Consuming Bodies, Producing Race:
Slavery and Diet in the Antebellum South, 1830-1865

By

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Abstract

This dissertation demonstrates that eating was more than a biological function, or “mere sustenance,” in the nineteenth-century U.S. South; the food a person consumed established one’s place in society’s hierarchy, fueled political debates over slavery, and contributed to the idea that black and white bodies were innately different. Framed methodologically, around the fields of U.S. history and African American Studies, “Consuming Bodies, Producing Race” interrogates eating by exploring the symbolic meanings that slaves and slaveholders attached to consumption. Eating provides a way to interrogate another side of enslaved cultural practice, underscoring the way people of African descent, in the words of Bernice Johnson Regan, “expanded the terrain of culture” within the oppressive confines of white supremacy in the U.S. What slaves considered edible went beyond hog meat and wild game. Thus, the eating habits of slaves shed light on their understandings of their own bodies in the face of violently enforced white ownership. Ultimately, this dissertation seeks to show how foodways, and eating in particular, provided an ideological basis for enslavement.

Table of Contents

v
Acknowledgements
iii

Introduction
1

Chapter 1
Black Bodies, Science, and the Defense of Slavery in the Cotton South
14

Chapter 2
"A Republic of Porkdom": Racialized Bodies, Economic Hierarchies, and Pork Consumption in the Old South
50

Chapter 3
In Search of Good Earth: Geophagy and Culture in the African Diaspora
84

Chapter 4
Narratives of Consumption: Provisions and Politics in the Antebellum Period
113

Conclusion
151

Works Cited
157

Introduction

For young Br'er Buzzard, mealtime was always a challenging experience. Due to his age and workload he received a meager ration of salt pork and greens. The daily provisions so troubled him that he often complained while eating, "Hit's rough, Hit's rough. Not 'nough grease aroun' Ter make hit scarce go down!"[1] Work for the young turkey buzzard largely centered on the big house, where he labored as a waiter. Among his various daily tasks, he was responsible for feeding the geese on the plantation. This job frustrated Buzzard who resented the generous and sumptuous fare provided to the geese.

Everything changed for the young bird, however, when a drove of buzzards flew by his plantation. They told him that Sister Cow was dead, and they were going to feast on her remains. The timing of this news was fortuitous. The buzzards flew by just as young buzzard was sitting down to eat his meal of boiled greens. As usual, the tough greens were difficult to swallow, and he openly complained about the coarseness of his food. Hearing these complaints, the other buzzards overhead encouraged Br'er Buzzard to join them. Tired of the toil and frustrated by the fare, Br'er Buzzard took to the air with the other birds in search of fresh meat. Brother Buzzard's decision to fly away was no small matter. No longer would he be a waiter in the big house; instead, he was now became a part of the drove of buzzards. His quest for better food spurred a physical transformation and the once all-white bird turned as one version of the tale concludes, " blacker'n airy one of de drove."[2]

Folk tales like "Br'er Buzzard's Fust Taste" are part of a larger body of enslaved folklore commonly called trickster tales. The trickster tale tradition within the Atlantic world can be traced back to continental Africa. This trickster tradition made its way across the Atlantic Ocean

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[1] Martha Young, *Plantation Bird Legends* (New York: R.H. Russell Publisher, 1902), 32.

[2] Young, *Plantation Bird Legends*, 38.

during the slave trade, and it was common throughout the Caribbean and the United States. Frequently, amoral trickster tales chronicled the triumph of the young and weak over the strong. Moreover, in the United States these trickster tales commonly explored the themes of sex and food.[3] Folklorist Martha Young collected "Br'er Buzzard's Fust Taste" shortly after the end of the Civil War. As a plantation owner's daughter, Young joined Joel Chandler Harris in seeking to preserve the folklore of former slaves who continued residing near her family's cotton plantation.[4]

"Br'er Buzzard's Fust Taste" is striking because food plays a central role in driving the narrative. Young Buzzard's discomfort quickly becomes apparent at the opening of the tale, suggesting that he is both poorly fed and inadequately provisioned. Br'er Buzzard affirms that his food is difficult to digest and that there was not enough.[5] Thus, the folktale begins by addressing the issue of scarcity within the slave community. In particular, it shows that Br'er Buzzard does not receive enough meat with his meal. Since many folktales were performed orally for audiences of children, it is possible that "Br'er Buzzard's Fust Taste" is drawing attention to the lean rations that children on many cotton plantations received before they began

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[3] For more on African folklore, see Michael Angelo Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 199-200; Roger Abrahams, *African Folktales* (New York: Random House, 2011). For a more thorough analysis of the African American trickster tradition, see Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 79-135.

[4] Martha Young, a native of Alabama, was a contemporary of Joel Chandler Harris. She is best known for her compilations of black America folklore from Alabama. See William Stanley Hoole, *Martha Young: Alabama's Foremost Folklorist* (University, Ala.: Confederate Pub. Co., 1982). Young notes that she first heard "Buzzard's Fust Taste" from her African American nursemaid, who recited the story to children in the slave quarters.

[5] Op. Cit.

performing field labor around the age of nine.[6] Subsisting largely on diets of corn, they ate meals of buttermilk and cornbread, since pork was typically reserved for field workers.

The folk tale also draws attention to the differences in the food consumed by different groups on the plantation. Although Br'er Buzzard had no choice but to subsist on lean rations, he watched as others on the plantation grew fat on the food they ate. Differences in diet influenced bodily appearance, which can be seen by comparing the bodies of Brother Buzzard and the geese under his charge. While buzzard's body was lean, reflecting the meager rations he received from his owner, the bodies of the geese were rotund and healthy. The comparisons of these animal bodies suggest the ways that the fare of slaves encoded the racial hierarchy; differences in diet shed light on how access to food could be shaped by hierarchy as well. In the folktale, the geese do not perform any labor, but they still receive better provisions than Br'er Buzzard, who worked daily as a waiter on the plantation. By drawing attention to inequalities in eating, the folk tale highlights the link between diet and status.

The conclusion of "Buzzard's Fust Taste" raises numerous questions about the relationship between eating and the body. The turning point occurs when Br'er Buzzard takes to the air to join the other buzzards. Deciding to leave behind the plantation and his meager daily ration, he sets off to join the other birds in feasting on the remains of the recently departed Sister Cow. This change in diet leads to a bodily transformation. The once lean white bird now becomes larger and changes colors. The change in food leads to a rapid physical maturation and Br'er Buzzard takes on the appearance of a full-grown black buzzard, suggesting that for enslaved men and women, eating could have powerful symbolic significance. Slaves' access to food was, in part, shaped by slave owners' regulation of diet. Nonetheless, like Br'er Buzzard,

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[6] Marie Jenkins Schwartz, *Born in Bondage: Growing up Enslaved in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001), 82-83, 131-154.

enslaved men and women could take measures to negotiate control over their eating and their bodies. Their efforts to do so is a key element of this dissertation, which seeks to contribute to the fields of African American and United States history through an interrogation of the historical relationship between race, diet and slavery in the Cotton South. As antebellum scientists encoded racial discourse on the bodies of slaves, they also provided a rhetorical basis for Southern bondage during a period of increased sectional tension. Concerns about race and embodiment likewise informed discourse about slave provisions, and even enslaved rations came to buttress support for Southern bondage. Nonetheless, eating also provided a way to affirm enslaved understanding about embodiment and diet, and also to challenge pro-slavery claims.

Eating, Slavery and the Cotton South

Cotton cultivation spread quickly throughout the "Southern Interior" between 1810 and about 1840 following the defeat of Southeastern Native Americans. As white slave owners and their slaves began making their way south, a well-defined region called the "Black Belt" took shape, developing into the South's largest cotton-growing region. Spanning from eastern South Carolina to eastern Texas, the Black Belt used slave labor to cultivate over three million bales of cotton annually by the mid-1800s.[7] Slave labor shaped all aspects of social, economic, and political relations in the region. "From the most intimate connections between men and women

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[7] Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004),166; Anthony Gene Carey, *Parties, Slavery, and the Union in Antebellum Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 16.

to the most public ones between ruler and ruled," historian Ira Berlin writes, "all relationships mimicked those of slavery."[8]

Within the Black Belt, a rigid social hierarchy affected nearly every aspect of life, including the Southern table. Anthropologist Sidney Mintz notes, "For us humans, then, eating is never a 'purely biological' activity (whatever 'purely biological' means). The foods eaten have histories associated with the pasts of those who eat them; the techniques employed to find, process, prepare, serve, and consume the foods are all culturally variable, with histories of their own."[9] In the Cotton South before the Civil War, eating held important cultural, social, and political significance that reveals the dynamics between African-American slaves and white slave owners. Among the more affluent slaveholders, dining was a sign of social standing. Travel accounts written during the antebellum period describe elaborate dinners where fine china was spread on tables and large buffets known as "groaning boards" featured a variety of different meats and vegetables usually prepared by bondswomen. These large meals came to symbolize the wealth and status of the Black Belt's largest slaveholders. Although smaller slave owners seldom held such extravagant dinners, many consumed a varied diet that included fresh meat or game and vegetables.[10] By contrast, slaves throughout the Black Belt received more monotonous diets due to planter regulation, and despite the intense labor demands. Although some slave owners allowed bondsmen and women to raise chickens or plant gardens, this practice was not

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[8] Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 9.

[9] Sidney Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture and the Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 7.

[10] Joe Gray Taylor, *Eating, Drinking, and Visiting in the South: An Informal History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 37-68; Marcie Cohen Ferris, *The Edible South: The Power of Food and the Making of an American Region* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 7-47.

widespread. Slave owners frequently sought to use all available land for the cultivation of cotton.[11]

Increased interests in slave management and agricultural reform in the antebellum period spurred debates about managing the fare of enslaved men and women, especially those who worked as cotton laborers. Writing in farm journals, slaveholders strategized about the best ways to provision slave laborers. Joining in these discussions, Southern physicians frequently called for greater monitoring of enslaved eating in order to promote soundness in slaves. Collectively, these public discussions reveal a consistent awareness of the connection between diet, the bodies of slaves, and cotton production.

Examining eating practice provides a way to interrogate what Feminist theorist Susan Bordo refers to as "body politics." The phrase draws attention to symbolic ways that enslaved corporeality was central to Southern bondage. Transforming the older trope of the body politic, theorist Bordo invokes a highly gendered "politics of the body."[12] "Feminism," Bordo writes, "imagined the human body as itself a politically inscribed entity, its physiology and morphology shaped by histories and practices of containment and control—from foot-binding and corseting to rape and battering to compulsory heterosexuality, forced sterilization, unwanted pregnancy, and (in the case of the African American slave woman) explicit commodification."[13] Emphasizing bodily practice provides a way of acknowledging the enslaved people as more active agents in the economy of slavery. This dissertation looks at the relationship between

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[11] John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 158-159; Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2013), 176-208.
[12] Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, 10th ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 15-21.

[13] Ibid., 21.

bodies and enslavement by interrogating how eating functioned to buttress defenses of Southern bondage. Understanding the significance of eating promotes deeper understandings of the significance of the enslaved body as a site of both oppression and resistance.

Food, History and Slavery (Historiography)

This dissertation brings together two fields of study: the history of food and the history of the body. In the early twenty-first century, food history has attracted significant scholarly attention, but the relationship between diet and enslavement remains understudied.[14] A few of the pioneering scholars writing on slavery in the American South paid tangential attention to diet. Historian Kenneth Stampp's *Peculiar Institution,* for example, concluded that slaveholder regulation of diet could lead to neglect.[15] Writing two decades later, Eugene Genovese offered a comparative analysis of slave and European working-class diets. He concluded, "The slaves' basic ration of a half-pound of low-grade pork was certainly miserable, but the slaveholders knew very well that it was as good as or better than workers and peasants were getting elsewhere."[16] While acknowledging that slaves were underfed, Genovese raised new questions by suggesting that the diets of slaves were perhaps better than European working classes because of weekly rations of meat. These early examinations of diet and slavery focused largely on nutrition and provided a material analysis of eating.

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[14] For example, the most recent scholarship on African American history and food focuses largely on the twentieth century; see Rebecca Sharpless, *Cooking in Other Women's Kitchens: Domestic Workers in the South,1865-1960* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010). Similarly, other works focus the majority of their analysis on postbellum foodways; see Frederick Douglass Opie, *Hog & Hominy: Soul Food from Africa to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Ferris, *The Edible South*.

[15] Kenneth M Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Knopf, 1956), 281-287.

[16] Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 63–64, 604.

Later studies of slavery and diet expanded upon Stampp and Genovese's analysis of enslaved nutrition. Writing about slavery in antebellum Virginia, historian Todd Savitt noted the challenges in determining the nutritional value of the fare of enslaved persons due to a lack of sources. Savitt concluded that seasonal shortages in meat and vegetables regularly caused enslaved men and women to go hungry.[17] Historians Kenneth Kiple and Virginia H. King examined enslaved diet in the Cotton South, challenging Savitt's assertion about enslaved caloric intake. They found that a majority of enslaved persons received adequate calories based on rations described in planter records. Nonetheless, the fare of enslaved men and women were deficient in necessary minerals and vitamins, including calcium and vitamin C. These deficiencies especially influenced mortality rates among slave children.[18] Adding an economic layer, historian Walter Johnson has shown how monetary concerns of slaveholders shaped diet and rationing. "The energy of each sector of earth could be converted to stock or staple, but not both; the labor of each hand had to be committed to raising either fodder or fabric."[19] Johnson effectively shows how the demand for cotton among slave owners conflicted with their ability to

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[17] Todd Lee Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery: The Diseases and Health Care of Blacks in Antebellum Virginia* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 86-103.

