al-Tony Gilmore, ed., *Revisiting Blassingame's Slave Community: The Scholars Respond* (Westport, Ct., 1978).

<sup>4</sup> Historical works emphasizing the American search for community include R. Jackson Wilson, *In Quest of Community: Social Philosophy in the United States, 1860-1920* (New York, 1968); George M. Fredrickson, *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union* (New York, 1965); David Bertelson, *The Lazy South* (New York, 1970); John Higham, "From Boundlessness to Consolidation: The Transformation of American Culture, 1840-1860" (pamphlet issued at Ann Arbor, 1969); Stanley M. Elkins and Eric McKittrick, "A Meaning for Turner's Frontier," *Political Science Quarterly* 69 (September 1954 and December 1954): 321-53; 565-602.

<sup>5</sup> The slave narratives, collected during the 1920s and 1930s by Fisk University and the Federal Writer's Project of the Works Progress Administration, have been republished recently in 19 volumes, including George P. Rawick's introductory volume, *From Sundown to Sunup*. George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* (Westport, Ct., 1972). References to this source will cite the series title, the interviewee's name, the state where the interview occurred, the volume number within the series, the particular part, if applicable, within each volume and the page number. Thus, a typical citation might read: *American Slave*, Sam Polite, South Carolina, III, 3, 290. There are several inherent problems involved in the use of these narratives. Most interviewees resided on plantations in the Lower South and were unable to give an accurate description of either farms or other slaveholding areas in the South. Most interviewees were also aged persons who were attempting to recall their slave past. Their memories were colored by the fact that they were very young when slavery was abolished, and that many ex-slaves, interviewed during the Great Depression, looked longingly and unrealistically backwards to an era when they should always have been under someone else's care. Hopefully, the inclusion of the slave autobiographies and judicial testimony, as well as other secondary sources, will offset the defects in the narratives. For a more detailed examination of the narratives see John W. Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems," *Journal of Southern History* 41 (November 1975): 473-92; C. Vann Woodward, "History from the Slave Sources," *American Historical Review* 79 (April 1974): 470-81.

slave marriages should demonstrate some characteristics which shaped slaves' cultural environment. Although most marriages are preceded by some type of courtship, limited leisure time inhibited slaves' ability to court. Additionally, one of the primary requisites of courtship, places where members of both sexes can assemble, was also scarce for slaves. Many couples met on their plantations, but others were introduced wherever they were allowed to congregate. Frequently, slave matches evolved from encounters at "frolics," Saturday evening social gatherings that celebrated the conclusion of a week's labor, or at cornshuckings, church services, and baptisms.<sup>6</sup> A slave minority, particularly in Georgia, was compelled to adhere to rigorous courtship strictures. These limitations, imposed by slaves, included waiting until the slaves attained a certain age before they were allowed to court, and being chaperoned by the female's parents.<sup>7</sup> Such practices are explicit reflections of the shaping of community values.

Marriages usually involved some type of wedding ceremony. One of the most common practices consisted of the master asking the couple to jump over a broomstick, then pronouncing them husband and wife.<sup>8</sup> Another frequent, although more formal, rite was a service conducted by a black preacher.<sup>9</sup> In rare instances, a white minister would be requested to preside at a wedding.<sup>10</sup> Many owners used slave marriages as an excuse to entertain, or to be entertained by, their chattel. These owners complemented the wedding ritual with post-ceremony festivities.<sup>11</sup> Despite numerous weddings, many owners dispensed with ceremony and simply permitted agreeable couples to live together.<sup>12</sup> Although many masters displayed a lack of concern toward marriages, slaves were quite conscious of courtship rites and very much concerned with sanctifying marriages through ceremonies.

Whether a slave couple participated in a marriage ceremony legitimized by whites was not as significant as the consequences of their union. Slave testimonies indicate that a permanent commitment bound many couples. One indication of this allegiance was the fidelity that spouses demonstrated for one another in the midst of adverse conditions. Frequently, couples who resided on different plantations, as well as those

<sup>6</sup> Robert Anderson, *From Slavery to Affluence: Memoirs of Robert Anderson, Ex-Slave* (Hemingford, Neb., 1927), p. 31; *American Slave*, Acie Taylor, Florida, XVII, 330-31; *ibid.*, Will Sheets, Georgia, XII, 3, 240; Ferebe Rogers, Georgia, XII, 3, 212; Ed McCree, Georgia, XIII, 3, 61; Jim Gitlard, Alabama, VI, 155.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, George Womble, Georgia, XIII, 4, 189; Phil Towns, Georgia, XIII, 4, 38-9; Camilla Jackson, Georgia, XII, 2, 296.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Hamp Kennedy, Mississippi, VII, 87; Carrie Davis, Alabama, VI, 107; William Wells Brown, *My Southern Home; or, the South and its People* [1880] (Upper Saddle River, N.J. 1968), p. 46.

