

"IN PRESSING NEED OF CASH": GENDER, SKILL, AND FAMILY PERSISTENCE IN THE DOMESTIC SLAVE TRADE

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Charlotte grew up on a Rockingham County, Virginia, plantation with her parents and sixteen brothers and sisters. Her family was somewhat favored by their slaveholder Charles L. Yancy because they represented nearly half of his enslaved population. They spent most of the day in the fields cultivating wheat, corn, rye, hemp, and tobacco; her father Novel was the "head man" who managed the agricultural laborers. Their lives changed when Yancy, who had developed a drinking problem, decided to employ an overseer. Suddenly, the plantation profits decreased and Charlotte and her family were subjected to four overseers over the course of two or three years. Unfortunately, Yancy's financial troubles continued and he "found himself in pressing need of cash," so Charlotte was sold to the highest bidder on the auction block in Richmond.¹

Charlotte's sale greatly affected her parents and siblings. Her mother, Mary Francis, "show[ed] all the symptoms of a distracted mind and a broken heart" and her father "laboured under great distress." Yancy noticed a change in Novel and asked him to share his feelings; to this he replied:

Why, master, if I should see one of your daughters sold away from you, and you did not ever expect to see her again in this life, I could give a pretty close guess how you felt; and now, if you can just place yourself in my stead, and think how you would feel at a separation such as I had to endure, and then my other children weeping around me, you can tell what the matter is with me.²

As the dialogue continued, the distressed father reminded the slaveholder of his continued faithfulness, hoping that Yancy would understand the reason for his sadness. Acknowledging Novel's loyalty, Yancy justified his decision to sell Charlotte, claiming, "If I have to sell, and must sell, I have to sell to the best advantage." At age 19, and a skilled field hand, Charlotte was one of the most valuable laborers on the estate and brought "the heaviest price"; Yancy believed he had no choice but to sell her first.³ Not quite convinced by this rationale,

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Charlotte's brother J. A. Banks entered the conversation and requested that Yancy sell him next so that his parents would not have to witness repeated acts of sale. To this Yancy replied, "You are about 19 years of age, and the most valuable *man* I have on the farm. I cannot spare *you*, but I have more young women than I need. I must sell some of them."⁴

Southern slaveholders purchased, sold, and traded enslaved black laborers on a daily basis throughout the antebellum period. Historians interested in the economics of slavery have uncovered a wealth of material relating to the domestic slave trade as well as the transatlantic trade, and have debated the overall profitability of this "inhuman bondage."⁵ More recently, Steven Deyle's prizewinning study *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* examined both the "long-distance interstate trade" and the extensive local or "intrastate" trade. Far from being "marginal" to the southern economy, the slave system was an essential element in commercial life. Deyle found that in 1860, the commercial value of the enslaved population "was roughly three times greater than the total amount of all capital, North and South combined, invested in manufacturing, almost three times the amount invested in railroads, and seven times the amount invested in banks." With regard to the slaveholding states, "By 1860 slave property had even surpassed the assessed value of real estate." Historian Herbert Gutman had argued in 1975 that "once every 3.5 minutes, 10 hours a day, 300 days a year, for 40 years, a human being was bought and sold in the antebellum South." However, since that time, historians documenting the domestic slave trade have estimated that Gutman's figures were "too low."⁶

One reason "this species of property" was so valuable was because from 1820 to 1860 prices were increasing. For example, Deyle estimates that from 1820 to 1829, the lowest average price for slaves sold in the New Orleans market was \$617. Between 1850 and 1859, the lowest average price had risen to \$1,046.⁷ With the exception of the studies by Walter Johnson and Edward Baptist, however, there has been little information available about differences in the prices for enslaved males and females.⁸ Part of the reason for this omission is that most studies of slave prices have focused on "prime male slaves."⁹ This has been the case since 1918 when historian U. B. Phillips in *American Negro Slavery* observed that "the only market grade . . . for which basic price tabulations can be made with any confidence is that of young male prime field hands, for these alone may usually be discriminated, even when ages and qualities are not specified."¹⁰ Many of the studies that followed concurred with Phillips and did not bother to analyze prices for bondwomen. However, as Walter Johnson noted, "The entire economy of the antebellum South was constructed upon the idea that the bodies of enslaved people [males *and* females] had a measurable monetary value, whether they were ever actually sold or not."¹¹ Building on this body of scholarship, this essay examines the relationships among gender, skill, family

units, and the price paid for enslaved workers in the U.S. domestic slave trade between 1850 and 1865.

The prices paid for 655 enslaved workers reported in broadsides, slave lists, trading company account books, probate records, and narratives from 1850 to 1865 reveal the complex relationships among many factors, including gender, skill, market conditions, and type of sale. We cannot simply say that slaves were sold because of debt, death, disease, or disobedience. Some, like Charlotte, entered the domestic slave market because of their work skills and age, and thus commanded high prices. Looking at records from Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and Virginia, it is clear that planters like Yancy recognized the value of bondwomen; others, however, dismissed women and concentrated their efforts on selling men. As we delve further into issues on gender, skill, and slave trading, another set of these patterns of sales and pricing can be offered.