[18] Virginia Himmelsteib King and Kenneth F Kiple, *Another Dimension to the Black Diaspora: Diet, Disease, and Racism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 79-95. The relationship between diet, disease, and enslavement is also explored in Richard Follet's study of Louisiana. Shifting the focus to diet on sugar plantations in southern Louisiana, he shows how women's sexual reproduction was dramatically affected in part by the lack of a balanced diet. Richard Follett, "Lives of Living Death: The Reproductive Lives of Slave Women in the Cane World of Louisiana," *Slavery and Abolition* 26 no. 2 (August 2005): 289-304.

[19] Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 176-77. The recent work of Vincent Woodard, likewise, affirms the role of starvation as a disciplinary tool; see Vincent Woodard, *The Delectable Negro Human Consumption and Homoeroticism within US Slave Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 46. Both Johnson and Woodard highlight dietary neglect as a form of slave owner violence within the Cotton South. The theme of hunger will be examined in more detail in Chapter 4.

adequately provision slaves. As a group these works shed important light on the material realities of enslaved dietary conditions, while emphasizing the importance of analyzing medical and planter records in the studies of diet. All of these works focus on diet and disease as biological concerns, providing a useful foundation for my examination of how race and political change shaped understandings about disease and the body.[20]

More recent studies of slavery and agriculture have raised new questions that move beyond a focus on how much slaves ate. In *Black Rice* Judith Carney argues that rice cultivation was part of "a significant African contribution to the agricultural history of the Americas."[21] Further, Carney shows how enslaved Africans from the Guinea Coast transplanted traditions to the Americas through the practice of rice cultivation. In her subsequent work, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, Carney shows a wider diasporic contribution through agriculture, contending that enslaved men and women "Africanized the food systems of plantation societies of the Americas."[22] Through the promotion of West African agricultural techniques and a reliance on native and African plants, bondsmen and women were able to reconstitute dietary customs in the Caribbean and, parts of the United States. This dissertation shares Carney's concern with agricultural production, but adds an analysis of consumption. Furthermore, this dissertation differs in geographical focus through an emphasis on the Cotton Belt.

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[20] This dissertation draws on the work of Charles Rosenberg and Nyan Shah, whose work highlights the ways social and political forces can shape understandings of health and disease; see Charles E. Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

[21] Judith A. Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1.

[22] Judith Carney, *In the Shadow of Slavery Africa's Botanical Legacy in the Atlantic World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 2.

Beyond broadening understanding about agriculture and enslavement, scholars have also sought to identify the origins of black culinary traditions like "soul food." Excavating the history of black American cuisine has generated new understandings about food and slavery in the American South, and raised intriguing questions on the interplay between food and identity.[23] Interrogating the history of "soul food," historian Frederick Opie places the black American cuisine in transnational context. Soul food, Opie writes, "is an amalgamation of West African societies and cultures, as well as an adaptation to conditions of slavery and freedom in the Americas."[24] Opie's study of race and food sheds light on the interplay between religious expression and eating in both West Africa and the United States. Through an analysis of religious ceremonies, he shows how communal eating was an integral part of community formation. Grounding his analysis of soul food in a detailed study of local conditions, Adrian Miller argues that throughout the Black Belt, slaves working as field laborers subsisted on a similar diet of pork, corn and molasses. He also shows how both labor and location could influence the quantity and quality of food slaves received in the Cotton South.[25]

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[23] Perhaps the first scholar to draw attention to the history of "soul food" was food historian Jessica B. Harris. Author of numerous works of African American food ways, Harris's scholarship draws attention to the relationship between West African cuisine and the black American South; see Jessica B. Harris, *Iron Pots and Wooden Spoons: Africa's Gifts to New World Cooking* (New York: Atheneum, 1989); Harris, *High on the Hog: A Culinary Journey from Africa to America* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011).

[24] Opie, *Hog & Hominy*, xi.

[25] Adrian Miller, *Soul Food: The Surprising Story of an American Cuisine, One Plate at a Time* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 2013. Another recent study that offers a culinary interrogation of enslaved eating is *What the Slaves Ate*. This work examines WPA narratives in order to shed light on important dishes and foods consumed by bondsmen and women. Dwight Eisnach and Herbert C. Covey, *What the Slaves Ate: Recollections of African American Foods and Foodways from the Slave Narratives* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2009).

This dissertation departs from these works by placing a greater attention on the meanings of enslaved consumption within the Cotton South. It contributes to what Kyla Tompkins calls "critical eating studies."[26] This approach to studying food seeks to interrogate eating alongside body theory in order to understand how eating informed cultural and political forces. "Consuming Bodies, Producing Race" examines enslaved ingestion as a biological, social, and metaphorical practice. Ultimately, it seeks to show how discourse about eating enlivened debates about race and slavery in the antebellum period, and how enslaved people sought to assert their agency in relation to consumption.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation begins with an examination of the development of an "embodied defense" of Southern bondage in the antebellum era, which used scientific advances to normalize associations between black bodies and enslavement. Chapter One brings together scientific and slaveholder discourse, and follows the shift from environmental understandings of race to a concept of race based around bodily difference as it emerged in the antebellum period through an analysis of the concept "animal heat." This embodied defense sought to encode racial difference on the bodies of slaves in order to provide greater ideological support for Southern bondage.

Chapter Two connects concerns about eating and the body by analyzing the slaveholder discourse about pork consumption. Although slaves within the Cotton South might consume a wide array of meats, including beef, poultry and fish, no other meat was more widely promoted by slaveholders as beneficial to laboring field slaves. Through an analysis of plantation records, slave narratives, travel accounts, medical periodicals and farm journals, this chapter

[26] Kyla Wazana Tompkins, *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 3.

demonstrates how pork ingestion among slaves became tied to understandings about black corporeal inferiority. Although black and white Southerners consumed pork, the ingestion held different meanings for each group.[27] This chapter interrogates the discursive underpinning of swine consumption to show how racial hierarchy became encoded on foodways in the Cotton South.[28]

Chapter Three explores the practice of geophagy among enslaved persons in the Caribbean and the American South. Drawing on an interdisciplinary methodology, it examines the ways slave owners in the Caribbean and the American South depicted geophagy, or clay eating, among slaves in medical texts and planter records in order to draw attention to how slave ingestion could trouble slaveholder authority over bondsperson's bodies. In contrast to swine consumption, which had support among slave owners, no slaveholder went on record endorsing geophagy. By looking at the way this practice was policed, we can see how discourses about slave disease could be socially constructed to reinforce planter authority over the bodies of slaves. In order to understand how geophagy was a culturally encoded practice, this chapter also draws on travel accounts from European explorers, W.P.A. slave narratives, and neo-slave narratives. Clay eating held different meanings for masters and slaves, and this chapter seeks to show how geophagy was part of an enslaved cosmology that linked their bodies to the world around them and offered a limited sphere of corporeal control.

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[27] For more on the frequency of pork consumption among both blacks and whites in the antebellum South, see Sam Bowers Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake: Food Supply in the Old South, 1840-1860* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972); Opie, *Hog & Hominy*.

[28] This chapter draws on the concept of "culinary philosophy," developed by food historian Rachel Laudan. Laudan uses this concept to show how consumption is frequently shaped by a society's social, political, and economic understandings. Rachel Laudan, *Cuisine and Empire: Cooking in World History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 1-8.

Chapter Four focuses on “metaphorical consumption” within pro- and anti-slavery discourse, looking at representations of enslaved contentment as shaped by narratives about slave consumption in pro-slavery discourse. It seeks to shed light on what I call the “trope of the well-fed slave." Deployed in political discourse during the Missouri Compromise, this trope circulated widely in pro-slavery literature and in accounts about the South produced by Northern allies. Shaped by the language of agricultural reform, the “trope of the well-fed slave” corroborated claims about slave provisioning made by slaveholders, and served to buttress Southern paternalism. Troubling these assertions about generously rationed slaves, abolitionists countered by drawing attention to enslaved hunger and their inferior rations. These opponents of slavery, thus, used eating to challenge Southern bondage. This chapter seeks to show how concerns about slave ingestion also informed sectional debates about Southern bondage.

Chapter 1: Black Bodies, Science, and the Defense of Slavery in the U.S. South

Subdued by the lash, and categorized in texts, black bodies faced constant regulation on the plantation and in the pages of Southern scientific and medical journals. The black body in the antebellum period operated as a critical site for establishing the basis for enslavement, the articulation of slave authority, and as a catalyst for fixing racial difference. Historian Stephanie Camp noted that antebellum slaves had three bodies that operated as sites for management, discipline, and pleasure.[29] This dissertation chapter argues for an additional black body that was discursively produced by slaveholders and their allies in an effort to promote an ideological basis for Southern bondage. They created a discursive enslaved body by drawing on racial and scientific thinking in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. The persistent use of Southern medical discourse aimed to present enslaved corporeality as inferior and ideal for field labor. Thus, the embodied defense of Southern physicians helped produce a symbolic slave body that could be evoked to justify Southern bondage.

Slavery was first and foremost an economic institution; nonetheless, elaborate ideological underpinnings helped to support Southern bondage. From theologians and novelists to men of letters and physicians, defenders of Southern bondage came from all walks of life. Historian Jeffrey Robert Young writes, "Ministers, newspapers editors, novelists, poets, politicians, sociologists, and political economists all participated in a dialogue that identified the many ways

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[29] In her groundbreaking work, *Closer to Freedom*, Stephanie Camp theorizes that slaves had more than one body. First, they had physical bodies made of flesh. A second body could also be a site of domination and violence, while the third could function as a locus of pleasure and resistance. Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 51-59.

in which southern slavery supposedly operated to improve the morality and quality of life of the Africa American slave population."[30]

In the antebellum period physicians in the North and South drew on emerging racial theories to promote justifications for slavery rooted in the field of anatomy. Physicians, like Josiah Nott, used their findings to assert that anatomical distinctiveness made blacks naturally fit for slavery. The relationship between doctors and slave owners demonstrates how science buttressed the economic and political defense of slavery.

Historical analyses of race, bodies, and slavery have increased in frequency within the last decade. From the work of Walter Johnson to that of Jennifer Morgan and Stephanie Camp, and more recently that of Joyce Chaplin, historians have employed the body as a site of analysis.[31] Johnson's *Soul by Soul* explores the workings of the domestic slave trade through the New Orleans antebellum slave market. Johnson argues that the chattel principle, the notion that slaves were people with a price, is central to understanding American slavery. When planters and traders commodified slaves' bodies, they asserted a knowledge about black bodies that was expressed in their ability to select the best slaves. For example, Johnson notes that slave buyers believed that slaves with darker complexions were harder workers, and so some slave buyers

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[30] Jeffrey Robert Young, "Pro-slavery Ideology," *The Oxford Handbook of Slavery in the Americas*, ed. Robert L. Paquette and Mark M. Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[31] Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 62-68; Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 135-161; Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 12-49; Joyce E Chaplin, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500-1676* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1-6.

prized them.[32] Johnson's work underscores how slaveholders' readings of black bodies animated their identity and authority.

Camp has also examined the link between human bondage and the body. *Closer to Freedom* looks at slaves' spatial and bodily practices to offer new insights into women and slavery. Although plantation owners aimed to regulate slaves' mobility as a means of expressing their authority over the bodies of slaves, Camp contends that slaves contested this control by creating a "'rival geography' – alternative ways of knowing and using plantation and southern space that conflicted with planter's ideals and demands."[33] Furthermore, Camp argues that enslaved women employed their bodies in order to contest plantation authority. For example, they ran away to clandestine parties where they dressed in different attire and danced sometimes late into the night. Perhaps one of Camp's more significant contributions is to show that planter authority over enslaved people's bodies was never complete.[34]

This chapter builds on the work of Camp and Johnson by exploring the ways Southern doctors developed representations of slave bodies in order to promote Southern bondage. These doctors put forth what I call an "embodied defense of slavery." The embodied defense consisted of narratives about the slave body that aimed to provide scientific support of Southern bondage. It took shape through the promotion of the ideas, which included: the belief that black slaves

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[32] Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 138.

[33] Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 7.

[34] Scholars like Franz Fanon and George Yancy have argued that white supremacy's ability to contain the body via a racialized gaze was so complete that it prevented African Americans from developing a complete self-awareness. See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1968); George Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race* (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008). Camp troubles this assertion through her work and attempts to raise the possibility that this gaze, while present, did not completely prevent self-awareness.

constituted a separate species, affirmations supporting black bodies as ideal for Southern labor, and analyses of black anatomical and physiological inferiority. These ideas about the bodies of slaves circulated in medical texts and even made their way into broader public discussions of slavery. While the primary aim of this embodied defense was to provide a scientific basis for enslavement, it also increased the significance of Southern medicine as a field.

Building an Embodied Defense of Slavery

The use of bodily difference to promote hierarchy can be traced back to early America. White English colonists by 1585 asserted a corporeal superiority over American Indians based on English settlers' immunity to disease. Colonists argued that American Indians deaths due to disease were the result of a "physical weakness."[35] This perceived difference bolstered British settlers' claims to land. Marking bodies as a basis for articulating cultural difference was thus common by the 1600s. "The English," Joyce Chaplain writes, "gestured toward racial identifications of the body without providing, yet, a theory that explained generational transmission of bodily variants: this was a racial idiom, not a coherent ideology."[36] This mode of thinking, however, helped promote the basis for a racial ideology over the next two centuries.

European settlers also noted bodily differences between themselves and the dark-skinned peoples they encountered on the western coast of Africa. They based notions of racial difference on the physical variations between Europeans and Africans. In their travel accounts, European

[35] Joyce E. Chaplin, "Natural Philosophy and an Early Racial Idiom in North America: Comparing English and Indian Bodies," *William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (1997): 248.

[36] Chaplin, *Subject Matter*, 160.

explorers frequently remarked on the color of skin and size of breasts and genitalia.[37] The differences Europeans noted between black and white bodies helped animate ideological claims for imperial conquest, and further affirmed the basis for the enslavement of Africans.