<sup>9</sup> *American Slave*, Jennie Kendricks, Georgia, XIII, 3, 4; George Woods, South Carolina, III, 4, 250; Uncle Willis, Georgia, XIII, 4, 168; Henry Wright, Georgia, XIII, 4, 201.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Robert Heard, Georgia, XII, 2, 270-71; Sam Mitchell, South Carolina, III, 3, 201-02.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Jim Gitlard, Alabama, VI, 155; Hannah Austin, Georgia, XII, 1, 20; Acie Taylor, Florida, XVII, 331.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Mary Scott, South Carolina, III, 4 85; Dora Franks, Mississippi, VII, 50; Henry Cheatman, Alabama, VI, 69; Jefferson Franklin Henry, Georgia, XII, 2, 189; Sarah Ross, Florida, XVII, 168; Mrs. Jane Seward in Benjamin Drew, ed., *The Refugee: A North-side View of Slavery* [1855] (Reading, Mass., 1969), p. 29.

who had been more radically separated by sales, remained faithful to their absent spouses.<sup>13</sup> Matrimonial devotion was even more convincingly demonstrated in those instances when husbands encouraged their wives to flee from a plantation in order to escape inhumane treatment.<sup>14</sup> One slave husband resorted to the opposite tactic when he abandoned his family because he could no longer bear to witness the cruel punishment that was administered to his wife and children.<sup>15</sup> Other couples tried to resolve this dilemma through escaping with their entire families.<sup>16</sup> If such a group escape was impractical, then frequently a single slave would run away, and, once safe, devise a plan to reunite his family.<sup>17</sup> When escape was too drastic a course to pursue, spouses might attempt to be purchased by a master living closer to their partner's master.<sup>18</sup> In an extreme case, one lonely ex-slave manifested his overwhelming love when he forfeited his freedom so that he could be with his wife.<sup>19</sup>

Slaves who were able to circumvent disunion by petitioning their masters or through successful escapes were probably less numerous than those who were passive victims of forced separations. Such situations demonstrated the integral role that family life played for slaves. One slave wife, grief-stricken following separation from her husband and children, drowned herself.<sup>20</sup> Many others reacted less decisively, but still managed to evince their yearning for departed lovers.<sup>21</sup> Frequently, the impetus that caused slave families to run away was the belief that they were about to be sold and their willingness to risk the hazards that confronted runaways rather than face separation.<sup>22</sup> These acts eloquently testify to the importance slaves placed upon their families.

The fear that couples would be separated permeated the slave quarters.<sup>23</sup> This was not paranoia, but legitimate apprehension.<sup>24</sup> A legion

<sup>13</sup> *American Slave*, Susan Snow, Mississippi, VII, 136; Charity Moore, South Carolina, III, 3, 205; Bryant Huff, Georgia, XII, 2, 239; Tom Rosboro, South Carolina, III, 4, 43.

<sup>14</sup> Louis Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave: From Bondage to Freedom, The Institution of Slavery as Seen on the Plantation and in the Home of the Planter* [1897] (New York, 1969), p. 98; Thomas Johnson in Drew, *North-Side View*, p. 267.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, Dan Josiah Lockhart, p. 31.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Henry Williamson, p. 93; John Little, pp. 148-49; Thomas Jones, p. 229; Hughes, *Thirty Years*, pp. 139-40; William W. Brown, *The Narrative of William Wells Brown, A Fugitive Slave; and a Lecture Delivered Before the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Salem, 1847* [1848] (Reading, Mass., 1969), p. 58.

<sup>17</sup> Rev. Alexander Hemsley in Drew, *North-Side View*, p. 23; *ibid.*, William Howard, p. 77.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, Henry Crowthorn, p. 180; Dan Josiah Lockhart, p. 31.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, John Little, p. 147.