One of the most recent contributions to the scholarship on enslaved women is the growing recognition of the value of their labor. In the 1980s and 1990s, historians Deborah Gray White, the late Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Jacqueline Jones, Darlene Clark Hine, Wilma King, and Brenda E. Stevenson investigated various aspects of slave women's labor.¹² More recently, Leslie Schwalm, Jennifer Morgan, Sharla Fett, Marli Weiner, Judith Carney, and I examined enslaved women's labor from household labor to field work, as well as their numerous other activities in the antebellum South, from doctoring to cotton ginning.¹³ Schwalm, Morgan, and I have concluded that on most southern plantations, more women worked in the fields than men. Therefore, we must ask: What was the actual market value of enslaved women? How did planters, traders, and potential buyers determine prices for individual males and females, as well as family groupings, or "sales by lot"?¹⁴ Finally, under what circumstances were the prices paid for "young male prime field hands" lower than those paid for "hearty prime women"?¹⁵

GENDER AND SKILLED LABOR

In early March 1839, Sally, a mulatto field hand at Hampton Point Plantation on St. Simons Island, Georgia, approached her mistress, Frances Kemble, in hopes of changing her work status. According to Kemble, Sally complained about the difficulty of field labor and "begged" to be assigned "some less laborious kind of work" because "hoeing in the field" was too hard. Exhausted from long hours in the cotton fields, Sally suffered from "incessant pain and weakness in her back." Therefore, she asked Kemble if she could "be allowed to learn a trade."¹⁶

In the early decades of the 19th century, bondwomen like Sally understood that skilled labor, especially in the trades, could provide certain physical and material privileges. But the idea of becoming a skilled cotton picker was not

Sally's goal. Essentially, she wanted relief from agricultural labor altogether. From her perspective, bondpeople who learned trades—those who worked as carpenters, coopers, wheelwrights, blacksmiths, or shoemakers—were nonagricultural laborers excused from the harsh rigors of work in the fields. However, most of these traditionally defined trades were reserved for men. Women utilized their nonagricultural skills as nurses, cooks, seamstresses, midwives, and washerwomen, and their agricultural skills as cotton pickers, ginners, and rice threshers. They labored side by side in the fields with their male counterparts and were equally valuable to the plantation work regime.

Although Sally seemed to realize that the skills that some field hands acquired set them apart from other workers, she also must have been aware that enslaved women were often excluded from most trades. Most enslaved women worked in the fields and were valued on the basis of their volume, speed, quality, and endurance in completing their assigned tasks. Many of the large estates in coastal Georgia and South Carolina included populations where bondwomen outnumbered men.¹⁷ The absence of skills did not prevent Sally from making her request, but in the end, she remained in the fields, along with the majority of enslaved females.

Sally's story suggests that bondpeople recognized the benefits and limitations of different types of labor. It also highlights the distinctions between agricultural and nonagricultural labor as well as specialized work. If skill means that a person has the ability to do something well, then some cotton pickers and rice cultivators were certainly "skilled." Slaveholders acknowledged this in their records, but some historians make the mistake of assuming that male artisans represented the only form of skilled labor. For example, slaveholders often assigned various aspects of field labor, from thinning rice stalks to ginning and moting cotton, to specific bondpeople, according to their skills and proficiency and regardless of their sex.¹⁸

Enslaved male and female cotton pickers, for example, displayed great skill and dexterity, and planters and traders valued them for this work. Thus, we cannot continue to assume that the only skilled workers were male artisans. Broadening our definition of "skill" allows us to consider a variety of contributions to the plantation system and makes room for bondwomen's experiences to surface. Women were skilled at agricultural tasks such as cotton picking, cotton ginning, and threshing rice; in addition, they were skilled at the traditional activities associated with women such as cooking, cleaning, sewing, nursing, and weaving. Some lacked agricultural skills, such as the bondwoman named Charity who was killed by her new owner because he was not satisfied "with the manner she used the hoe . . . [therefore he] gave her a blow upon the neck, and she fell dead at his feet." Charity was an elderly woman who had never worked in the fields. Apparently, her lack of training and unfamiliarity with

agricultural labor and implements was reason enough for her new owner to take her life.¹⁹

Field work could be challenging depending on the particular crop, the time of year, the weather, the task, the driver, and a variety of other circumstances. Female cotton pickers worked so hard that enslaved males often held them in high esteem. Former bondman John Brown remembered seeing "slave women, and girls, and even little children, picking the cotton in the fields, till the blood runs from the tips of their fingers." These field workers were frequently "pricked by the hard pods" and still had to drag their baskets of cotton to the scale to meet their daily quotas.²⁰

Some bondpeople had gender-specific responsibilities related to their skills in agricultural and nonagricultural settings. Phillip St. George Cocke, a large slaveholder who owned Belmeade Plantation in Amelia County, Virginia, kept meticulous records of his workforce. The enslaved population at Belmeade in 1854 consisted of 127 women, men, and children.²¹ The gender ratio was fairly balanced (sixty-five males, sixty-one females, and one illegible), and children (under age 15) represented 35 percent of the population. All of the bondpeople at Belmeade over age 15 had specific tasks assigned to them.²² Cocke organized his workers in gender-specific activities, with the exception of field hands. Women served as housemaids, nurses, cooks, seamstresses, laundresses, dairymaids, weavers, spinners, and field hands. Men worked as shoemakers, millers, butlers, shepherds, herders, ploughmen, blacksmiths, gardeners, ox drivers, wagoners, carpenters, and field hands. In addition to work specialization, Cocke assigned prices to every person; these values provide a glimpse into the possible skill levels of these individuals.²³