Black women's bodies were particularly critical in constructing hierarchies of racial difference. Enslaved African women served multiple functions. Their enslavers valued them for their physical labor, and their ability to reproduce helped extend the parameters of slavery in the Americas. As enslavers speculated about African women's reproductive potential, they crafted images of savagery and combined these with efforts to "inscribe enslaved women as racially and culturally different" even as they developed economic and cultural "strategies" to claim authority over children and childbearing.[38] For example, Robert Burton, when describing the nursing practices of African women in Barbados affirmed, "They give them the breast over their shoulders, and this may be the reason of the flatness of their Noses by their knocking them continually against the Back and Shoulders of the Mother…"[39] This representation of female bodies served an ideological function. Travel narratives represented African women's bodies as monstrous, and their sexuality was characterized in animalistic terms. English explorer William Towrson, for instance, remarked in 1555 that the only way to distinguish men from women in Guinea was by the shape of the women's breasts. He wrote, "[They] 'goe so alike, that one cannot know a man from a woman but by their breastes, which in the most part be very foule and

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[37] Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 34-36.

[38] Ibid., 13-16.

[39] Robert Burton quoted in Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 35.

long, hanging downe low like the udder of a goate."[40] Towrson's commentary on African bodies highlights how travel narratives emphasized the difference between European and African bodies. To highlight African savagery, writers often distorted women's breasts, describing them as elongated and comparing them with animals. By representing the body as savage, they laid the groundwork for justifying slavery through the bodies of African women. The embodied defense of slavery, which reached maturity in the antebellum period, had its origins in these ideas from the 1500s.

Eighteenth-century observers and analysts increasingly turned to the body as a site for articulating the nature and meaning of racial difference. European natural philosophers began advancing arguments to explain the differences in color among the Africans and Indians colonizers encountered. Perhaps the most prominent commentator on human variation was George-Louis Leclerc, also known as the Comte de Buffon. Like many writers in his day, Buffon argued that race was the result of environmental factors, such as climate, diet, and social customs. In his most well-known work, *Natural History General and Particular*, he wrote, "Three causes, therefore, must be admitted, as concurring in the production of those varieties which we have remarked among the different nations of this earth: 1. The influence of climate; 2. food, which has a great dependence on climate; and, 3. Manners, on which climate has, perhaps, a still greater influence."[41]

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[40] William Towrson quoted in Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 27.

[41] George Louis Leclerc Buffon, *Natural History General and Particular by the Count de Buffon*, trans. William Wood (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1812), 3:374. Another important exponent of monogenesis was Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. He posited that there was a connection between skin color, skull shape and bile production. According to historian Bruce Dain, Blumenbach's writings were particularly influential in shaping the thought of Stanhope Smith. Bruce R. Dain, *Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 59-65.

Despite human variation in color, Buffon believed in "monogenesis," the idea that all human being shared the same origin. He posited that humans also shared the same "inner form."[42] Nonetheless, Buffon traced human beings' development into six distinct races: Caucasian, Mongolian, American, Malay, African, and Australian.[43] His belief in their common origin, however, led him to argue that racial differences were due to degeneration brought on by environment. Thus, climate played the most significant factor in determining skin color. Buffon affirmed, “The heat of the climate is the chief cause of blackness among the human species. When, this heat is excessive, as in Senegal and Guiney, the men are perfectly black; when it is a little less violent, the blackness is not so deep; when it becomes somewhat temperate, as in Barbary, Mogul, Arabia, &c. the men are only brown; and, lastly, when it is altogether temperate, as in Europe and Asia, the men are white.”[44] Monogenesis established a racialized order of human beings based in part on skin color; however, because these differences were due to environment, exponents of monogenesis argued that color could change over time.

Buffon’s thoughts on human variation gained the attention of intellectuals in the United States. His ideas influenced some of the most prestigious thinkers living and working in the young nation. From Stanhope Smith to Benjamin Rush, these early contributors to North American science argued that racial characteristics could be altered by a change in environment.

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[42] Eric Voegelin, *The History of the Race Idea: From Ray to Carus*, Vol. 3 (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 122-123.

[43] John S. Haller Jr., *Outcasts from Evolution: Scientific Attitudes of Racial Inferiority, 1859-1900* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 70-74. For more on monogenesis and its development in the United States, see Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 63-80.

[44] George Louis Leclerc Buffon, *Natural History General and Particular by the Count de Buffon*, 3d ed., trans. William Smellie (London: A. Strahan, 1791), 3:202-204.

Noted Philadelphia scientist Benjamin Rush borrowed the ideas of Buffon. A man of letters, Rush was a writer, physician, and college professor who signed the Declaration of Independence. He attended the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University), and he founded Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Rush believed that Africans' skin color was due to a form of leprosy.[45] This belief cast one of Africans' most noticeable physical characteristics in a decidedly negative light. Yet, Rush argued against the promotion of white racial superiority based upon this physical trait. He affirmed, " If the colour of Negroes be the effect of a disease, instead of inviting us to tyrannize over them, it should entitle them to a double portion of our humanity, for disease all over the world has always been the signal for immediate and universal compassion."[46] He believed that over time physical differences between blacks and whites might diminish as black Americans began adapting to the North American climate. Rush believed that black people could eventually become assimilated into white society. In the eighteenth century, then, scientists like Rush did not believe that Africans' physical distinctions were biological and, therefore, permanent.

Similarly, Stanhope Smith, a fellow College of New Jersey graduate and a Presbyterian minister, also argued for an environmentally conditioned understanding of race. Like Rush, Smith contributed to the intellectual growth of the United States in the early national era. He founded an institution for higher education, Hampden–Sydney College in Virginia, which received its charter before the American Revolution. He also served as the seventh president of the College of New Jersey. But, unlike Rush, Smith did not contend that skin color was the result

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45 Bruce Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 23-25.

46 Benjamin Rush quoted in Robley Dunglison, *Human Physiology*, 8th ed. (Philadelphia: Blanchard and Lea, 1856), 2:603.

of disease. For Smith, skin color was solely the result environmental adaption. In fact, he posited that if blacks remained in the North away from plantation labor, they would begin to look more like white Northerners. He affirmed in 1787, "In a torrid climate, where the inhabitants are naked, the colour will be as much deeper, as the ardour of the sun is both more constant and more intense. And if we compare the dark hue that, among us, is sometimes formed by continual exposure, with the colour of the African, the difference is not greater than is proportioned to the augmented heat and constancy of the climate."[47] For Smith and other Northern supporters of monogenesis, some physical differences were not biologically predetermined.

By contrast to these Northern thinkers, slaveholders in the American South and Caribbean asserted that environment was less significant in promoting human variation. In plantation societies that depended on agricultural slave labor, some challenged the ideas of Buffon.[48] Men like Edward Long and Thomas Jefferson speculated that perhaps blacks were not the same species as whites. They argued for fixed notions of race. These slaveholders' arguments provided the intellectual foundation for the embodied defense that circulated in the antebellum period. Writers in the early national period frequently emphasized apparent differences between black and white bodies. Edward Long, a noted attorney and colonial politician who wrote a history of Jamaica that spanned 1664-1774, posited that the physical differences between Europeans and Africans were profound and permanent. Long wrote: "The particulars wherein [Negroes] differ most essentially from the Whites are, first, in respect to their bodies, viz. the dark membrane which communicates that black colour to their skins [a], which

[47] Stanhope Smith, *An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species, to Which Are Added, Strictures on Lord Kames's Discourse on the Original Diversity of Mankind* (Philadelphia: C. Elliot and T. Kay, 1789), 15.

[48] The concept of a "slave society" is drawn from Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004).

does not alter by transportation into other climates, and which they never lose, except by such diseases, or casualties, as destroy the texture of it; for example, the leprosy, and accidents of burning or scalding."[49] Among the many visual markers of blackness, Long emphasized the permanence of skin color, which he argued would not change due to environment. He wrote, "Negroes have been introduced into North American colonies near 150 years. The winters, especially at New York and New England, are more severe than in Europe. Yet the blacks born here, to the third and fourth generation, are not at all different in colour from those Negroes who are brought directly from Africa; whence it may be concluded very properly, that Negroes, or their posterity, do not change colour."[50]

Long represented a growing group of racial thinkers who were moving to promote racial difference as less dynamic and more fixed. To buttress his claim for the permanence of skin color, Long marshaled support from the field of science. By the 1700s, scientists believed that racial coloring was due to a "reticular membrane" that lay beneath the skin.[51] Scientists found that even when placed in water, the membrane did not change colors. Building on this discovery, Long argued that if skin color could not be altered by environment, perhaps blacks were permanently inferior to whites. Further, Long suggested that persons of African descent might be a different species from whites. Describing black hair and the smell of black bodies as

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[49] Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica, Or, General Survey of the Ancient and Modern State of That Island with Reflections on Its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws, and Government* (London: T. Lowndes, 1774), 351-352..

[50] Ibid.

[51] Andrew S. Curran, *The Anatomy of Blackness: Science & Slavery in an Age of Enlightenment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 74-116.

"bestial" he suggested these bodies might be closer to those of animals.[52]

Jefferson and Long wrote about scientific differences between racial groups while living in plantation societies. Jefferson was born in Virginia after tobacco became profitable and the "plantation revolution" had already reshaped the colony's economy. Approximately 2,000 Africans came to Virginia in the 1680s, while 8,000 arrived between 1700 and 1710.[53] Jefferson's family was one of the clans whose fortunes were tied to tobacco and the slaves who planted, grew, and harvested the plant. His father, Peter Jefferson, constructed a plantation called Shadwell in 1734, and Thomas was born there nine years later. Everything in his environment told Jefferson that he was a young master. When his father died, young Jefferson inherited a sizeable amount of land and a number of slaves. At the age of 26, he began to build his own plantation, which he called Monticello. During his lifetime, Jefferson owned about 200 slaves. So, slavery was woven into the core of Jefferson's life as a Virginian.[54]

Thomas Jefferson echoed Long's assertion of fixed racial difference. Jefferson drew upon ancient scientific studies to argue that "animal heat" distinguished Africans from people of European descent. Animal heat was a measure of the heat generated by a mammal. The earliest theories about animal heat were posited by Greek thinkers Aristotle and Galen, who contended that heat from the body originated from the heart. This heat made its way through the body via the circulation of blood. For these classical thinkers, breathing held the primary function of

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[52] For more on the ways smell has historically function to mark differences in both race, class, and civilization, see Mark M. Smith, *How Race Is Made Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 29-47.

[53] Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 54-55.

[54] See Jon Meacham, *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power* (New York: Random House, 2012); Roger W. Wilkins, *Jefferson's Pillow: The Founding Fathers and the Dilemma of Black Patriotism* (New York: Beacon Press, 2002).

cooling the body. By the eighteenth century understandings about the principle of animal heat advanced, but the heart was still believed to play a critical role in the production of animal heat.[55]

Jefferson was perhaps the first white Southerner to make the connection between animal heat and the African American body. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia,* he suggested the possibility that differences in the physiological make up of black Americans' hearts caused them to produce less animal heat. By linking racial difference to biological difference, Jefferson provides an antecedent for nineteenth-century scientific racism. He wrote, "This greater degree of transpiration renders them more tolerant of heat, and less so of cold, than the whites. Perhaps too a difference of structure in the pulmonary apparatus, which a late ingenious experimentalist has discovered to be the principal regulator of animal heat, may have disabled them from extricating, in the act of inspiration, so much of that fluid from the outer air, or obliged them in expiration, to part with more of it."[56] Jefferson's exposition on black corporeality used science to rationalize and fix racial difference. Borrowing on the work of Irish physician and chemist Adair Crawford, Jefferson promoted a more racialized understanding of animal heat by arguing that black Americans' susceptibility to cold weather was due to their hearts being less productive than those of white Americans.[57] Thus, although blacks could endure warmer climates, their inability to acclimate to cold weather underscored their inferiority to white Americans.

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[55] Alfredo de Micheli, "On Respiration and So-Called Animal Heat: Historical Outline," *La Revista de Investigación* 53, no. 5 (2001): 462–67.

[56] Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Boston: Lilly and Wait, 1832), 145.

[57] Jefferson cites Crawford's work in his discussion on animal heat. Both Crawford and Jefferson agree on the heart's role in the production of animal heat; however, Crawford does not suggest that there are recognizable racial differences involving animal heat production. Adair Crawford, *Experiments and Observations on Animal Heat and the Inflammation of Combustible Bodies Being an Attempt to Resolve these Phenomena into a General Law of Nature* (London: J. Johnson, 1788); Alfredo de Micheli, "Regarding Respiration and the So-called 'Animal Heat' An Historical Sketch," *Revista de investigación clínica; organo del Hospital de Enfermedades de la Nutrición* 53, no. 5 (September-October 2001): 462-67.

Both Jefferson and Long highlight the ways that bodily difference began to shape understandings of racial hierarchy in the eighteenth century. Their discourse aimed to fix racial difference by reading African and enslaved bodies. Nonetheless, while both Jefferson and Long drew on the findings of natural philosophers and scientists, neither man was trained in the field of medicine or science. Rather, they were both lawyers by trade. By the nineteenth century, a racialized understanding of science would emerge, and medical experts would employ these ideas to justify enslavement.

Race, Science and Medicine in the Antebellum Era

In the nineteenth century, an increasing number of U.S. scientists turned their attention to the classification of human variations. While earlier commentators in the late 1700s tended to include men of letters, by the 1800s those evaluating race began to employ more self-consciously scientific methods. Borrowing from the methods of European scientists, many turned their attention to human skulls. Some understood analysis of the skull as a means of assessing innate qualities and intelligence, while others simply sought to assess brain size. The field of phrenology, which was developed by German scientist Joseph Gall, gained prominence in the United States by the 1830s. Experts in phrenology claimed that by assessing ridges and imperfections on the surface of a human skull, they could evaluate an individual's intelligence and capacity for civilization.