<sup>20</sup> Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Elijah Jenkins in Drew, *North-Side View*, p. 79; Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes: Thirty Years as a Slave and Four Years in the White House* [1868] (New York, 1968), pp. 25-8; Robert S. Starobin, ed., *Blacks in Bondage: Letters of American Slaves* (New York, 1974), pp. 58, 65, 69-70, 74, 91-2, 153-54.

<sup>22</sup> Christopher Hamilton in Drew, *North-Side View*, p. 123; *ibid.*, Henry Morehead, pp. 126-27; Josiah Henson, *The Autobiography of the Reverend Josiah Henson* [1881] (Reading, Mass., 1969), Ch. XII; Austin Steward, *Twenty-two Years a Slave and Forty Years a Freeman* [1857] (Reading, Mass., 1969), 124-25.

<sup>23</sup> *American Slave*, Duncan Gaines, Florida, XVII, 135; Hughes, *Thirty Years*, pp. 79-80; Solomon Northrup, *Twelve Years a Slave* [1853] eds. Sue Eakin and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge, 1968), pp. 38-9.

<sup>24</sup> The frequency of slave separations has been debated by Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Slavery* (Boston, 1974), pp. 49-51; and their critics, notably Herbert Gutman and Richard Sutch, "The Slave Family: Protected Agent of Capitalist Masters, or Victim of the Slave Trade," in Paul A. David, et al., *Reckoning with Slavery: A Critical Study in the Quantitative History of American Negro Slavery* (New York, 1976), p. 126; Blasingame, *Slave Community*, p. 91. Gutman has wisely indicated that the percentage of slaves separated is not as crucial as the slaves' knowledge that such separation was possible: Gutman, *Black Family*, pp. 146-48.

of slave narratives reveals that many families were separated through sale.<sup>25</sup> Many other unions were forcibly dissolved when one of the couple's masters migrated to a new location.<sup>26</sup> Despite numerous disunions, a number of slaveholders actively discouraged family separations, and some owners even attempted, often successfully, to reunite families.<sup>27</sup>

Although slaves could determine their own values concerning the role of families and sexual relationships, masters exerted an enormous influence. Several historians of slavery have concluded that masters preferred couples to reside on the same plantation, where they could be placed under constant vigil. Slaveholders feared that frequent visits to another plantation, where slaves might receive more lenient treatment or where they might develop visions of freedom, would ignite sedition. Also, slave couples who labored on the same estate frequently caused fewer disciplinary problems. Affectionate mates, intimidated by the thought of their loved ones being chastised, would endeavor to avoid retribution. In these instances, the ultimate punishment was the threat, easily transformed into reality, of separation.<sup>28</sup>

Despite many masters' preference that slave couples live together, some slaves belonged to different owners than their partners.<sup>29</sup> When couples lived on different plantations, slaves had to obtain visiting privileges in order to be with their mates. Most masters uniformly granted passes for visits on specified days.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, some slaves were unable to be with their spouses as frequently as they desired. One woman saw her husband only during the summer when their two masters visited.<sup>31</sup> A number of slaves developed ingenious methods to enable them to live with their mates. One couple, who labored for different Indian masters, lived together halfway between their owners'

<sup>25</sup> Steward, *Twenty-two Years*, p. 62; Henson, *Autobiography*, p. 15. Leonard Harrod, in Drew, *North-side View*, p. 239; *ibid.*, Lydia Hedgebeth, p. 195; John Fracis, p. 138; Alexander Hamilton, p. 125; William Howard, p. 77; Christopher Nichols, p. 49; James Adams, p. 19. Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, p. 51; Brown, *My Southern Home*, p. 112; Anderson, *From Slavery to Affluence*, pp. 4-5; Keckley, *Behind the Scenes*, p. 29; Northup, *Twelve Years*, p. 39. American Slave, Edward Lycurgas, Florida, XVII, 208; Winston Davis, Florida, XVII, 87; Rhodus Walton, Georgia, XIII, 4, 123; Julia Rush, Georgia, XIII, 3, 229; Heard Griffin, Georgia, XII, 2, 73; Elisha Doc Garey, Georgia, XII, 2, 8; Mary Scott, South Carolina, XIII, 4, 81.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, Jennie Johnson, South Carolina, II, 3, 38. Bert Luster, quoted in Rawick, *Sundown to Sunup*, p. 84; *ibid.*, Andrew Simms, p. 85. George Williams in Drew, *North-side View*, p. 241; *ibid.*, William Brown, p. 197; Keckley, *Behind the Scenes*, pp. 22-3.