Because almost all the adult bondpeople at Belmeade had a specific craft and value, we can make some judgments about the values attached to various skills. Payton, a 28-year-old male, had the highest value (\$800) and was listed as an "ox driver." There were three other ox drivers, Dick (18 years old), Henry (25 years old), and Tom (38 years old), but each were valued at \$100 less than Payton. Perhaps Payton was the "head driver," was more experienced, or simply better at driving oxen than the others, which explains the higher value. In this instance, their ages varied so we should not make the assumption that youth played a role in the assigned values. However, four out of the five listed as stone masons, Beverly (24 years old), Alfred (38 years old), Junius (25 years old), and Hanible (40 years old), were all valued the same—\$700. The fifth, Randol, was valued at less, \$400, very likely because he was 66 years old. The enslaved women on the estate were all worth \$400 or less, regardless of whether they served as cooks, seamstresses, weavers, or dairymaids—the same as the field hands. The way planters and slaveholders such as Cocke used gender and gradations in age and skill levels to determine the value of an enslaved worker allows us to better

understand how prices were determined by the buyers and sellers in the slave markets.

PRICES, FAMILY GROUPINGS, AND THE SLAVE MARKET

In *American Negro Slavery*, Phillips argued that prices for enslaved workers fluctuated with the market and went through several changes from 1795 to 1861.²⁴ He also suggested that “artisans often brought twice as much as field hands of similar ages, prime women generally brought three-fourths or four-fifths as much as prime men; boys and girls entering their teens, and men and women entering their fifties, brought about half of prime prices for their sexes.” Phillips also discovered that “infants were generally appraised at about a tenth or an eighth of prime.” Simply put, “the average price for slaves of all ages and both sexes . . . was generally about one-half of the price for male prime field hands.”²⁵ His unit of measure was that of prime male workers, leaving women, children, aged men, or those with nonagricultural labor skills marginalized in his analysis. In order for us to determine the significance of gender, labor, and skill as they relate to purchase prices, each group must receive serious attention.²⁶

Advertisements for upcoming sales emphasized the physical “likeliness” of those placed on the auction block and sometimes included starting bids, prices, and appraised values. J. E. Moses of Lumpkin, Georgia, for example, posted broadsides in November 1859 for “a likely lot of [N]egroes, about 40 in number, embracing every shade and variety” to be sold upon his return from Virginia. Moses had already sold 200 enslaved men and women from this group of “seamstresses, chamber maids, [and] field hands” and proudly declared that all of his previous buyers were satisfied.²⁷ During the same year, John P. Broun, an Alabama slaveholder, advertised the sale of 77 enslaved men, women, and children in Mobile; in addition, he included information in his flyer such as the names and ages of each person. Penciled notes in the margins of the list indicated the sale prices for some individuals or, more frequently, the price of each “lot.” Aranetta and Martha, 25 and 28 years old, respectively, were valued at \$1,300 each, but they were sold in “a likely lot” that included three other women and an infant, all valued at \$3,900. The only man of comparable age with an individual value was 25-year-old John, listed at \$1,600. The \$300 difference in price between Aranetta and John may have something to do with their labor skills. However, Lindy, a young woman aged 17 and at the beginning of her childbearing years, was valued at \$1,600, the same as John, the “prime male slave.”²⁸ Two women were listed as “pregnant”: 17-year-old Adeline and 32-year-old Fanny. However, their individual prices were not listed because these women were sold in lots that very likely included other family members, possibly their children. Fifty-one of “Broun’s Negroes” had their birth month and/or year next to their name, which would have been of interest to potential buyers as they

prepared to attend this upcoming public sale.²⁹ No clear pattern for pricing emerges from these data until we know more about the individuals included in "sales by lots."³⁰

Local newspapers in cities with large slave markets such as Augusta, Richmond, Savannah, Mobile, and Charleston contained numerous notices for upcoming auctions similar to the broadsides J. E. Moses and John Broun posted in 1859. It appears that, at the local level of the domestic slave trade, slaveholders in some cases sold entire families at one time. For example, in an 1860 Savannah newspaper, J. Bryan, a prominent slave trader and auctioneer, announced the sale of "138 Negroes, Accustomed to the Culture of Rice." This descriptive list contained the names, ages, and other remarks about each bondperson.³¹ Bryan also indicated familial relationships by listing the members of family groupings, defined as "a lot." One family included Jimmy, the slave driver, described as a "full hand" who was a "strong, prime and tall, ploughman." His wife, Fatima, was also rated as a "full hand" and a "hearty prime woman." Jimmy and Fatima had two "fine" children, Tira and Cain.³² According to handwritten notes on the original document, this family sold for \$2,340. The penciled-in prices along the margins do not necessarily reflect the amount that each family member was worth and were included in the "lot" for purposes of the sale.³³ Such figures on the document could be the notes of a potential buyer computing what he would pay for the slaves described, or they might reflect the appraised value for entire families. The presence of such notations shows a concern for costs, appraised values, gender, and skill.³⁴