In the South few periodicals offered more support for phrenology than the *Southern Literary Messenger*. Thomas Willis White started this Southern literary periodical in 1834 in

Richmond, Virginia, and initially served as its editor. In 1835, White hired Edgar Allan Poe, a hitherto-unknown writer from Maryland, to serve as editor of the *Messenger*. Captivated by the new field of phrenology, Poe affirmed, "Phrenology is no longer to be laughed at. It is no longer laughed at by men of common understanding. It has assumed the majesty of a science; and, as a science, ranks among the most important which can engage the attention of thinking beings—this too, whether we consider it merely as an object of speculative inquiry, or as involving consequences of the highest practical magnitude."[58] Poe highlighted the changing perception of phrenology within the United States and its arrival as a viable field of inquiry.

Support for phrenology was common throughout the United States. An example of this can be seen in the *Messenger,* which published a speech by noted phrenologist George Combe. The Scottish-born lawyer and scientist had founded the Edinburgh Phrenological Society in 1820. Three years later, the society began publishing the *Phrenological Journal*, and Combe's ideas found a wider audience. His ideas on race and intellectual capacity influenced scientific thinkers in the United States. Evaluating a series of skull from American Indians, blacks, and whites, Combe argued that blacks showed the least capacity for higher intellectual development and the greatest inclination to be superstitious. Drawing on established Phrenological categories, he explained: "This character corresponds with the development which we observe in Negro skulls; for they exhibit much Hope, Veneration, and Wonder, with comparatively little reflecting power. Their defective Causality incapacitates them for tracing the relation of cause and effect, and their great Veneration, Hope, and Wonder, render them prone to respect any object which is represented as possessing supernatural power."[59]

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[58] Edgar Allen Poe, "'Phrenology'," Southern Literary Messenger 2 (1835): 286. See also Edgar Allen Poe, "Combe on Phrenology," Southern Literary Messenger 5 (1839): 393-97.

[59] George Combe, *A System of Phrenology*, 3rd ed. (London: John Anderson, 1830), 617.

Phrenology declined in popularity by the 1840s; by this time, many of its critics highlighted the lack of scientific procedures and the frequent generalization made in absence of evidence. Nonetheless, the methods of phrenologists would influence scientists who wrote on black anatomical difference. Like phrenologists, some Southern medical experts interpreted anatomical and physiological differences in relation to notions about enslaved character.

In the 1840s some scientists continued examining skulls but sought to use more careful methods of analysis. One such scientist was Samuel Morton. Morton began his career as a naturalist by studying medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, under the direction of Dr. Robert Parish. Morton eventually earned a degree in medicine in 1820 and later travelled to the University of Edinburgh to continue his studies. While studying in Scotland, Morton met George Combe. The two men would later collaborate in the writing of Morton's first major work.

Samuel Morton began collecting skulls in 1830 as part of his instruction in comparative anatomy. By 1849, he collected over 867 human and 601 animal skulls. The influence of phrenology led Morton to measure the inner cavity of the skull in order to ascertain brain size. He measured the size of skulls of different races and groups by examining the "internal capacity of skulls" using mercury, pepper seeds or buckshot.[60] This was in contrast to others who studied facial angle or length, which was a more common mode of analysis in the eighteenth century. He equated larger brains with higher intelligence. Morton referred to this work as "craniometry."[61]

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[60] Ann Fabian, *The Skull Collectors: Race, Science, and America's Unburied Dead* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 14.

[61] Fabian, *The Skull Collectors, 17*.

Morton's best known work, the massive *Crania Americana*, employed a comparative study of Indian skulls to argue that Indians' brains were smaller, and therefore, inferior to whites. The inferior size of Indian skulls also explained their inability to establish a stable civilization. He wrote, "The structure of [the Indian's] mind appears to be different from that of the white man; nor can the two harmonise in the social relations, except on the most limited scale."[62] *Crania Americana* coincided with efforts to remove American Indians from parts of the Southeast and offered a scientific defense for the seizure of Indian lands. Morton's work also garnered him significant attention in the American South, where supporters of slavery seized his theories about racial difference in order to make broader claims about the growing slave populations. In Charleston, South Carolina, newspapers advertised *Crania Americana* and a local bookseller allowed patrons to preview a copy of the text.[63]

Morton's greatest influence came through his advocacy of polygenesis. Instead of presuming that all human beings derived from a single creation, as the Bible and popular understandings assumed, Morton asserted that there had been multiple creations around the globe. Morton aimed to displace arguments about human variation that focused on diet or environment as the primary cause of difference. For Morton and many American scientists who followed him, race was determined at birth.

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[62] Samuel Morton, *Crania Americana: Or a Comparative View of the Skulls of Various Aboriginal Nations of North and South America* (Philadelphia: John Pennington, 1839), 29. Morton's work on the study of skull sizes has been disputed by more contemporary scholarship. Stephen Jay Gould reconstituted Morton's study of skulls and found that preconceived notions about racial difference often biased Morton's findings. For example, Gould notes that while Morton affirmed the average size of a Native American's skull was 80.2 cubic inches, the actual measurements done by Gould showed the average would actually be 82 cubic inches. This was just three cubic inches less than whites. Stephen J. Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, Revised & (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2006), 88-89.

[63] Fabian, *The Skull Collectors*, 81-92.

In the American South, physician Josiah Nott would work to promote this notion of polygenesis in order to buttress support for slavery. The notion of polygenesis helped establish a basis for arguing that race was a fixed biological category. Although some white Southerners argued that polygenesis ran counter to the creation story in the Bible, the concept did find a home in the South. Born in South Carolina, Josiah Nott grew up in Columbia before moving to Charleston in pursuit of an education in the 1820s. Nott eventually decided to travel north for his education, where he received a degree from the University of Pennsylvania medical school in 1829, nearly a decade after Samuel Morton. After studying medicine in Paris, Nott eventually settled in Mobile, Alabama, in 1836, where he established a thriving medical practice. His contributions to the study of racial diversity began in the 1840s. Influenced by the writings of Samuel Morton, Nott advanced the theory of polygenesis among American scientists.

For Nott, evidence of polygenesis could be seen in the differences between the bodies of black and whites. Thus, the origins of Southern physicians' embodied defense began with the ascendance of polygenesis. Borrowing from the work of craniologists such as Morton, Nott argued in 1843 that the smaller brain size of blacks proved their inferiority. Further, he asserted that not only were blacks a different species, but they were also closer to apes:

> It will be seen from this hasty sketch, how many points of resemblance anatomists have established between the Negro and Ape. It is seen in the head and face, the arms, and hands, the compressed chest, the bones and muscles of the pelvis, the flat long thighs, the forward bend of the knee, in the leg, foot and toes. In short, place beside each other average specimens of the Caucasian, Negro, and Ourang Outang, and you will perceive a regular and striking gradation. [64]

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[64] Josiah Nott, *Two Lectures on the Natural History of the Caucasian and Negro Races* (Mobile, AL: Dade and Thompson, 1844), 24.

Nott's discourse moved beyond brain size to argue for other markers of bodily difference that proved blacks were of a lesser species than whites, which made them fit for bondage. The use of comparative anatomy aimed to fix racial difference and affirm that blacks were a different species.

More than any other Southern scientist, Nott popularized polygenesis. This was most clearly seen through the publication of *Types of Mankind*, which was published in 1854 as a tribute to Samuel Morton. *Types of Mankind* was a collaborative effort largely assembled by Josiah Nott and fellow ethnologist Louis Agassiz of Harvard. The two men wrote the majority of the essays found in the volume and they also solicited other prominent writers on human variation, including Egyptologist George Gliddon and naturalist Henry Patterson. While *Types of Mankind* offered no new findings, it helped promote the notion of polygenesis to a wider audience.[65]

Types of Mankind featured Nott's reflections on blacks as a separate species. He wrote:

> That Negroes imported into, or born in, the United States become more intelligent and better developed in their physique generally than their native compatriots of Africa, every one will admit; but such intelligence is easily explained by their ceaseless contact with the whites, from whom they derive much instruction; and such physical improvements may also be readily accounted for by the increased comforts with which they are supplied…Wild horses, cattle, asses, and other brutes, are greatly improved in like

[65] Ibid.

> manner by domestication: but neither climate nor food can transmute an ass into a horse, or a buffalo into an ox. [66]

Nott's observation here reflected his efforts to promote the permanence of racial difference through the idea of polygenesis. Further, the immutability of racial difference for blacks established their permanent inferiority. Nonetheless, unlike Morton, Nott's support for polygenesis was used buttress slavery. The popular *Types of Man* enjoyed a wide readership in both the North and the South.[67]

By the 1850s, discussions of polygenesis moved beyond scientific circles. Thus, the *Debow's Review* offered the following observation in August of 1850. The editor for the agricultural journal noted, "The question of the human race, whether a unity or not, is being now discussed, with great ability, by naturalists all over the world. This subject has important being just now, in examining the position occupied by the negro…It is something to discover that he is not of common origin with the Caucasian, and this appears to be the better opinion among scientific men."[68] Elliot's reflection highlights how debates about polygenesis intersected with efforts to defend slavery. Antebellum physicians helped maintain and defend Southern bondage. Unlike their Northern counterparts, doctors in the South actively participated in the slave economy. Beyond treating ailing Southern whites, physicians cared for infirmed slaves. Illness

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[66] Josiah Nott and George Gliddon, *Types of Mankind: Or, Ethnological Researches, Based Upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures, and Crania of Races, and Upon Their Natural, Geographical, Philological and Biblical History* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Company, 1854), 260.

[67] Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind*, 220-226.

[68] James D. B. DeBow, "'Negro Physical Character,'" *Debow's Review: Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources* 9, no. 2 (1850): 231.

could adversely affect the value of a bondsperson, so the medical care provided by Southern doctors for slaves aimed to protect slave owners' investments. Additionally, Southern doctors could also be found at slave markets. They evaluated black bodies, ensuring that their value reflected the price placed on the people up for sale. Doctors thus played a vital supporting role in slavery, from inspecting chattel at the point of sale at a market to caring for sick slaves on farms and plantations. In the process, they gained intimate knowledge of black bodies, and they advanced theories about those bodies in the South.[69]

Physicians were crucial to determining a slave's "soundness." Antebellum slaveholders developed the idea of soundness to evaluate the physical and mental fitness of slaves for labor. A sound slave, for example, showed no sign of disease or lash marks. The former would mark the slave as physically unhealthy, while the latter meant that the slave had a history of disobedience. Both were equally troubling to a prospective buyer. Traditionally, when white Southerners sold enslaved men and women, they guaranteed the slave was also workable – and submissive – through written bills of sale. It was common for physicians to inspect slaves for "soundness" before they were sold. These inspections frequently included checks for heart problems or respiratory issues. As historian Sharla Fett notes, soundness commodified slave health by equating enslaved wellness with a market value.[70]

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[69] For more on the role of Southern doctors and enslaved medical care, see Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery*, 149-184; Sharla M. Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 15-35; Ariela J. Gross, *Double Character: Slavery and Mastery in the Antebellum Southern Courtroom* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 72-97; Gretchen Long, *Doctoring Freedom: The Politics of African American Medical Care in Slavery and Emancipation* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 11-43.

[70] Fett, *Working Cures*, 20.

Southern physicians could be called on to testify regarding a slaves' wellness in legal proceedings. Juriah Harriss, editor of the *Savannah Journal of Medicine* and Professor of Surgery at Savannah Medical College, wrote, "Physicians in the South are daily called upon to give medical evidence in court, in cases of prosecution for sale of an unsound negro, or by a citizen to pronounce upon the soundness of a negro slave, whom he proposes purchasing, or finally as medical examiner for insurance companies, to determine the condition of negroes as regards health."[71] The various types of court testimony described by Harriss highlight the ways that Southern physicians protected the economic interests of slaveholders.

Prior to the nineteenth century, an individual interested in working as a doctor served as an apprentice to a more experienced physician. The origins of Southern medical education date back to the 1810s, with the founding of Transylvania Medical College in Kentucky. Before the Civil War, the largest of the six Southern medical colleges was located at the University of Nashville. By contrast, there were 41 medical colleges located either in the West or the North. For this reason, it was not uncommon for Southerners pursuing medical educations to attend schools in other regions.[72] John DeBow estimated nearly 1,000 Southerners attended medical colleges in the North in 1860.[73] The creation of Southern medical colleges accompanied other efforts to develop a more formal medical education. Collectively, medical colleges and journals

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[71] Juriah Harriss, "What Constitutes UnSoundness in the Negro?," *The Savannah Journal of Medicine* 1, no. 3 (1858): 146.

[72] William G. Rothstein, *American Physicians in the Nineteenth Century: From Sects to Science* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 93-96; Steven M. Stowe, *Doctoring the South: Southern Physicians and Everyday Medicine in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 21.

[73] John Hope Franklin, *A Southern Odyssey: Travelers in the Antebellum North* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 64-67.

promoted ideas about race and black bodies, while also helping to establish Southern medicine as a more legitimate field of study.

From its inception, Southern medicine distinguished itself from the medical practice in the North by its focus on slavery. By the antebellum period, some Southern doctors went further by providing an ideological defense of Southern slavery. The narratives about enslaved bodies promoted by Southern physicians also reaffirmed the value of Southern doctoring, and reasserted their knowledge about these bodies. These discourses about bodily difference emerged at the same moment Southern doctoring was being transformed into a more legitimate profession. This discursive support for bondage was due in part to slavery's increased economic significance and a growing body of individuals advocating on behalf of slaveholders.