<sup>27</sup> American Slave, Phil Towns, Georgia, XII, 4, 38; Brown, *My Southern Home*, p. 40-1; Helen Tunnickliff Catterall, ed., *Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro, Volume II, Cases From the Courts of North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee* (Washington, D.C., 1929), pp. 353, 423, 429; Helen Tunnickliff Catterall, with James J. Hayden, eds., *Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro, Volume V, Cases from the Courts of States North of the Ohio and West of the Mississippi Rivers, Canada and Jamaica* (Washington, D.C., 1937), pp. 285-86; Northup, *Twelve Years*, p. 140.

<sup>28</sup> Herbert G. Gutman, *Slavery and the Numbers Game: A Critique of Time on the Cross* (Urbana, 1975), p. 101; Genovese, *Roll, Jordon, Roll*, pp. 452, 454, 472, 473-74; Blassingame, *Slave Community*, pp. 85-6. One ex-slave corroborates these historians' analysis with their own ideas: American Slave, Clara C. Young, Mississippi, VII, 172.

<sup>29</sup> Anderson, *From Slavery to Affluence*, p. 4; Robert Bett in Drew, *North-side View*, p. 78; *ibid.*, Thomas Johnson, p. 267 and William Brown, pp. 196-97.

<sup>30</sup> American Slave, Susan Snow, Mississippi, VII, 136; Jasper Battle, Georgia, XII, 1, 62-3; Rias Body, Georgia, XII, 1, 87-8; Willis Cofer, Georgia, XII, 1, 207; Charlie Robinson, South Carolina II, 4, 36; Emma Jeter, South Carolina, III, 3, 33-4; Anderson, *From Slavery to Affluence*, p. 4; Northup, *Twelve Years*, p. 169; Tom Woods, quoted in Rawick, *Sundown to Sunup*, p. 86.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, Betty Foreman Chessler, p. 80.

residences.<sup>32</sup> Another pair stayed together after the woman persuaded her master to hire her out on the farm where her husband toiled.<sup>33</sup> Still another couple avoided separation by alternately living together on each of their owners' plantations.<sup>34</sup>

Occasionally, a slave would marry a free black.<sup>35</sup> In such instances, the free person often attempted to overcome the problem of separation by purchasing the spouse's freedom.<sup>36</sup> In an extreme case, a man voluntarily became a slave in order to pay for his wife.<sup>37</sup>

A majority of slaves enjoyed meaningful, lasting relationships with members of the opposite sex, but a minority placed less value on the marriage agreement. Some slaves abstained from sexual relations rather than capitulating to the ignominy of being unfaithful to their spouses. Others, as one might expect, were not as loyal and engaged in adulterous affairs while remaining with their spouses.<sup>38</sup> More admirable were those slaves who were unable to reconcile themselves to celibacy, or lonesomeness, and who remarried following involuntary separation from their former mates.<sup>39</sup>

Many observers of slavery believed that slave marriages were short-lived because slaves casually viewed such liaisons. This belief was based upon the assumption that slaves had many insignificant premarital affairs.<sup>40</sup> The slave testimony clearly indicates that many slaves pursued pre-marital sexual relationships, and records of abundant illegitimate births substantiate the narratives.<sup>41</sup> Yet to conclude that slaves regarded marriages casually because they participated in prenuptial sexual intercourse may be inaccurate. Pre-marital sex is not necessarily synonymous with promiscuity; slaves who engaged in pre-marital sex may have had only one partner, and such affairs might have been preludes to marriage. Furthermore, the prevalence of pre-marital sexual involvement indicates that most slaves sanctioned such activities without allowing previous sexual experiences to affect their marital relationships.<sup>42</sup> Slaves' atti-

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, Kiziah Love, pp 83-4.

<sup>33</sup> Henson, *Autobiography*, p. 13.