Other members of the families on this list of enslaved workers had specific skills worth noting in the "remarks" column. Janvier, a 57-year-old male, was rated as a "one-half hand" and was described as a "Fair Carpenter-House builder—Hearty old man"; his wife, Hannah, age 48, who was also a "one-half hand," appeared as "Delicate, but well disposed—good for light work." They had six children. Handwritten notes suggest that the entire family was to be sold as a lot valued at \$5,175.³⁵ Some planters questioned and commented on the rates being charged based on the physical abilities and disabilities of the individuals in the lots. Diana, advertised in the same notice, was a 46-year-old "three-fourth hand." The remarks next to her name indicate that the traders thought she was feigning illness to avoid being sold: "Complaining, *but looks well*."³⁶ The fate of these families, and the other enslaved laborers mentioned in this advertisement, is unknown, but the information providing their ages, health, skills, and family ties is very useful and allows us to understand the pricing patterns.³⁷ Indeed, we can learn "a lot" about the value placed on enslaved families and the skills each member possessed by comparing the appraisers' figures with prices paid by purchasers.

When H. N. Templeman and William H. Goodwin established a slave trading company in Richmond, Virginia, they tracked their profits carefully. Their firm

documented bondwomen and bondmen by their names, ages, price paid or cost, purchaser, and the price sold. In September 1850, Templeman transported thirty-eight enslaved men, women, and children to the lower South in hopes of selling them all "to the highest bidder." The group consisted of twenty-one women, thirteen men, and four unidentified individuals ranging in age from 1 to 30. It appears that Templeman and Goodwin made larger profit margins from bondwomen, if purchase prices are compared to sales prices. This was the case even when enslaved males were purchased for more. For example, Landon, a 20-year-old male, was the most expensive enslaved worker, purchased for \$825 and sold for \$1,000, making a \$175 profit. Susan Cocke, an 18-year-old bondwoman, was priced slightly less to begin with at \$817, but sold for \$1,300, bringing the firm \$483 in profit. Other similarly large profit margins came from sales of bondwomen and their offspring. Caroline and her children, George and Eleanora, purchased for \$800, were sold for \$2,300; Templeman and Goodwin made \$1,500 from this enslaved family. Even though we do not know to which lower South markets these individuals and families were sold, we do know that Templeman and Goodwin and other slave traders in the 1850s profited more by selling slave laborers in family lots; and the returns on bondwomen (and sometimes their children) were often higher than returns on bondmen.³⁸ It is likely that because of higher profits, this firm chose to bring a larger number of bondwomen south. In addition to profits, other patterns emerge from these data.

Age and sex often determined how much profit Templeman and Goodwin made off the sale of enslaved females and their children. For example, on 14 January 1851, 17-year-old Henry was purchased for \$700, whereas Mary Rose, the same age and purchased on 1 January 1851, cost \$605. Templeman and Goodwin made \$280 and \$225 profits on Henry and Mary Rose. Sometimes the younger the person, the more varied the price. In November and December of 1850 and January of 1851, three 12-year-old girls were sold by Templeman—Jane (\$425), Sarah (\$600), and Amanda (\$450)—along with Henry Davis, a young male (\$500). According to the firm's records, the Henry Davis sale brought the lowest profit (\$100), whereas the sale of the girls brought considerably more: Jane brought \$225 in profit; Sarah, \$200; and Amanda, \$175.³⁹

Most slave traders placed higher values on their bondmen. According to an 1862 property list from Savannah, Georgia, a planter and slaveholder named Johnston included the prices of bondpeople aged 17 to 40. The males in this age group were valued at \$800 to \$1,500, whereas females of the same age were all valued at \$800.⁴⁰ Enoch and Martha Calloway of Washington, Georgia, also valued their bondmen higher. In 1859, 27-year-old Sarah and Aaron were priced at \$1,000 and \$1,500, respectively.⁴¹ John Dickinson, owner of Berry Plain Plantation in King George County, Virginia, did the same in his inventory dated 1 February 1855. At 35 years of age, Frank was worth \$700, whereas Matilda,

who was likely past childbearing age, was valued at \$300. Four years later, Frank was worth \$850 and Matilda \$350. In all probability, Matilda's lower appraised value may also have something to do with her labor skills (or lack thereof).⁴²

At Retreat Plantation in coastal Georgia in 1859, bondwomen had higher prices than bondmen up until the age of 20, and equal and sometimes higher prices until age 30. Pleasant, Elizabeth, Mary, Matilda, Clara, and Bella were all between 15 and 20 years old, and each was priced at \$1,000. Richard Jr., the only male in this age group, had the same price, but most of the other males were priced at \$500 to \$700.⁴³ Men and women from ages 21 to 30 often commanded the same price and the majority of the eighteen listed in this category were valued at \$1,000 (see figure 1).⁴⁴ Thus, when examining the individual prices based on age and gender, bondwomen on this plantation had equal or higher values than their male counterparts throughout their childbearing years. Plantation records, including letters, account books, probate records, and bills of sale, revealed that Anna Page King, the manager of this estate, acted at times sympathetically toward the bondwomen. On several occasions, she pointed out the women's skills and their value to the estate and commented on their heavy workloads and their compromised health in letters to her husband and children. She often viewed slave women as her "right hand" and was greatly saddened by their deaths.⁴⁵ King's comments reveal that enslaved women were valued for their labor skills on this estate and in some cases priced higher because of their talents and/or reproductive abilities.