Between the 1810s and the 1850s, slavery expanded from the Southern coastal region into the Southern interior and further west. During this era, U.S. territorial expansion led to the formation of several new Southern states, including the new "Southwest" of Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas. Cotton cultivation played a critical role in the development of the region as Southern whites moved into these areas in order to grow cotton. The spread of slavery was due to the development of short staple cotton, a variety that could be grown in a wider variety of soils. The profitability of cotton cultivation led Southern whites to look to this new cash crop, and many sought out new land in order to grow the crop. By the 1850s, Alabama, Mississippi and Texas produced over half the cotton grown in the South. Further, the increased importance of cotton to the Southern economy can be seen in the amount of cotton exported from the region. Historian Ira Berlin notes that the South's total exports of cotton

increased from 600,000 bales in 1820 to four million bales by the middle of the nineteenth century.[74]

Slavery formed an integral part of Southern economic life. The profits reaped from growing cotton formed a fundamental part of the region's economy. The economic significance of cotton led those involved within the institution to advance an ideological basis for bondage. By the 1830s, these defenses of slavery aimed to respond to growing abolitionists' criticism, and they also reaffirmed slavery's benefits to the South. The central role of Southern slavery led many politicians, novelists, and even physicians to craft justifications for Southern bondage, particularly in the years preceding the Civil War.

Support for bondage by the antebellum period was common throughout the Cotton South; however, South Carolina led other states in promoting pro-slavery discourse. This advocacy grew by the 1830s as politicians asserted states had autonomy over the federal government during the nullification crisis.[75] Following the passage of the Tariff of 1828, John C. Calhoun led a group of South Carolina politicians in their efforts to oppose this tariff by arguing that states had the right to nullify federal policy.[76]

Among the many outspoken supporters of slavery from this state in the late antebellum period were James Henry Hammond and Reverend James Thornwell. The two men illustrate the

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[74] Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 166.

[75] For more on the development of a pro-slavery political ideology, see Lacy K. Ford, *Deliver Us from Evil: the Slavery Question in the Old South*, Reprint ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Manisha Sinha, *The Counterrevolution of Slavery: Politics and Ideology in Antebellum South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

[76] For more on the nullification crisis, see William W Freehling, *The Road to Disunion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

different ways Southern statesman advocated for bondage. Hammond owned a large plantation in the state, and during his long political career he worked to promote the expansion of slavery and to foster an ideological defense of the practice. In 1858, as sectional tensions over slavery grew increasingly fierce, Hammond delivered a famous speech in which he defended the South's cotton economy and he argued for the social importance of Southern bondage. Hammond asserted that slavery provided the South with a "mud-sill" that was necessary for the development of higher civilizations.[77] In short, as a racially distinct force of dispossessed laborers, slaves allowed Southern whites generally to turn to other, more elevated pursuits.

Proslavery rhetoric such as Hammond's distinguished his generation from slaveholders in the early national era. While Jefferson likened slavery in the South to holding "a wolf by the ears," antebellum slave owners posited that slavery was a positive good. Between 1800 and 1830, as cotton became more profitable, slaveowners' ideological support of slavery became more entrenched.[78] Some supporters of slavery turned to the Bible for support. In fact, religious leaders in the South often came to the defense of slavery. Frequently these pro-slavery advocates argued that slavery was a form of punishment that was passed down to blacks due to a curse from Noah in antiquity. The Biblical basis for black slavery often gestured to the Book of Genesis. According to popular interpretations, Noah cursed his son's descendent with permanent servitude. Genesis 9:26-27 affirmed, "And he said Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God Shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in tents of Shem; and

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[77] Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 347.

[78] Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 308-322.

Canaan shall be his servant."[79] Based upon interpretations of this passage, Africans were believed to be the direct descendants of Canaan, and therefore they were divinely ordained to be in bondage. Other Southern theologians continued to promote the notion of slavery as a curse; however, this discourse moved beyond Noah.

Religious justifications for slavery were the most common type of pro-slavery discourse.[80] Among the leading pro-slavery theologians, none was better known than James Thornwell. Born in South Carolina, Thornwell attended both South Carolina College and Harvard College. Following his return to South Carolina, he eventually became President of South Carolina College, which was known as an incubator for pro-slavery thought in the antebellum period. Over the course of the 1850s, James Thornwell became one of the South's most fervent clerics in support of slavery. He affirmed in a sermon in 1850, "Slavery is a part of the curse which sin has introduced into the world...In other words, it is a relation which can only be conceived as taking place among fallen beings--tainted with a curse."[81] For Thornwell, slavery was part of a natural order within all societies, and was due to perceived differences in black American character. Moreover, Thornwell's remarks echo James Henry Hammond by suggesting that slavery was part of a natural social order. Even Southern politicians by the late antebellum period evoked the notion of the curse to buttress defenses of slavery. Jefferson Davis

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[79] Genesis 9:26-27 quoted in William Sumner Jenkins, *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1935), 205.

[80] Paul Finkelman, "The Significance and Persistence of Proslavery Thought," in *The Problem of Evil: Slavery, Freedom, and the Ambiguities of American Reform*, ed. Steven Mintz and John Stauffer (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2007), 95–114.

[81]James Henley Thornwell, *The Rights and the Duties of Masters, a Sermon Preached at the Dedication of a Church Erected in Charleston, SC for the Benefit and Instruction of the Coloured Population* (Charleston, SC: Walker and James, 1850), 31.

affirmed in 1858: "[T]he good Bishop Las Casas with philosophical humanity inaugurated the importation of the race of Ham; they came to relieve from an unnatural state the dwellers in tents and to fulfill their own destiny, that of being 'servant of servants."[82] Davis's comments highlight the prominence of religion in justification of bondage, and show how slavery politicized Christian ideology within the American South.

Meanwhile, Southern doctors who defended slavery often based the claims for bondage on the bodies of slaves. By the antebellum period the economic significance of Southern slavery led even Southern physicians to advance arguments in its support. Frequently, these medical slavery apologists borrowed earlier ideas about race and also sought to employ similar methods of reading bodily difference. These doctors developed an embodied defense of Southern bondage. The material bodies of slaves often became embroiled in medical discourse, which constructed narratives about slaves' bodies that affirmed them as ideal for plantation labor in the American South. This discourse produced a black body that was fit for slavery by arguing it was of a different species and that it was adaptable to warm climates. Further, these medical narratives affirmed black bodies as inferior to white bodies and fit for subjection to planter authority.

Southern physicians in the antebellum period turned to comparative anatomy to construct their embodied defense. Southern physicians and some Northern allies worked to develop a narrative about the bodies of slaves, which naturalized the connections between their bodies and the labor they performed. Matthew Estes, a physician in Columbus, Mississippi, wrote a comprehensive defense of Southern slavery in 1846, which he personally distributed in Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana. Described as a "Democrat of the South Carolina school,"

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[82] Jefferson Davis quoted in Jenkins, *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South*, 205.

Estes's writings in support of Southern slavery highlight how physicians popularized an ideological defense of slavery.[83] One way this was done was by arguing that slaves' bodies were best suited for warm climates like those in the South. He wrote, "From...external characteristics, I infer that the Negro was designed by his Creator to live in southern climates."[84] Borrowing from those who used the Bible to defend slavery, Estes suggested that black bodies were divinely designed to live in the American South. He further asserted, "In fact we always find him, when left alone, living in hot countries. He is much more healthy, happy, and lives to a much more advanced age, in such climates, than in more northern regions."[85] Ultimately, Estes provided medical justifications for Southern bondage by asserting there was a biological affinity between black bodies and warmer climates. He also cast colder climates as more harmful to black bodies.

Climate marked one critical difference between the antebellum North and South. Southern temperatures could soar in late spring and summer, and this made working on cotton and sugar plantations in the American South arduous. A former slave in South Carolina noted that summers could be physically taxing. He recalled, "The heat was worse than the cold. The land was so hot that if we buried an egg in it in the morning, it would be cooked by ten or eleven o'clock, and our feet got all blistered and burnt up if we went without shoes."[86] The

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83 William M. Gwin to John C. Calhoun, August 30, 1845, in *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, Volume XXII: 1845-1846, ed. Clyde N. Wilson (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 100; G. Ward Hubbs, *Guarding Greensboro: A Confederate Company in the Making of a Southern Community* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 71-73.

84 Matthew Estes, *A Defense of Negro Slavery, as It Exists in the United States* (Montgomery: Press of the Alabama Journal, 1846), 63-64.

85 Ibid.

86 A Runaway Slave, 1838, "Recollections of a Runaway Slave," *The Emancipator*, The Awakening. Documenting the American South. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2003: http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/runaway/runaway.html.

environmental conditions for slaves who worked in the Southern interior also proved hard. J.H. Banks, a former slave from Alabama, noted there was little reprieve from the heat, and even meals had to be consumed in the sun. Banks affirmed, "The breakfast and dinner would be brought to the field to us, and no matter what part of the row we might be in when the women came, we must there and then sit down in the hot sun and eat it."[87] Slaves like Banks, who worked on cotton plantations, often toiled long days in the late spring and summer. For example, overseers on the D.H. Smith plantation in Alabama's Black Belt noted that slaves plowed rows of cotton, repaired fences, and even planted corn and potato crops during the summer months of June, July, and August.[88] Further, it was during the late summer that slaves first began picking cotton. Thus, Southern physicians' assertions about the slave body and climate served to support slavery by defending the day-to-day work on plantations in the Cotton South.

Since field slaves often spent long hours toiling in the sun, this discourse affirmed the fitness of black bodies based on the fact they functioned best in warm climates. Further, Estes argued that while the bodies of blacks were well suited to these conditions, by contrast, white bodies were not best suited for warm or tropical weather. Thus, they were less fit for toil in the hot sun of the South. People of African descent should, therefore, be slaves in the South because of their physical makeup. This line of thinking coalesced with the writings of Northern scientists like Morton who argued black Americans, due to their brain size, were not suited to higher forms of thought.

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[87] J.H. Banks, *A Narrative of Events of the Life of J. H. Banks, an Escaped Slave, from the Cotton State, Alabama, in America*, 1861, Documenting the American South, University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2000: http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/penning/penning.html.

[88] D. H. Smith Plantation Book, 1859, box 1, Coll. LPR174, Waldrick Plantation Records, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

The assertion that blacks could work best in the sun was based upon a belief that slaves' dark skin could better endure heat and long exposure to the sun. Charleston physician W.G. Ramsay affirmed, "The colour of the skin of the negro gives him a great advantage over the European's, by enabling him to endure the heat of the sun with less suffering. The experiments of Hunter have clearly proved the resistance of the black colour to the radiant heat of the sun's rays, whilst the white skin would soon become sensibly affected."[89] The ability to adapt to hot temperatures became a way of marking difference between black and white bodies. Tolerance to heat became a basis for defending slavery. Ramsay's assertion also reflects the ways Southern scientists marshaled a wide array of scientific knowledge in defense of bondage.

Relatedly, Southern physicians advanced the idea that blacks could better tolerate the rays of the sun. Here again, the argument was that physiological difference between white and black bodies made the latter better suited to working in Southern climes. Estes claimed that an African American's ability to endure the rays of the sun was similar to that of a chicken:

> Every one has observed at the inner corner of the eye of fowls, a semi-lunar membrane, which moves with great rapidity over the eye, when exposed to the solar rays. This has been called by naturalists, the nictillating membrane. It is designed to direct the course of the tears, and to protect the eye from the intense rays of the sun. In the eye of the white man, this membrane is very small. … In the Negro this membrane is greatly expanded; and serves, in addition to the purpose of directing tears...to protect the eye, as in the case of fowls, from the effects of the solar rays. This membrane serves as a protection to the

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[89] W.G. Ramsay, "'The Physiological Differences Between the European (or White Man) and the Negro," *Southern Agriculturalist and Register of Rural Affairs* 12, no. 6 (1839): 286-96.

> Negro against the effects of the hardships, necessarily incident to the condition of Slavery.[90]

Estes attempts to prove African Americans are biologically suited to field labor by noting that their eyes offer a natural protection against the rays of the sun. Ultimately, the ability to endure heat of the sun and the bright light it generated affirmed that the black body was more suited to the rigors of field labor in the South. Further, the writings of Estes show that even Southern physicians who did not support polygenesis still believed that African Americans were a lower creation, and were perhaps more closely related to animals.

Physician Samuel Cartwright expanded upon the ideas of Estes and others. Cartwright was part of the generation who left the Chesapeake for the Southern interior during the cotton boom. Born in Virginia, he attended medical school in Pennsylvania and served as an apprentice to Benjamin Rush while living in the North. He eventually returned to the South to practice medicine. Like so many white Virginians, he moved to the new state of Alabama before eventually settling in Mississippi and then Louisiana. In Louisiana, Cartwright lived in New Orleans, the center of the interstate slave trade in the antebellum era. He thus made his living in a city whose economic fortunes were inextricably linked to slavery.

Cartwright diverged from his mentor Rush's thinking when he began to use science to defend slavery. The medical narratives of Southern physicians like Cartwright reinforced prevailing notions of black inferiority and also affirmed the superiority of white Southern bodies.

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[90] Estes, *A Defense of Negro Slavery*, 66. Samuel Cartwright makes a parallel argument about the eyes of black Americans. Based upon the work of German anatomist and physician Samuel Thomas von Soemmerring, Cartwright notes similarities between the eyes of African Americans and orangutans. Samuel Cartwright, "'The Diseases and Peculiarities of the Negro Race (Concluded)'", *Debow's Review: Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources* 1, no. 5 (November 1851): 504-8.