<sup>34</sup> *American Slave*, Fred James, South Carolina, III, 3, 14.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, William Sherman, Florida, XVII, 286; Eugene Wesley Smith, Georgia, XIII, 4, 230; Eugene, Georgia, XIII, 4, 213; Ferebe Rogers, Georgia, XIII, 3, 209; William Grose in Drew, *North-side View*, p. 56; *ibid.*, William Howard, p. 77; *ibid.*, Francis Henderson, p. 110; *ibid.*, Rev. William Troy, p. 249; Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass; An American Slave* [1845] (New York, 1968, p. 80.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Nelson in Drew, *North-side View*, p. 260; *ibid.*, Phillip Younger, p. 175; Catterall, *Judicial Cases*, Volume II, pp. 377, 383-4.

<sup>37</sup> *American Slave*, Samuel Smalls, Florida, XVII, 301.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, Charlie Moses, Mississippi, VII, 114, Mollie Williams, Mississippi, VII, 163; Alice Green, Georgia, XII, 2, 34; Sena Moore, South Carolina, III, 3, 209; Alexander Robertson, South Carolina, III, 4, 32.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, Delia Garlic, Alabama, VI, 132; Lina Hunter, Georgia, XII, 2, 268-69; Bert Luster, quoted in Rawick, *Sundown to Sunup*, p. 83; Anderson, *From Slavery to Affluence*, p. 5; Northup, *Twelve Years*, pp. 140-41; Catterall, *Judicial Cases*, Volume V, p. 316.

<sup>40</sup> Gutman, *Black Family*, pp. 61-2, 556-57 lists writings of many of these observers.

<sup>41</sup> Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, p. 39; *American Slave*, Georgia Baker, Georgia, XII, 1, 50; Rias Body, Georgia, XII, 1, 89; Annie Huff, Georgia, XII, 2, 234; Callie Elder, Georgia, XII, 1, 311; Dan Smith, South Carolina, II, 495-96; Ambrose Douglas, Florida, XVII, 102; Amy Chapman, Alabama, VI, 59; Camilla Jackson, Georgia, XII, 2, 296; Mama Duck, Florida, XVII, 117; Angie Garrett, Alabama, VI, 133; Paul Smith, Georgia, XIII, 3, 322; Henry D. Jenkins, South Carolina, III, 3, 24; Jane Sutton, Mississippi, VII, 151.

<sup>42</sup> Historians' analysis indicates that most slave marriages were stable, monogamous relationships. Blassingame, *Slave Community*, pp. 77-8; Herbert Gutman and Richard Sutch, "Victorians All: The Sexual Mores and Conduct of Slaves and Their Masters," in David, et al., *Reckoning with Slavery*, p. 142; Gutman, *Black Family*, Part One, *passim*.

tudes towards pre-marital sex is a clear manifestation of a developed set of community values.

Pre-marital sexual involvement may have been stimulated by the general lust directed toward slave women. In many instances, a white man competed with a black one for a slave girl's favors. Due to the nature of the system the white man was usually able to dominate such rivalries. If for some reason he failed to do so, the slave girl was often punished.<sup>43</sup> In more equal contests, when two black males vied for a woman's affection, one of them often attempted to subdue his antagonist with the aid of a conjurer.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps the most extreme rivalry occurred in those instances when two whites both desired intimacy with the same slave girl.<sup>45</sup>

Situations where two whites competed to attract a particular slave woman may have been rare, but the miscegenation that it involved was not uncommon. Abundant slave testimony demonstrates the prevalence of interracial sexual contact.<sup>46</sup> Many white males willingly engaged in illicit interracial relationships. Few of these men were capable of admitting that a black woman could be a satisfactory wife. One Missouri man exemplified this attitude when he discovered that his wife was black and he abandoned her in order to avoid the ostracism of white society.<sup>47</sup> Many black women who associated with white men were also engaged in affairs with members of their own race, since they bore both black and mulatto children.<sup>48</sup> Some white men desired more fulfilling relationships than they received from casual encounters with slave women. Such men preferred concubines, stimulating the extremely high prices that the most alluring slave women attracted.<sup>49</sup>

Since slave women would have had a difficult time attempting to repel their master's advances, they were frequently subjected to sexual exploitation.<sup>50</sup> Those women who desired to resist their master's entreaties could inform on the man's activities to his undoubtedly unsympathetic wife, run away or simply refuse to surrender themselves.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Douglass, *Narrative of Frederick Douglass*, pp. 25-6; Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, p. 7; Patrick Snead in Drew, *Northside View*, pp. 69-70; *ibid.*, Mrs. Henry Gowens, p. 101; *American Slave*, Sam McAllum, Mississippi, VII, 109-110.