These examples tell us that slaveholders and traders priced enslaved males and females differently depending on their perceived market value. Also, Templeman and Goodwin's prices and profits, as well as the slave lists from Johnston, Calloway, Dickinson, and King suggest that the prices for "prime male hands" were only one measure of the perceived market value of bondwomen and their children. Bondpeople's skills, as well as the time period, market conditions, and type of sale (individual or sale by lot), were additional factors that influenced their value to slave traders; more data is needed to determine the complexities of the relationships among price, gender, skill, and types of sales.

The slave market itself represented a stressful environment for bondpeople. Several historians have provided graphic descriptions of these distressful sites of cruelty and oppression and they detail how bondwomen and men were poked, prodded, fondled, and touched inappropriately by potential buyers who wanted to physically inspect their future investments.⁴⁶ During these humiliating scenes, traders focused on their potential profits, while the bondpeople, women in particular, did all they could to maintain their dignity. John Brown, a former slave, recalled that "the price a slave fetches depends, in a great measure, upon the general appearance he or she presents to the intending buyer. A man or a woman may be well made, and physically faultless in every respect, yet their value be impaired by a sour look, or a dull, vacant stare, or a general dullness of

demeanour.”⁴⁷ P. M. Tabb and Son, a slave trading company in Richmond, Virginia, confirmed this notion that price often depended on seeing the bondperson firsthand. Responding to inquiries made by slaveholder Robert W. Carter about the likelihood of selling specific enslaved males and females, the traders noted on 18 November 1846 that “it is impossible to give any reliable information as to what price any slave will bring til the property is actually in market.”⁴⁸ Other traders gave rough estimates of the selling prices of prospective bondwomen and bondmen. A. J. McElveen of Sumpterville, South Carolina, in a letter to his partner Z. B. Oakes dated 18 August 1853, discussed the likelihood of purchasing an enslaved female: “I am offered to day a woman 25 or 28 years old tolerable likely Good field hand. She is well formed and Stout built Sound and [hearty]; her teeth a little defective also a tolerable Good cook; washes well also a Good Stearcher [*sic*] and Ironer, they are no doubt in all these qualifications. I can [buy] her for \$750 I think the market will afford the price.”⁴⁹ McElveen’s detailed information about this woman’s multiple skills and physical characteristics guaranteed them a profit should they purchase her.

On the other hand, problems sometimes arose when those bondpeople to be auctioned off had physical or psychological challenges to their “soundness.” When slave owners or traders were dishonest about the “soundness” (or unsoundness) of bondpeople, disappointed and deceived purchasers often took them to court. Some cases, particularly those involving purchases based on falsified information, went to the state courts. In *Callaway v. Jones* (1856), two Wilkes County, Georgia, residents went to court to settle a disagreement relating to the health of two enslaved females. The plaintiff, William Callaway, served as the administrator for W. P. Gammage, who was unsatisfied with the condition of Tenah and Rachel, whom he purchased in 1850 from Jones and Quattlebum, the defendants. Although the latter provided a “written warranty of soundness” at the time of the sale, Gammage discovered six years later that Tenah had a “disease of the womb, and Rachel . . . a defect in one of her eyes.”⁵⁰ According to an earlier decision by the court, a “warranty of soundness” meant that “patent defects to which the attention of the buyer is called, and against which he disclaims all purpose of holding the seller responsible, are not covered by a warranty of soundness.”⁵¹ Therefore, Gammage could not recoup his payment to Jones. He believed that the more appropriate value of Tenah and Rachel was \$425, not the \$1,100 he paid, and felt that he should not be responsible for the remaining \$675 balance left on the two women.⁵² The judgment rendered included the following:

As to the womb disease alleged to have existed in one of the women at the time of the sale, the denial is, and of necessity must be, a mere matter of opinion—no disease is more subtle; none effects the whole system so completely; and consequently, none is more difficult to detect. And as to the defect in the eye, of the other woman, while the fact is admitted, it is insisted, that the blemish was obvious, and was not, therefore, covered by the general warranty of soundness.⁵³

Clearly, Callaway and Gammage brought the suit because they thought the court would rule in their favor; it is likely that Gammage purchased Tenah under the assumption that she would have children. After learning that she had a "disease of the womb," Gammage realized that she was not capable of producing slave property for him and did not want to pay full price for her "services." This case demonstrates that physical health and the reproductive value of bondwomen were important enough for owners to take traders or other owners to court. As one former bondman put it, southern slave owners were more than willing to tell "lies for the accommodation of their own pockets."⁵⁴