By the late antebellum period, the writings of Cartwright could be found in Southern periodicals, medical journals, and pro-slavery anthologies. Although some Southern physicians questioned his claims, he helped popularize and politicize a scientific basis for enslavement. In an essay titled "Slavery in Light of Ethnology," Cartwright argued that blacks in fact constituted separate species, which was proven by the fact they had a separate origin. To buttress these claims he offered evidence by pointing to markers of anatomical and physiological difference. "[The negro]," he wrote, "is a genuine human being, anatomically constructed, about the head and face, more like the monkey tribes and the lower order of animals than any other species of the genus man."[91]

Cartwright also evoked black physiological differences in the respiratory system to sanction the slavery. He wrote in 1852:

> The negro's lungs, except when the body is warmed by exercise are very sensitive to the impression of cold air...In cold, weather, instead of sleeping with their feet to the fire...they turn their heads to the fire—evidently for satisfaction of inhaling warm air….In bed, when disposing themselves for sleep, the young and old male and female instinctively cover their heads and faces as if to insure the inhalation of warm, impure air, loaded with carbonic acid and aqueous vapor. The natural effect of this practice is, imperfect atmospherization of the blood—one of the heaviest chains that binds the negro to slavery.[92]

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[91] Samuel Cartwright, "Slavery in the Light of Ethnology," in *Cotton is King, and Pro-slavery Arguments: Comprising the Writings of Hammond, Harper, Christy, Stringfellow, Hodge, Bledsoe, and Cartwright, on This Important Subject*, E.N. Elliott, ed. (Augusta, Georgia: Pritchard, Abbott and Loomis, 1860), 707-709.

[92] Josiah Cartwright, "Diseases and Peculiarities of the Negro" *Debow's Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources* 2, no. 1 (1852): 315-329.

Thomas Jefferson first promoted this belief in the eighteenth century and it continued to circulate in pro-slavery discourse throughout the antebellum period.

For Cartwright, it was not solely the black American brain that was inferior to white Southerners; the lung capacity of black people also marked them as inferior to that of whites and made them fit for slavery. In the nineteenth century, the lungs were believed to play a critical role in promoting circulation. Thus, Cartwright's assertion worked to promote the idea that white bodies were more biologically productive, and ultimately, superior in corporeal strength. The belief in the decreased lung capacity of blacks may have been shaped by the fact that respiratory ailments were common among slaves. Regardless of the reasons behind Cartwright's claims, other medical apologists also turned to lung capacity as a justification for bondage. This mirrors the writings of Nott and Morton, and through this discourse blacks are represented as less capable of higher functions than whites.

New ideas about animal heat also emerged in the antebellum era to support claims about black bodies' fitness for bondage. Since enslaved men and women possessed inferior lung capacity, they produced less body, or animal, heat. By the nineteenth century scientific understandings about animal heat changed, and the lungs were believed to play a more central role in heat production than the heart. Nonetheless, Southern scientists and intellectuals continued to invoke a racialized understanding of animal heat in order to make arguments about the racial differences between black and white bodies.

By the late antebellum period, slavery apologists interrogated black Americans' inability to produce adequate "animal heat," and they used their findings to support ideas about black bodily comportment. For example, William Holcombe, a Southern physician who lived for a

time in Natchez and New Orleans, built on the work of others writing about animal heat, arguing that blacks' inability to produce animal heat made African Americans lazier than whites and caused them to have larger appetites. In "Characteristics and Capabilities of the Negro Race," published in 1861, Holcombe wrote, "The negro has less thoracic capacity than the white man; less lung, slower respiration; takes in less oxygen, generates less animal heat, and the blood metamorphoses of his system are more tardy in their evolution. Consequently, he is more torpid, lazier, and sleepier—thinks less, breathes less, and eats more than the white man."[93] Holcombe's work shows how discourses about physiological difference could be deployed in order to affirm efforts to regulate black corporeality. Physical difference held significance for understanding character traits. In this instance the ability to produce adequate amounts of animal heat became linked to laziness and indolence.

Proslavery ideas about race and animal heat began to shape slaves' everyday life, including what they ate. Inadequate production of animal heat provided a justification for bodily regulation and slaveholders' intervention in diet. In the pages of Southern medical journals and agricultural periodicals, the link between eating food and the generation of additional animal heat was presented to Southern antebellum audiences. Writing on the need for "heat-generating" foods in slaves' diets, physicians like John Wilson of Georgia argued that men and women in bondage required foods that aided the production of animal heat. "Heat-generating" foods included pork and Indian corn, the two most common provisions in rations for slaves in the South. The need for heat-generating foods was most acute in the winter months when illness among slaves was the most common.

He wrote in 1860:

[93] William H. Holcombe, "Characteristics and Capabilities of the Negro Race," *Southern Literary Messenger* 33, no. 23 (December 1861): 400-410.

> In the diet... his feeble heat-generating powers should be strictly regarded. We have seen the chemists divide all foods into two great classes—heat producing and muscle - producing. Now I would not have it supposed that the negro is to be considered merely as a walking furnace, for the consumption of fuel in the form of food; but certain it is that carbonaceous or heat-generating elements should form a very large proportion of his food; and particularly in the winter season, when the demand for heat is greatest.[94]

Wilson's comments highlight the ways that racialized understandings of slaves' bodies influenced understandings of their proper diet. Moreover, Wilson's claim underscores the link among diet, slaves' bodies, and health.

Beyond differences in skin, eyes, and lungs, doctors asserted that slaves possessed different internal organs, such as the stomach. "The difference between the Negro and the white man extends even to the intimate structure of their organs," wrote W.G. Ramsay.[95] These perceived differences affected understandings of digestion. The differences in the function of internal organs shaped the perception that slaves had greater digestive capacity. Even Northerners subscribed to this theory. Northern naturalist Solon Robinson affirmed, "The nerves of organic life are much larger—particularly those connected with digestion."[96] This perceived difference in digestion was echoed by Samuel Cartwright, who noted that because of this, slaves did not suffer from stomach ailments common to Southern whites. He wrote, "Their digestive

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[94] John Stainback Wilson, "The Peculiarities and Diseases of Negroes," *American Cotton Planter and Soil of the South* 4, no. 3 (March 1860): 126-28.

[95] Estes, *A Defense of Negro Slavery*, 66.

[96] Solon Robinson, "'Negro Slavery at the South'," *Debow's Review The Commercial Review of the South and West* 1, no. 6 (1849): 206-14.

powers, like children, are strong … At the age of maturity they do not become dyspeptic and feeble…as among those white people suffering from the ills of a defective system."[97] These claims supported the notion that black bodies were fit for slavery in a number of ways. First, Cartwright compared African Americans to children, which underscored their inferiority to whites. Second, if they did not become ill due to digestive problems, they could work harder and longer. Finally, this claim reinforced ideas about slaves' diet, since they could subsist on inferior rations.

This belief in blacks' increased digestive capabilities may have also animated a common belief that slaves were notorious for excessive consumption. For example, a writer in *Debow's Review* affirmed in 1847, "Negroes are thriftless, thoughtless people, and have to be restricted in many points essential to health. Left to themselves they will over eat, [and] unseasonably eat." Similarly, Cartwright argued that slaveholders had to use extreme care in the management of slave fare otherwise they would over consume. He wrote, "Like children, they require government in everything; food, clothing, exercise, sleep—all require to be prescribed by rule, or they will run into excesses. Like children, they are apt to over-eat themselves."[98] Cartwright's discourse infantilized slaves by likening them to children who required careful monitoring of their consumption. This discourse buttressed slavery and planter authority over slave bodies.

These concerns about bodily difference overlapped with interests in diet. In farm management journals and Southern medical writings pork consumption invoked black corporeal inferiority. According to physicians like John Wilson and Samuel Cartwright pork offered added nutrients necessary to compensate for an inferior lung capacity evident in decreased production

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[97] Samuel Cartwright, "Slavery in the Light of Ethnology," 693.

[98] Samuel Cartwright, "Diseases and Peculiarities of Negroes," *Debow's Review: Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources* 2 (1852): 315–41.

of animal heat. This narrative about black embodiment coincided with the ascendances of a scientific discourse that linked differences in black bodies to pro-slavery discourse in order to advocate for a permanent racialized slavery in the American South.

Chapter 2: "A Republic of Porkdom": Racialized Bodies, Economic Hierarchies, and Pork Consumption in the Old South

From Cuisine to Commodity

In the antebellum United States, no meat dominated Southern tables more than pork. Consumed in slave quarters, hotels, and plantation homes, pork was the region's most commonly eaten meat.[99] While affluent slave owners feasted on bacon and ham – often during the same meal – their slaves ate fatty rations of salt pork. Yeomen farmers also subsisted on swine, sometimes selling the product to slave owners.[100] Observing the preponderance of pork in the region, physician John Wilson declared in 1861 that the South could also be named the "Hog-eating Confederacy or the Republic of Porkdom."[101] White Southerners increased cultivation of pigs on their farms and plantations to sustain themselves and the growing ranks of slaves; therefore, pork production would increase as slavery spread in the 1800s. As a result, pork and slavery went hand in hand by 1850. And over time, consumption of pork became part of the very language white Southerners used to describe racial difference and racial mastery.

Although pork would become synonymous with Southern cuisine, and specifically the African American diet, neither British nor African inhabitants of the Southeast cultivated swine

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[99] Historians Waverly Root and Richard De Rochemont note that pork was a common part of many American's fare by the eighteenth century; see Richard De Rochemont and Waverley Root, *Eating in America: A History* (New York: Morrow, 1976), 72-88. Further, scholars in food studies have documented the prominence of swine ingestion among slaves and Southern whites in the antebellum period; see Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*; John Egerton, *Southern Food: At Home, on the Road, in History* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Eisnach and Covey, *What the Slaves Ate*.

[100] Taylor, *Eating, Drinking, and Visiting in the South*, 17-67.

[101] John Stainback Wilson, "Health Department," *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine*, February 1860), 60.

in the earliest days of the region.[102] Instead, the history of swine consumption in what would become the South began with Spanish colonization of North America in the 1500s. Conquistadors Lucas Vazquez de Ayallon and Hernando de Soto brought hundreds of hogs to North American locales like Florida and South Carolina during their expeditions.[103] Feral swine began to reproduce and the wild hog population rose quickly. By the time British colonizers arrived in the colony of Virginia in 1607, the wild swine population proved to be a serious nuisance. The early Virginia settlers complained that pigs were so numerous they hampered settlement. "Hogs," John Good recalled, "swarm like vermin...at large in troops."[104] Inhabitants of Jamestown constructed barriers to keep hogs out of the colony. For these early colonists wild game was more common fare than hog meat.[105]

Until the late 1700s, Southern agriculturalists had limited success raising hogs. Typically, pigs were the product of breeding between feral and recently imported domestic swine, but this breeding method did not provide consistent results. Richard Parkinson, an English traveler, described these early beasts:

> There are great numbers of hogs, in general of a very inferior kind. The real American hog is what is termed the wood-hog; they are long in the leg, narrow on the back, short in the body, flat on the sides, with a long snout, very rough in their hair, in make more like the fish called a perch than any thing I can describe. You may as well think of stopping a

[102] Harris, *High On the Hog*, 87-110; Opie, *Hog and Hominy*, 1-16.

[103] Merril D Smith, *History of American Cooking* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2013), 27-28.

[104] George Brown Goode, *Virginia Cousins: A Study of the Ancestry of Posterity of John Goode of Whitby* (Richmond, Virginia: J.W. Randolph & English, 1887), 33.

[105] Root and de Rochemont, *Eating in America*, 125.

> crow as those hogs. They will go to a distance from a fence, take a run, and leap through the rails, three or four feet from the ground, turning themselves sidewise.[106]

Parkinson's depiction highlights the fact that these early hogs were slight in stature, and often leaner than swine bred in Europe. Further, they behaved more like feral hogs than domesticated pigs. Still, many settlers struggled to tame these hogs in the eighteenth century. As a result, swine domestication in the Southeast lumbered along. In the 1760s, George Washington received, as a gift from the Duke of Bedford, two domesticated pigs called Woburn, or Bedford, hogs. The introduction of these European hogs helped Washington and other farmers cultivate swine in Virginia. Following the Revolutionary War, similar efforts to domesticate swine occurred in other parts of the region by importing European hogs for breeding.[107]

Improvements in pig husbandry led to increased swine consumption in the developing Cotton South. The new emphasis on swine breeding was largely due to the ease with which pork could be cultivated and preserved. Unlike cattle, hogs could be left to forage in nascent Southern cities or graze on uncultivated farmlands. At harvest time, farmers rounded up the swine to be fattened and slaughtered. Pork could also be easily preserved. For example, hog flesh became sausage and ham, while fattier cuts could be salted and preserved for the winter. Other parts of

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[106] Richard Parkinson, A Tour In America, in 1798, 1799, and 1800, Vol. 1 (London: J. Harding, 1805), 290-291.

[107] Washington's interest in swine husbandry was part of a broader effort to advance the practice of agriculture in the American South. Historian Jean Lee notes that Washington invested considerable effort in perfecting the landscape and farming practice at Mount Vernon, particularly following his tenure as President of the United States. Jean Lee, "Slavery at the Home of George Washington," in *Mount Vernon Plantation: A Model for the Republic*, Ed. Philip J. Schwarz (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001), 12-45; Henry Clay Dawson, *The Hog Book: Embodying the Experience of Fifty Years in the Practical Handling of Swine in the American Cornbelt* (Chicago: Breeder's Gazette, 1911), 27-30.

the hog could be boiled down for lard. By contrast, cattle required intensive management and larger supplies of provisions, and, once slaughtered, beef was more difficult to preserve. Significantly, resourceful farmers could use the entire hog. The previously mentioned innovations also reshaped enslaved fare in parts of the Upper South. Prior to the 1790s, meat, according to historian Edmund Morgan, was less common in the daily diets of slaves. Instead slaves subsisted largely on Indian corn. Following the previously mentioned innovations in farming, slaves in states like Virginia by the late eighteenth century began receiving rations of pork more frequently.[108]

By the antebellum period, pork was the most widely consumed meat in the United States. From the newly settled lands in the West to the Northeast and South, hog meat graced the tables of countless Americans.[109] The heightened interests in swine as fare and the opening of new markets due to settlement led farmers, particularly those in the Ohio Valley, to turn to hog farming the way that whites further South looked to cotton. Known as "Porkopolis," Cincinnati became the center for pork meat packing in the United States by the 1810s. The city's location near the Ohio River made it an ideal distribution outlet. At its height in the 1830s, approximately 400,000 hogs were slaughtered in forty-three different facilities.[110]

Pork packing was a seasonal industry that spanned the winter months due to a lack of refrigeration facilities. Beginning in November, farmers shipped hogs in droves to the city to be slaughtered and cured in local packinghouses. This pork was then distributed around the

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[108] Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 135-138.