<sup>44</sup> *American Slave*, Govan Littlejohn, South Carolina, III, 3, 106-07; Sallie Littlejohn Keenan, South Carolina, III, 3, 78-9.

<sup>45</sup> Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, p. 7; Northup, *Twelve Years*, pp. 195-96, 198-99.

<sup>46</sup> Hughes, *Thirty Years*, p. 5; Steward, *Twenty-two Years*, p. 89; Mrs. Henry Gowens in Drew, *Northside View*, pp. 100, 102; *ibid.*, James Smith, p. 247; *ibid.*, William Grose, p. 58; *ibid.*, William Thompson, p. 96; Catterall, *Judicial Cases, Volume II*, pp. 357, 430, 451, 469; Catterall, *Judicial Cases, Volume V*, pp. 278-79, 323; *American Slave*, Henri Necaise, Mississippi, VII, 119; Minnie Davis, Georgia, XII, 1, 253; Elisha Doc Garey, Georgia, XII, 2, 2; Alexander Robertson, South Carolina, III, 4, 32; Reuben Rosborough, South Carolina, III, 4, 161; Taylor Gilbert, Florida, XVII, 55; Florida Clayton, Florida, XVII, 62; Creton Milling, South Carolina, III, 3, 194-5; James Lucas, Mississippi, VII, 93.

<sup>47</sup> Brown, *My Southern Home*, pp. 105-06.

<sup>48</sup> Betty Foreman Chessier, quoted in Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup*, p. 80; Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, p. 59; *American Slave*, Minnie Davis, Georgia, XII, 1, 253.

<sup>49</sup> Northup, *Twelve Years*, p. 58; Hughes, *Thirty Years*, p. 12; *American Slave*, Melvin Smith, Georgia, XIII, 3, 290.

<sup>50</sup> Northup, *Twelve Years*, p. 143; Keckley, *Behind the Scenes*, p. 39; Henson, *Autobiography*, pp. 13-14; John Clopton in Drew, *Northside View*, p. 113; *ibid.*, Eli Johnson, p. 269; *American Slave*, John Henry Kemp, Florida, XVII, 186; Sarah Rose, Florida, XVII, 168.

<sup>51</sup> *American Slave*, Martha Bradley, Alabama, VI, 46; Anna Baker, Mississippi, VII, 13; Winston Davis, Florida, XVII, 90; Mrs. Henry Gowens, in Drew, *Northside View*, p. 102; Catterall, *Judicial Cases, Volume II*, p. 388.

Many women complied with unwanted advances, since they realized that slaves who persistently denied their master's overtures were likely to be beaten or sold to a crueller master.<sup>52</sup>

Interracial sexual activities often outraged or hurt white women, who were angered by the moral laxity of their husbands, fathers, sons, or brothers. A direct result of white women's anger could be severe treatment or sale of the unfortunate black women and her mulatto offspring.<sup>53</sup> If a white woman could not tolerate her husband's philandering, then she could sue for divorce.<sup>54</sup>

Although many people associate miscegenation with white men and black women, there were encounters between black men and white women.<sup>55</sup> Contrary to common lore, very few of these affairs involved rape.<sup>56</sup> In no cases did slaves mention homosexual assaults.

The most obvious consequence of miscegenation was mulatto children. The slave testimony demonstrates that most mulattoes were fathered by plantation personages, such as a master, an owner's sons, an overseer, and a driver.<sup>57</sup> Many other mixed-blooded children, particularly in the Lower South, resulted from Indian-slave unions.<sup>58</sup> The offspring of mixed parents were not always welcomed by their fellow slaves, and in many cases a black-mulatto antagonism developed.<sup>59</sup> Such rivalry demonstrates an instance of community development among both blacks and mulattoes. One source of this antagonism may have been the attempts, both successful and futile, of white parents of mulattoes to manumit their offspring or accord them more tolerant treatment.<sup>60</sup>

Slaveowners who attempted to emancipate their slave offspring apparently acted contrary to their role as promoters of slave breeding.<sup>61</sup> Many slaveowners actively encouraged, and frequently compelled, their slaves to participate in a particular match for the purpose of bearing offspring. In an extreme but not solitary case, a master brought two slaves together and commanded them to engage in intercourse in his

<sup>52</sup> *American Slave*, Sarah Ross, Florida, XVII, 168; Winston Davis, Florida, XVII, 90; Mrs. Henry Gowens in Drew, *North-side View*, p. 102.