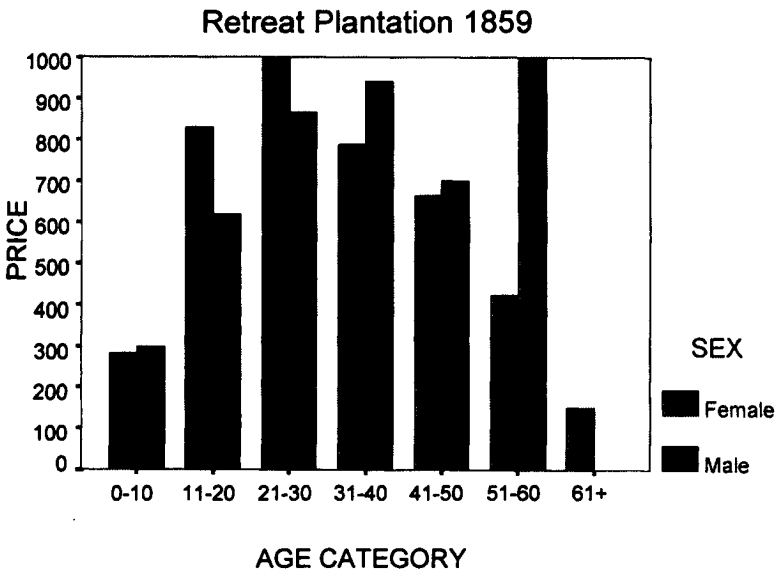
CONCLUSION

In his 2005 study of the domestic slave trade, Steven Deyle drew a distinction between the interregional and intrastate slave trade, pointing out that "of the more than 2 million slaves sold in [the United States] between 1820 and 1860, more than two-thirds were sold to local buyers. This includes intrastate sales between planters, commercial sales through agents or brokers, and court-ordered sales."⁵⁵ Given the volume of the domestic slave trade, enslaved African American families faced the very real possibility of separation and breakup as a result of slave owners' and traders' participation in the interregional and/or local slave markets. Moreover, in earlier studies of the operations of the mid-19th-century slave market, it was argued that the "prime male hand" was the dominant measure for determining prices for enslaved workers.

The historical evidence on the operations of the domestic slave trade between 1850 and 1865 discussed in this essay revealed that a number of factors determined prices paid for enslaved workers, including gender, age, skill, and type of sale; and that some enslaved females or "hearty prime women" considered "full hands" had market values comparable to that of young males. This essay also showed that in both the local and interregional slave trade, entire family groupings were sold in highly profitable "lots" and, in those instances, the value of the lot increased based on the number of females of childbearing age included. There is a need for more research on the types of sales conducted in the domestic slave trade because the evidence unearthed in this study suggests that documenting "sales by lot" will help us better understand the persistence of nuclear and extended family patterns among enslaved African Americans, despite the devastating and inhumane conditions created by the domestic slave trade, the American system of slavery, and slaveholders who were often "in pressing need of cash."

Figure 1

Mean Slave Price By Age and Sex



NOTES

¹J. W. C. Pennington, *A Narrative of Events of the Life of J. H. Banks, an Escaped Slave, from the Cotton State, Alabama, in America* (Liverpool, England, 1861), 1–26.

²*Ibid.*, 19.

³*Ibid.*, 19.

⁴*Ibid.*, 21–22, emphasis in the original.

⁵Frederic Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South* (1931; reprinted Columbia, SC, 1996) and Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (Boston, MA, 1974), 67. For other studies on slave profitability and prices, see Alfred H. Conrad and John R. Meyer, *The Economics of Slavery and Other Studies in Econometric History* (Chicago, 1964); U. B. Phillips, “The Economic Cost of Slaveholding in the Cotton Belt,” *Political Science Quarterly* 20 (June 1905): 257–75 and *American Negro Slavery* (1918; repr. Baton Rouge, LA, 1966); Laurence J. Kotlikoff, “The Structure of Slave Prices in New Orleans, 1804–1862,” *Economic Inquiry* 17 (1979): 496–518; Peter Passell and Gavin Wright, “The Effects of Pre-Civil War Territorial Expansion on the Price of Slaves,” *The Journal of Political Economy* 80:6 (1972): 1188–1202; Laurence J. Kotlikoff and Sebastian Pinera, “The Old South’s Stake in the Inter-Regional Movement of Slaves, 1850–1860,” *Journal of Economic History* 37 (No. 2, 1977): 434–50; Richard Sutch, “The Breeding of Slaves for Sale and the Westward Expansion of Slavery, 1850–1860,” *Southern Economic History Project Working Paper* 10 (Berkeley, CA, 1972); Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson, “British Abolition and Its Impact on Slave Prices Along the Atlantic Coast of Africa, 1793–1850,” *Journal of Economic History* 55:1 (1995): 98–119; Herman Freudenberger and Jonathan B. Pritchett, “The Domestic United States Slave Trade: New Evidence,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 21 (No. 3, 1991): 447–77; Lewis Cecil Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC, 1933), 663–67; Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison, WI, 1989); Peter C. Mancall, Joshua L. Rosenbloom, and Thomas Joseph Weiss, “Slave Prices in the Lower South, 1722–1815,” *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper* 120 (Cambridge, MA, 2000); Mancall, Rosenbloom,

and Weiss, "Slave Prices and the South Carolina Economy, 1700–1809," *Journal of Economic History* 61 (September 2001): 616–39; Robert H. Gudmestad, *A Troublesome Commerce: The Transformation of the Interstate Slave Trade* (Baton Rouge, 2003); Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery* (New York, 1989); David Eltis, Frank D. Lewis, and Kenneth L. Sokoloff, eds., *Slavery in the Development of the Americas* (Cambridge, MA, 2004); Walter Johnson, ed., *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas* (New Haven, CT, 2004); and David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York, 2006).