[109] Root and de Rochemont, *Eating in America*, 119-127.

[110] J'Nell L. Pate, *America's Historic Stockyards: Livestock Hotels* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 2005), 65. See also William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 95-260.

country. Before being shipped to different regions in the United States, the pork was graded based on its quality. "Clear Pork" was the highest quality meat, and it was typically shipped to the Northeast. By contrast, "Prime Pork" barrels contained shoulders, jowls, rumps, and less desirable cuts. These barrels were often shipped to the South. Similarly, "Bulk Pork," which contained any parts of the hog – including heads and feet – were frequently shipped to markets for sale to slave owners in New Orleans.[111] The rise of Cincinnati as a center for swine distribution illustrates the economic significance which pork played as a commodity in the antebellum United States' economy. Averaging 14 to 20 dollars a barrel, the price of hog meat rivaled that of cotton.[112] Despite these prices, some slave owners in the Cotton South preferred to purchase swine because many planters sought to devote all arable land to cotton cultivation.

Inexpensive and easy to cultivate and preserve, hog meat became daily fare for slaves and Southern whites, which increased demand for pork and fostered further innovations in domestication. Pork production in the South by the late antebellum period outpaced that in other parts of the country. In 1860s the South's swine population was worth $106,555,000. Ten Southern states had swine populations over one million, and the South raised nearly two-thirds of the nation's pork.[113] Thus, historical geographer Sam Hilliard writes, "If the 'king' of the antebellum southern economy was cotton, then the title of 'queen' must go to the pig."[114] Nonetheless, unlike cotton, which was mainly exported to the Northeast and abroad to Europe, swine produced in the South stayed in Dixie. While meatpacking houses in the North diversified

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[111] Roger Horowitz, *Putting Meat On the American Table: Taste, Technology, Transformation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 54-55.

[112] Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*, 95-111.

[113] Sam B. Hilliard, "Pork in the Ante-Bellum South: The Geography of Self-Sufficiency," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 59 no. 3 (September 1969): 461-480.

[114] Hilliard, *Hog meat and Hoecakes*, 92.

by processing beef and pork, in the South, hog cultivation eclipsed other modes of animal husbandry.[115]

Hog breeding in the South took place among three groups: planters, yeomen, and herdsmen. Initially, though, some slaveholders showed reluctance toward raising swine, considering the practice to be degrading. Instead, they preferred to purchase pork from meatpacking houses in Cincinnati.[116] Moreover, other slaveholders had more material reason for not raising swine. For this group, all available farmland needed to be devoted to cotton crops. Reflecting on the practice of swine husbandry, a cotton planter in Alabama affirmed, "Cotton at 10 to 12 1/2 cents per pound is much more profitable."[117] Nonetheless, many slaveholders in the Cotton South did engage in swine husbandry, particularly as the price of rose in the late antebellum period. As more markets for Midwestern swine opened up in the West and abroad, Southern planters had to pay more for pork. Opining about the rising cost of swine in the pages of an agricultural journal, a North Carolina planter encouraged readers to breed hogs in order to break Southern reliance on Northern hogs. "We are at present," he affirmed, "in a state of humiliating dependence on other sections, for the very food that sustains life in both man and beast."[118] The reflection underscores pork's role as the centerpiece of Southern fare for both slaves and Southern whites, and it couches the practice of buying swine from the Midwest in the

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[115] Anonymous slave owner quoted in Forrest McDonald and Grady McWhiney, "The Antebellum Southern Herdsman: A Reinterpretation," *The Journal of Southern History* 41, no. 2 (1975): 155.

[116] E. Merton Coulter, *Confederate States of America, 1861-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950), 254.

[117] Anonymous slave owner quoted in McDonald and McWhiney, "Antebellum Southern Herdsman," 157.

[118] Scott Hill, "'How Shall We Raise More Pork!'" *Cotton Planter and Soil of the South*, August 1857, 239.

language of slavery. Such concerns about economic dependence highlighted the anxieties of slaveholding and non-slaveholding whites that affirmed autonomy as a basis for manhood.[119]

Swine cultivation in the South increasingly became a priority. As migrants moved westward into new regions, they brought hogs with them to breed. Typically, cotton planters began raising herds within the first year of establishing their plantations. Slave owners also grew corn to feed livestock and slaves. Frequently, both hogs and slaves subsisted on a diet of Indian corn. Former slave and abolitionist Solomon Northup recalled among slaves on his Louisiana plantation, the fare of slaves and the animal feed for hogs differed only slightly. Northup recalled, "Master Epps' hogs were fed on shelled corn—it was thrown out to his 'niggers' in the ear. The former, he thought, would fatten faster by shelling, and soaking it in the water—the latter, perhaps, if treated in the same manner, might grow too fat to labor."[120] The similarity in fare between human chattel and livestock suggests the increasing interconnectedness between slaves and swine.

Because of slave owners' reliance on pork, regions of the South that engaged in the most intensive cotton production were also home to the most intensive swine cultivation. The Black Belt of Alabama provides a prime example. By the 1850s the region was one of the most prolific cotton growing areas of the United States. At the time, the state of Alabama ranked as one of the leading cotton growing states in the country, and this was due in large measure to the Black Belt. Located in the center of the state, the region was known for its dark, rich soil and large cotton plantations filled with laboring black bodies. In addition to growing cotton, plantations in the

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[119] On dependence, slavery, and manhood, see Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 37-91.

[120] Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853, from a Cotton Plantation near the Red River, in Louisiana* (Buffalo, NY: Derby & Miller, 1853), 170.

Black Belt also produced sizable swine herds. Slave owners and overseers gave special attention to the practice of cultivating pork. In the farm journal for Babcock Plantation, the overseer listed the total number of hogs raised and slaughtered alongside the amount of cotton picked. In 1860, plantation slaves slaughtered 150 hogs on Babcock, and this totaled 2,725 pounds of hog meat.[121] Plantations like Babcock, throughout the Black Belt, similarly devoted attention to swine rearing. According to the agricultural census for 1860, Alabamans in the Black Belt raised a total of 355,529 hogs for slaughter.[122]

Like slaveholders who cultivated swine stock for local consumption on the plantation, yeoman farmers often raised large herds for subsistence. Among yeoman farmers concerns about economic independence motivated agricultural imperatives. By growing one's own food a farmer decreased his reliance on goods purchased from other sources. Corn cultivation was an essential part of hog raising. Some yeoman even devoted more land to corn than to cotton. For example, by the 1840s, the cultivation of foodstuffs eclipsed cotton production for non-slaveholding yeomen in South Carolina, where swineherds ranged from 25 to 54 hogs. Agricultural census data for Mississippi, North Carolina, and Tennessee show that in the 1850s yeoman farmers devoted roughly half of their total acreage to corn.[123] Since Indian corn was the main food used to fatten hogs before slaughter some industrious yeomen raised large crops of corn in order to sell their surplus to hog herdsmen. In some cases, yeoman sold their surplus swine to cotton planters or at local markets. Yeoman farmers played an integral role in hog

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[121] Plantation Journal by Willis P. Bocock, 1860, Waldwick Plantation Records, LPR174, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

[122] Hilliard, 88-91.

[123] Ibid., 92-111.

cultivation – and, as a result, the maintenance of the growing slave population – in the antebellum South.[124]

Southern herdsmen were also critical to swine husbandry. Typically, this group lived outside the main cotton growing regions of the South. Similar to pig farmers farther north, swine herdsmen tended large numbers of pigs, ranging in size from 400 to 2000 hogs. While traveling in Tennessee, British journalist James Buckingham described a large herd of hogs grazing. "Hogs," he wrote, "were everywhere abundant."[125] Often they lived on lands that were inhospitable to cotton cultivation either due to climate or soil exhaustion. Herdsmen allowed hogs to graze in grown over fields and wooded areas until they drove their stock to meat packing centers in cities like Cincinnati, Louisville and even New Orleans. The varied approaches to swine husbandry, from those used by planters to yeoman and herdsman, all had a similar aim. These groups sought to meet the demand for pork in the antebellum South. Although herdsmen were not directly involved in slavery, their work contributed to the growth and prosperity of the larger slave society. The pig herdsmen fed the slaves that grew the cotton that dominated the Southern economy.

But pork was more than meat; it could also be a form of currency as the product grew in importance. When a yeoman farmer in Virginia was unable to pay the admission fee to a traveling minstrel show, the farmer went home and returned with a smoked ham, which he traded for a ticket.[126] This story illustrates the interconnectedness between pork as fare and pork as a commodity. Hog meat's consumption increased its economic value, and in the antebellum

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[124] McDonald and McWhiney, "The Antebellum Southern Herdsman," 160-161; McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 61-70.

[125] James Buckingham, *The Slave States of America* (London: Fisher, Son & Company, 1842), 234.

[126] Ibid.

South, whether you were rich or poor, man or woman, free or enslaved, everyone consumed pork.

The prominence of hog meat among Southerners did not escape the attention of those traveling in the South. The discourse promoted by those traveling in this region helped to promote an association between hog meat and Dixie. Although Southerners ate a variety of different kinds of meat, the frequency with which hog meat was eaten led Massachusetts Clergyman Henry Knight to assert that the quality of beef paled by comparison to swine: "It is remarked that, north of the Potomac, one may find good beef, and bad bacon; and south of the Potomac, good bacon and bad beef."[127] Knight's comments reflected the fact that Virginians placed an increased emphasis on swine cultivation. Harriet Martineau, an English writer traveling in the United States during the 1830s, commented both on the frequency of pork consumption and the various ways Southerners incorporated pork into their dishes. "Throughout the south," she affirmed, "the traveler meets little else than pork, under all manner of disguises."[128] As Martineau discovered, Southerners even flavored their vegetables with salt pork or lard. Slaves combined salt pork with vegetables in an effort to stretch their rations.[129] Perhaps motivated by different reasons Southern whites also used swine in a similar manner. Pork inflected dishes were common even if sides of pork were not served as part of the meal. Furthermore, regardless of the time of day, pork was a affixture on the Southern table.[130]

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[127] Henry Knight, *Letters from the South and West* (Boston: Richardson and Lord, 1824), 71.

[128] Harriet Martineau, *Society in America*, Vol. 2 (Paris: Baudry's European library, 1837), 17.

[129] Harris, *High on the Hog*, 87-110; Opie, *Hog & Hominy*, 31-54.

[130] Ibid; Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Back Country* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1861), 160-161.

New England schoolteacher Emily Burke best illustrates the primacy of pork as a component of Southern cuisine. Describing the preeminence of pork on white Southern tables, Burke compared hog meat's importance to the Southern diet with bread: "As it respects the swine, I believe the people of the South would not think they could subsist without their flesh; bacon, instead of bread, seems to be their staff of life. Consequently, you see bacon upon a Southern table, three times a day, either boiled or fried."[131] Burke's assertion suggests how Southern dietary norms differed from the eating habits of other regions in the United States. For many Americans, bread was an essential component of the daily diet. Noted exponent of dietetics Sylvester Graham asserted bread was essential for both physical and moral well being.[132] Even if swine was consumed from coast to coast in the antebellum period, it was only in the South where pork assumed a heightened cultural significance.[133]

Pork Consumption, Race, and Class in the Antebellum South

Due to the prevalence and diversity of swine eating in the American South, hog meat ingestion provides a useful way to analyze differences in status and class during the antebellum period. Class, as well as race and gender, shaped social hierarchy in the American South. The most affluent and influential white Southerners were those who comprised the planter class, typically large-scale cotton and sugar planters who owned vast plot of land and dozens or even

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[131] Emily P Burke, *Reminiscences of Georgia* (Oberlin, Ohio: J.M. Fitch, 1850), 223.
[132] For more on Sylvester Graham, see Stephen Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America: Sylvester Graham and Health Reform* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980); Adam D. Shprintzen, *The Vegetarian Crusade: The Rise of an American Reform Movement, 1817–1921* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

[133] Kyla Wazana Tompkins, "Sylvester Graham's Imperial Dietetics," *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* 6, no. 1 (2009): 50-60.

hundreds of slaves.[134] While their style of dress and the homes they built embodied their affluence, the fare of this group also reflected their status. The food people consume is often a marker of class in societies across the world. In his pioneering work, *Sweetness and Power*, Sidney Mintz describes how English sugar consumption outlined nascent class hierarchies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. "[P]eople who eat strikingly different foods or similar foods in different ways," Mintz asserts, "are thought to be strikingly different, sometimes even less human."[135] Diet, then, reflects a variety of social distinctions, class among them. Most Southerners ate swine; however, the types of pork and quantities consumed sheds light on how pork consumption informed class structure.