<sup>53</sup> *American Slave*, Douglas Dorsey, Florida, XVII, 95; Rebecca Hooks, Florida, XVII, 175; Julia Rush, Georgia, XIII, 3, 230; Northup, *Twelve Years*, pp. 31-2; Brown, *My Southern Home*, p. 111; Eli Johnson in Drew, *North-side View*, p. 270; Catterall, *Judicial Cases, Volume V*, p. 294.

<sup>54</sup> Catterall, *Judicial Cases, Volume V*, p. 297; Catterall, *Judicial Cases, Volume II*, p. 281.

<sup>55</sup> Catterall, *Judicial Cases, Volume II*, pp. 289, 339, 354, 385, 400, 401, 428.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 413, 428.

<sup>57</sup> Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, p. 1; Douglass, *Narrative of Frederick Douglass*, pp. 21-4; Anderson, *From Slavery to Affluence*, 5; Henry Gowens, in Drew, *North-side View*, p. 99; *ibid.*, William Johnson, p. 95; *ibid.*, Mrs. Henry Gowens, p. 100; *ibid.*, James Smith, pp. 247-8; Northup, *Twelve Years*, p. 176; *American Slave*, Sarah Ross, Florida, XVII, 168; Jack Johnson, South Carolina, III, 3, 41; Isiah Jeffries, South Carolina, III, 3, 17; Sarah Ray, Georgia, XIII, 4, 310; Rachel Sullivan, Georgia, XIII, 4, 227; Carrie Mason, Georgia, XIII, 3, 112-13; Victoria Penny, South Carolina, XIII, 3, 261; Benjamin Henderson, Georgia XII, 2, 173.

<sup>58</sup> *American Slave*, Charlie Davenport, Mississippi, VII, 36; Anna Baker, Alabama, VI, 12; Nathan Beauchamp, Alabama, VI, 25-6; Carrie Nancy Fryer, Georgia, XII, 1, 335; Harriet Miller, Georgia, XIII, 3, 127; George Patterson, South Carolina, III, 3, 226.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, Lula Washington, Georgia, XII, 4, 135; Walter Long, South Carolina, III, 3, 120; Brown, *My Southern Home*, p. 4.

<sup>60</sup> Mrs. Henry Gowens in Drew, *North-side View*, p. 100; Catterall, *Judicial Cases, Volume II*, pp. 426, 430, 447, 451, 470; Catterall, *Judicial Cases, Volume V*, pp. 275, 307-08, 320.

<sup>61</sup> Gutman and Sutch, "Victorians All?" pp. 137-38, 155; Gutman, *Slavery and the Numbers Game*, pp. 97-9, 101-02; Gutman, *Black Family*, pp. 75-80; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, pp. 345, 462, 464.

presence. Following that act, the two were considered married. Since they were fortunate enough to produce large, healthy babies, their master did not again interfere with their sexual activities.<sup>62</sup> Sometimes slaveowners selected, or purchased, healthy young men and employed them as studs.<sup>63</sup> The same practice applied to women who were known as breeders.<sup>64</sup> The value of these individuals was demonstrated by the extremely high prices they commanded from slave traders and auction bidders.<sup>65</sup>

Masters frequently rewarded particularly fertile women with greater indulgence and a lighter workload than they normally would have received.<sup>66</sup> Slaveowners' desire for increasing their property through propagation caused them to be extremely dissatisfied with barren women. When a master suspected that a particular woman was sterile, she was frequently sold, or separated from her mate.<sup>67</sup> Sometimes slaveowners who were discontented with their women's birthrate would practice miscegenation solely to produce more slave children.<sup>68</sup>

Two masters who thought that an especially healthy brood might be expected from an interplantation match sometimes mated such a pair.<sup>69</sup> Unfortunately, in only one such occurrence did the ex-slaves who related these actions explain which master owned the children. In this case, two owners who could afford only one slave apiece purchased a couple and shared their offspring.<sup>70</sup> Since most children lived with their mothers, the resolution to this dilemma that interplantation mating must have advanced would be an interesting addition to our knowledge of slave breeding.