⁶Herbert Gutman, *Slavery and the Numbers Game: A Critique of Time on the Cross* (Urbana, IL, 1975), 124. Steven Deyle argues that Gutman's figures were too low. For scholarship that has revised Gutman's figures see Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (New York, 2005), 60, 172 and 291–96; Michael Tadman, "The Interregional Slave Trade in the History and Myth-Making of the U.S. South," in Johnson, *The Chattel Principle*, 117–42; and Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA, 1999).

⁷Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 140.

⁸Johnson, *Soul by Soul* and Edward E. Baptist, "'Cuffy,' 'Fancy Maids,' and 'One-Eyed Men': Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States," *The American Historical Review* 106 (December 2001): 1619–50. For a discussion of gender and slave prices see, Daina Ramey Berry, "'We'm Fus' Rate Bargain': Value, Labor, and Price in a Georgia Slave Community" in Johnson, *The Chattel Principle*, 55–71.

⁹Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*; Mancall, Rosenbloom, and Weiss, "Slave Prices and the South Carolina Economy"; Eltis, *Slavery in the Development of the Americas*.

¹⁰Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, 370.

¹¹Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 25, emphasis added.

¹²Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (1985; reprinted New York, 1999); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1988); Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, From Slavery to Freedom* (New York, 1985); Brenda E. Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York, 1996) and "Distress and Discord in Virginia Slave Families, 1830–1860," in *In Joy and in Sorrow: Women, Family, and Marriage in the Victorian South, 1830–1900*, ed. Carol Blesser (New York, 1991); Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," *Signs* 14 (Summer 1989): 912–20; and Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington, IN, 1995).

¹³Leslie Schwalm, *"A Hard Fight for We": Women's Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (Urbana, IL, 1997); Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Gender and Reproduction in the Making of New World Slavery* (Philadelphia, PA, 2004); Sharla M. Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002); Judith A. Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Cambridge, MA, 2001); Marli F. Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina*, (Urbana, IL, 1998); and Daina Ramey Berry, *"Swing the Sickle for the Harvest Is Ripe": Gender and Slavery in Antebellum Georgia* (Urbana, IL, forthcoming).

¹⁴Sales by "lot" often involved families or groups that planters placed in the market as one unit. Although some slaveholders made specific instructions not to separate families at auctions, it appears that sometimes market trends or the needs of individual buyers caused separations to occur despite the sentiments of the previous owner. Thomas D. Russell addresses family separation in court sales. See Russell, "Articles Sell Best Singly: The Disruption of Slave Families at Court Sales," *Utah Law Review* (No. 4, 1996): 1161–1209.

¹⁵Quote taken from "Descriptive List of 138 Negroes," J. K. Williams Collection, MS 83.1.2, Coastal Georgia Historical Society, MS 83.1.2. The ad noted that the sale would take place on 15–20 January 1860.

¹⁶Frances Anne Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838–1839* (Athens, GA, 1984), 229–30.

¹⁷For work on the female majority in agricultural labor, see Carney, *Black Rice*; Leigh Ann Pruneau, "All the Time Is Work Time: Gender and the Task System on Antebellum Low Country Rice Plantations," Ph.D. diss., University of Arizona, 1997; Schwalm, *"A Hard Fight for We"*; and Daina L. Ramey, "'She Do a Heap of Work': An Analysis of Female Slave Labor on Glynn County Rice and Cotton Plantations," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 82 (Winter 1998): 707–34. For the importance of enslaved women's reproductive labor, see Morgan, *Laboring Women*.

¹⁸For an expanded discussion of skill, see Berry, *"Swing the Sickle,"* chapters 1 and 2.

¹⁹Emily Burke, *Pleasure and Pain: Reminiscences of Georgia in the 1840s* (1850; reprinted Savannah, GA, 1978), 60.

²⁰John Brown, *Slave Life in Georgia: A Narrative of the Life, Sufferings, and Escape of John Brown, a Fugitive Slave Now in England* (London, 1855), 171–72.

²¹"Inventory of Slaves, 1854," St. George Cocke Family Papers, MSS# 1 C6455a1, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA.

²²Tyler, an 11-year-old "stable boy," was the only person under age 15 with a specialized occupation listed.

²³Belmeade women occupied the following positions: housemaids (4), nurses (2), cooks (1), seamstresses (2), laundresses (1), dairy maids (1), hand's cooks (2), weavers (2), spinners (5), and field hands (12). The men on this estate served as blacksmiths (2), gardeners (1), ploughmen (7), ox drivers (4), wagoners (2), carpenters (3), stone masons (5), carriage drivers (1), shoemakers (2), hog herders (1), cow herders (1), butlers (1), shepherds (1), waiters (2), field hands (8), and millers (1).