Sexual activity was a constant concern of both the slaves and the masters. The emphasis placed upon sexual relationships indicates that they formed an integral aspect of a slave's existence, but slaves' sexual activities cannot be regarded without discussing the role of the masters. The interactions involved in sexual relationships reflect one of the central and most dramatic facts about slavery: whatever a slave did affected the master and whatever a master did affected the slave. If such reciprocal effects were not always apparent, then they may have

<sup>62</sup> *American Slave*, Louisa Everett, Florida, XVII, 127-28. See also *ibid.*, Jim Allen, Mississippi, VII, 4; Mollie Williams, Mississippi, VII, 157-58; Berry Clay, Georgia, XII, 1, 191; William Grose in Drew, *North-side View*, p. 58; Brown, *My Southern Home*, pp. 41-5.

<sup>63</sup> *American Slave*, Charlotte Martin, Florida, XVII, 167; Rias Body, Georgia, XII, 1, 88; John Cole, Georgia, XII, 1, 228.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, Ferebe Rogers, Georgia, XIII, 3, 210; Louis Napoleon, Florida, XVII, 242; Charlotte Martin, Florida, XVII, 167; Douglass, *Narrative of Frederick Douglass*, pp. 74-5; Catterall, *Judicial Cases, Volume II*, pp. 410, 420.

<sup>65</sup> *American Slave*, Winston Davis, Florida, XVIII, 87; Rias Body, Georgia, XII, 1, 88; Willis Cofer, Georgia, XII, 1, 205; Isiah Green, Georgia, XII, 2, 50; Lina Hunter, Georgia, XII, 2, 260.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, Julia Brown, Georgia, XII, 1, 142; Sallie Paul, South Carolina, III, 3, 235; Dirk Walton Young, Georgia, XII, 4, 206; Phil Towns, Georgia XII, 38; Luke Towns, Florida, XVII, 342; Douglas Parish, Florida, XVII, 257; Catterall, *Judicial Cases, Volume II*, p. 408.

<sup>67</sup> Catterall, *Judicial Cases, Volume II*, p. 392; *American Slave*, Berry Clay, Georgia, XII, 1, 191; Pierce Cody, Georgia, XII, 1, 197; Sam Polite, South Carolina, III, 3, 272.

<sup>68</sup> *American Slave*, Charlotte Martin, Florida, XVII, 167.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, Carrie Davis, Alabama, VI, 107; George Womble, Georgia, XIII, 4, 190; Mollie Williams, Mississippi, VII, 158.

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

been obscured because the psychical processes that were involved could not have been as easily discerned as physical exchanges.

Slaves could not completely control their sexual activities any more than they could completely control any other phase of their existence. Although masters were often able to compel submission and breeding, blacks still managed to develop shared community values concerning their sexual relationships. Although blacks were rather free in their premarital sexual activities compared to whites, slaves did adhere to clear codes of behavior. The slave testimonies indicate that frequently there were standard procedures to be followed regarding courtship. Furthermore, the slave writings convincingly demonstrate that families occupied a position of central importance for slave life. Blacks were concerned with marriage despite restrictions against the institution. Slaves considered fidelity and caring for their loved ones a virtue. Perhaps the most telling observation that may be noted is that slaves continued to develop love for one another despite the circumscribed conditions imposed by slavery. Blacks frequently exposed themselves to grave danger in order to remain with their spouses, children and relatives. The slave testimony eloquently attests to the efforts blacks underwent to maintain a home and a family.

If a community is a group of people who develop a shared set of values, then slaves certainly evolved community practices pertaining to their sexual relationships. Although the environment of slavery was not conducive to strengthening traditional family ties, blacks were insistent upon forming familial relationships. Slaves may not have conducted themselves according to white standards of behavior, but their statements eloquently express a code of behavior to which they adhered. Most slaves emphasized family relationships which formed an integral aspect of their existence. This family pride reflects the strong sense of community which slaves developed. Although other aspects of community development may or may not have occurred, slaves clearly formed community values to guide sexual relationships.