²⁴Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, 370–75. He found that the slave prices were directly affected by the market in cotton. From 1795 to 1803, after American Revolution, there was a slight increase in prices. However, the prices dropped by the War of 1812. At the close of the war, there was a sharp increase from 1814 to 1818 until the Panic of 1819–1823, when prices fell considerably. The next major shift was an increase that peaked in 1837, but the panic that same year led to decreases again. The market was not stable until the mid-1840s; after that decade, there were constant increases until secession in 1861.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 370–71.

²⁶Economic historians have done good work in this area but there is still much more work needed on enslaved women and children. See, for example, Kotlikoff, "The Structure of Slave Prices"; Kotlikoff and Pinera, "The Old South's Stake in the Inter-Regional Movement of Slaves"; Freudenberger and Pritchett, "The Domestic United States Slave Trade"; and Mancall, Rosenbloom, and Weiss, "Slave Prices in the Lower South, 1722–1815." Alan L. Olmstead and Paul W. Rhode recently compiled a data set and have done a fine analysis on gender and cotton-picking productivity in the South as part of a working papers series. See, for example, Olmstead and Rhode, "'Wait a Cotton Pickin' Minute!': A New View of Slave Productivity," (Davis, CA, 2005); contact authors for permission to use and/or cite this paper (olmstead@ucdavis.edu and prhode@email.unc.edu).

²⁷Advertising Ephemera Collection, Database #B0430, Emergence of Advertising On-Line Project, John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising, and Marketing History, Duke University Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/ea>.

²⁸*Ibid.*, Database #B0437.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰For a discussion of individual slave sales, see Russell, "Articles Sell Best Singly."

³¹"Remarks" included information about health, skill, and/or temperament. See "Descriptive List of 138 Negroes." The ad noted that the sale would take place on 15–20 January 1860.

³²"Descriptive List of 138 Negroes." Typically, slaves aged 10 and younger did not have rates.

³³For the purpose of this study, "price" refers to the appraised value according to the planters' judgment. "Cost" represents the amount a person paid to purchase the slave(s).

³⁴See Berry, "'We'm Fus' Rate Bargain," for further discussion of prices and market values for enslaved people.

³⁵"Descriptive List of 138 Negroes."

³⁶"Descriptive List of 138 Negroes," emphasis added.

³⁷For more on these "remarks," see Johnson, *Soul by Soul*.

³⁸Templeman and Goodwin Account Book, #M-3508, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC.

³⁹*Ibid.* Amanda and Jane were sold on 12 November 1850, Sarah on 20 December 1850, and Henry David on 8 January 1851.

⁴⁰"List of Property Belonging to Mr. Johnston," Johnston Family Papers, #1629, courtesy of Hargarett Library, University of Georgia, Athens, GA.

⁴¹"Slaves of Enoch Calloway Passed on to His Wife, Martha Calloway, 1859" Wilkes County, Georgia, Ordinary Estate Records, Georgia Archives, Morrow, GA.

⁴²"Account Book, 1855–1890," of John Fayette Dickinson, in the Dickinson Family Papers, MSS 1 D5607 a6, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA.

⁴³See Table 1, "Appraisal of the Estate of Anna Matilda Page King, 1859," Glynn County, Georgia, Court of Ordinary, Georgia Archives, Morrow, GA.

⁴⁴There were eighteen enslaved persons between the ages of 21 and 30. In this group, ten were male and eight were female. All of the males, with the exception of Edinborough (no value) and Frank (\$800), were worth

\$1,000. All of the females, with the exception of Clementine Jr. (\$800), were valued at \$1,000; Table 1, "Appraisal of the Estate of Anna Matilda Page King, 1859."

⁴⁵See the lengthy discussion of Retreat Plantation in Berry, "*Swing the Sickle*." For a discussion of slave and free health on Retreat Plantation, see Daina Ramey Berry and Melanie Pavich-Lindsay, "'On Saturday Her Fever Returned and We Could Do Nothing to Save Her': Women, Disease, and Death on a Georgia Sea Island Plantation," paper presented at the Sixth Southern Conference on Women's History, Athens, GA, 7 June 2003. The original letters are housed in the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC. For a published set of the King Family letters, see Melanie Pavich-Lindsay, *Anna: The Letters of a St. Simons Island Plantation Mistress, 1817-1859* (Athens, GA, 2002).

⁴⁶Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South*; Deyle, *Carry Me Back*; Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*; Johnson, *Soul by Soul*; Baptist, "'Cuffy,' 'Fancy Maids,' and 'One-Eyed Men,'" and Berry, "We'm Fus' Rate Bargain."

⁴⁷Brown, *Slave Life in Georgia*, 115.

⁴⁸Beverly Randolph Wellford Papers, Mss1 W4597, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA.

⁴⁹Edmund L. Drago, ed., *Broke by the War: Letters of a Slave Trader* (Columbia, SC, 1991), 49.

⁵⁰*Callaway v. Jones*, 19 GA 277 (1856). For a brief overview of this case, see Helen Tunnickliff Catterall, ed., *Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro* (Washington, DC, 1926-37), 47-48.

⁵¹*Callaway v. Jones*, 278.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 277-78.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 278.

⁵⁴Pennington, *Narrative of Events of the Life of J. H. Banks*, 27.

⁵⁵Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 157.