Planter families consumed a variety of different types of meat, including select cuts of fresh pork, daily. For most Southerners fresh pork was a luxury limited to hog killing season; therefore, access to fresh pork shows how swine ingestion marked class differences. From hams to porcine terrines, the more affluent Southerners of the planter class ate finer qualities of swine. The wide array of different types of hog meat and the large quantity of swine marked the planter class as an affluent group. Similarly, the middling class whites who lived in developing Southern cities and towns had access to fresh pork. Typically, these men and women worked in a variety of occupations, from physicians to lawyers and teachers. This group also consumed a wide array of different pork cuts and they also enjoyed eating greater volumes of swine.[136]

Southern yeoman consumed a more moderate amount of fresh pork. Their access to fresh meat was closely linked to hog killing season. During these periods families worked to preserve

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[134] Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 159-244.

[135] Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 3.

[136] Taylor, *Eating, Drinking, and Visiting in the South*, 37-52.

swine for the remainder of the year either by pickling it or by hanging it to cure in smoke houses. By raising swine locally on the farm, yeoman had access to hams, shoulders, and pork chops; however, more typically fare consisted of bacon and ham, since yeoman also sold the pork they raised to affluent planters. Visiting with a Southern yeoman and his family in St. Petersburg, Virginia, in the 1860s, Frederick Law Olmsted noted only two kinds of pork among the items on the table: "There was fried fowl, and fried bacon and eggs, and cold ham…"[137] While the scale of this breakfast does not compare with the previously mentioned one from the hotel, pork played a prominent role in this meal, including both the bacon and ham and the other items, almost certainly fried in lard.

Meanwhile, poor whites in the South had little or no access to fresh pork. Their pork consumption consisted largely of salt pork and wild game they shot and prepared for themselves. Typically, they ate salted bacon, a fatty side of smoked pork. By smoking the cut of meat, poor whites could preserve and ration it for the entire year. The fattier cut, along with its method of preservation, reflected their lack of affluence. The frequent consumption of pork among poor Southern whites in Tennessee led them to begin calling the meat "Old Ned," the name of a popular minstrel song, due to its dark color. In fact, the daily fare among poorer whites closely mirrored the rations of slaves.

For bondsmen and women in the Cotton South by the 1830s, hog meat was an integral part of their daily fare. Although the amount of meat varied widely, field slaves usually received three pounds of pork a week. When rationing pork, slave owners provided one of the following types of pork to slaves: bacon, salt pork, or mess pork. The difference between these types of meat involves the method used to preserve them. While bacon had been smoked, salt pork and

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[137] Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States: With Remarks on Their Economy* (New York: Dix & Edwards, 1856), 80.

mess pork were fattier sides sometimes taken from the stomach region that were typically preserved using salt or brine solutions. Mess pork was often packed into barrels for purchase.[138] Describing the fare of slaves on a cotton plantation in Virginia, Frederick Law Olmsted noted that swine and corn meal were staples. "The general allowance," Olmsted wrote, "was thought to be a peck and half of meal, and three pounds of bacon a week."[139] The rations of corn and pork were thought to provide essential nutrients for slaves who were expected to pick one to three hundred pounds of cotton per day.

Both Southern whites and slaves ate pork as a part of their diets, but only slaves experienced daily regulation of swine ingestion. Dietary regulation for slaves assumed a heightened importance in plantation management discourse by the 1840s. Plantation management, which gained prominence by the 1830s, aimed to modernize cotton cultivation in the American South by encouraging innovations in agriculture production.[140] Interests in plantation organizing strategies aimed to promote greater efficiency in order to increase profits. A host of plantation management schemes circulated in agricultural journals, which promoted the management of slaves' dress, diet, and leisure time. Regulating black corporeality took place both on the plantation and also in Southern discourse. These efforts in plantation regulation aimed to produce more cotton and healthier slaves. Discourse about farm management spread widely through agricultural journals, such as the *Southern Cultivator* and the *Soil of the South*. In these periodicals, slave owners, overseers and even physicians discussed methods for

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[138] Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table*, 55.

[139] Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 108.

[140] Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South*, 69–104.

improving farming operations that included everything from soil tillage to enslaved housing and diet.

Medical experts in the antebellum period often regarded diet as a key factor in promoting better health, preventing disease, and increasing one's life span. Failure to attend to slaves' nutritional needs could lead to disease or even death. The focus on diet in plantation management discourse is illustrated by a reflection from a slave owner from Charlotte County, Virginia. "The most important subject to attend to in the management of negroes," he wrote, "is to give them a sufficiency of food."[141] This slave owner went on to note that failure to attend to a slave's provision increased the possibility of disease. "The great susceptibility of many families of negroes to scrofula," he later affirmed, "is to be attributed to hard and scanty living."[142] Adequate attention to a slave's fare could increase a slave's chances of becoming so incapacitated by disease that he or she would be unable to work.

In a similar vein, Dr. M.W. Philips noted in the late 1840s that the frequent cause of illness among his slaves was improper diet. He affirmed, "I have had sickness, and for several seasons; but generally I could trace the effect to a cause. Sometimes I have had nearly one half complaining—immediately I inquire about their food, and seldom am I mistaken. You will therefore suppose that I regard food as quite material."[143] Slave owners' interest in diet was motivated by their need to maintain a healthy labor force; they sought sound slaves capable of

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[141] Annonymous, "Management of Slaves, &c.," *The Farmers' Register: A Monthly Publication, Devoted to the Improvement of the Practice, and Support of the Interests of Agriculture* 5, no. 1 (1838): 32–33.

[142] Annonymous, "Management of Slaves, &c.," *The Farmers' Register*, 32–33.

[143] M.W. Phillips, "Plantation Economy," *The Southern Cultivator, A Monthly Journal, Devoted to the Interests of Southern Agriculture* 4, no. 1 (1846): 127. This article was also reprinted in the *Southern Cultivator*; see M.W. Philips, "Plantation Economy," *Southern Cultivator and Farming*, August 1846, 127-128.

picking cotton, and disease threatened plantation productivity. The rationale for enslaved consumption of swine rested on economic and ideological basis, which reaffirmed black racial inferiority. While some Southern whites ate ham and other choice sides of swine, by contrast, slaves consumed fattier side of pork, which affirmed their inferior status.

White Southern men marked slaves as excessive consumers if they were improperly managed. John DeBow affirmed to readers in his monthly periodical, "Negroes are a thriftless, thoughtless people, and have to be restricted in many points essential to their constitutions and health. Left to themselves they will over eat, unseasonably eat, walk half the night, sleep on the ground, out of doors, anywhere."[144] DeBow contended that slaves lacked the ability to control their consumption were intrinsically prone to engage in unhealthy and improper eating habits. Thus, on many plantations, slaves received their weekly rations at what were known as "drawings." Former slave Campbell Armstrong from Houston County, Georgia, described this ritual. He recalled, "They'd weigh the stuff out and give it to you and you better not go back. They'd give you three pounds of meat and a quart of meal and molasses when they'd make it. Sometimes they would take a notion to give you some things like flour. But you had to take what they give you. They give out the rations every Saturday. That was to last you a week."[145] As Campbell's reflection suggests, the amount of rations provided to slaves was not negotiable, and bondsmen and women were responsible for ensuring these provision lasted them until the next drawing. Similarly, former slave George Womble from Clinton, Georgia, described the weekly rationing of pork and corn on his plantation to W.P.A. interviewers. He recalled, "At the

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[144] James D. B. DeBow, "The Negro," *Debow's Review: Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources* 3, no. 5 (1847): 420.

[145] Campbell Armstrong, Interview by Samuel S. Taylor (Little Rock, Arkansas, 1938), Federal Writer's Project, United States Work Projects Administration, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (1941): 69.

end of the week all the field hands met in the master's backyard where they were given a certain amount of food which was supposedly enough to last for a week. Such an issue was made up of three pounds of fat meat, one peck of meal, and one quart of black molasses."[146] On some plantations slave owners provided enslaved men and women additional vegetables, and other plantation owners also offered slaves chickens; however, this was far from the norm.[147] In most cases, field workers, who were responsible for picking one to three hundred pounds of cotton a week, were forced by this rationing system to subsist on roughly half a pound of hog meat per day. Both Armstrong and Womble highlight the ways plantation management regimes promoted slave owners' authority over the bodies and labor of slaves.

Pork provisions among slaves tended to be higher in bone content than those consumed by many white Southerners, a practice reflecting the slaves' perceived inferiority to Southern whites. Hocks and jowls were two of the fattiest cuts of hog meat and for some slaves, and these cuts were part of their daily fare. In the W.P.A. narratives, "fat meat" is synonymous with slave swine rations. Formers slaves, such as John F. Van Hook, Will Sheets, and Liza Mention, described eating "fat meat" as part of their weekly ration in their discussion of slave diet with W.P.A. interviewers in the 1930s.[148]

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[146] George Womble, Interview by Edwin Driskell (Atlanta, Georgia, January 20, 1937), Federal Writer's Project, United States Work Projects Administration, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (1941): 185.

[147] For more on the types of provisions offered to slaves, see Eisnach and Covey, *What the Slaves Ate*.

[148] John F. Van Hook, Interview by Sadie B. Hornsby (Athens, Georgia, December 1, 1938), Federal Writer's Project, United States Work Projects Administration; Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (1941): 71-97; Will Sheets, Interview by Sadie B. Hornsby (Athens, Georgia, 1938). Federal Writer's Project, United States Work Projects Administration; Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (1941): 236-245; Liza Mention, Interview by Lelia Harris and John Booth (Beech Island, Georgia, March 25, 1938), Federal Writer's Project, United

The regulation of slaves' ingestion of pork also involved the rationing of lesser desirable cuts to slaves. "On our plantation," remembered a former slave from Georgia named Benjamin Johnson, "de white folks been feedin' de slaves off fat meat, jowls, an' heads an' jaws."[149] Similarly, former slave Candus Richardson noted that owners gave slaves the pieces of pork that they did not want to eat.[150] By reserving leaner cuts for themselves, Southern whites further underscore how eating reflected and produced racial difference in the antebellum period. Ultimately, the differences in pork consumption among individuals in the South shed light on the symbolic significance of pork consumption and how it helped constitute difference. The testimony of former slaves shows how fattier portions of swine reserved for slaves further reinforced their perceived inferior racial status.

Efforts to restrict enslaved consumption of swine also reinforced divisions within the slave community. All slaves had their fare regulated as a component of slave management; however, a slave's gender, age, and occupation frequently informed how much pork he or she ate. Men typically received more meat than women, and field workers consumed more than house slaves. For example, describing the provisions provided to slaves in southern Alabama, an anonymous planter affirmed, "The meat served out to them consists generally of bacon cured on the farms, to which, if the supply be insufficient, is added Western bacon or mess pork; some planters use the latter article entirely; of which—the usual allowance—for a man, or boy above

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States Work Projects Administration, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (1941): 121-126.

[149] Benjamin Johnson, Interview by Edwin Driskell (Fulton County, Georgia, 1937) Federal Writer's Project, United States Work Projects Administration; Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (1941): 322

[150] Candus Richardson, Interview by Harry Jackson (Marion County, Indiana, 1938), Federal Writer's Project, United States Work Projects Administration, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (1941): 158-162.

15 years of age, is three pounds a week; and for a woman, or a boy between 10 and 15, is two pounds per week; and to all others, in proportion."[151] Despite the fact that on many cotton plantations men and women performed similar tasks, enslaved women routinely received smaller allotments of pork. Olmsted observed that "Light Hands," who were typically women, the elderly and children, often received smaller allotments of pork than male field slaves.[152] The practice of rationing more pork to men illustrates how swine ingestion became closely linked to hard labor, which was also linked to male labor.[153] Collectively, the reflections of these house slaves highlight how slaveholders considered fatty pork best suited for field laborers.

If eating like a slave was to have a diet based largely on Indian corn and a ration of pork, and having a more diverse diet was to eat like a white slaveholder, then the ability to circumvent the exclusive diet of pork and corn held social meaning for slaves. Status was even reflected, then, in consumption within slave communities. Former slave from Mississippi Candus Richardson noted that difference between field and house slave rations by highlighting the fact that field slaves received coarser rations. As she recalled, "Slaves that worked in the Master's house ate the same food that the master and his family ate, but those out on the plantation didn't

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[151] A Planter from Perry, South Alabama, "Treatment of Slaves in the South-West," Southern Literary Messenger 7, no. 1 (1841): 774.

[152] Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States: With Remarks on Their Economy* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1856), 350-351.

[153] Providing more meat to male slaves was part of a broader trend in meat consumption in the antebellum period. Meat in the nineteenth century could be associated with virility, and as a result of this association, it was common for men to consume more meat than women. Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: Continuum, 1990), 2-8.

fare so well; they ate fat meats and parts of the hog that the folks at the 'big house' didn't eat."[154] Elizabeth Hays also highlights the difference between house and field slave fare by noting that the latter was rougher. "They had plenty of meat and bread and milk to eat. Coarse food—the commonest kind of food they could get 'hold of! When I knowed anything, I was in the big house eating the bes' with the white folks."[155]

Eating food that was similar to that of white slave owners meant access to a more varied (and presumably healthier) diet, and for slaves who worked inside the plantation house, the ability to avoid eating fatty pork marked their comparatively privileged position. George Eason noted that house servants on his plantation had "good food," because, "they got practically the same thing that was served to the master and his family." Eason's recollection highlights slaveholders' custom of rationing their leftover food to house slaves. Avoiding the fare of field slaves thus made a difference in a slaves' sense of self. If slaves could eat like Southern whites, their bodily differences were not as stark as suggested. Eason noted, "This house group consisted of the cook, seamstress, maid, butler, and the wash woman. Mr. Eason and those persons who held the above positions always had good food because they got practically the same thing that was served to the master and his family."[156] In a similar vein, Easter Brown told

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[154] Candus Richardson, Interview by Harry Jackson (Marion County, Alabama, 1937)Federal Writer's Project, United States Work Projects Administration; Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (1941): 159.

[155] Eliza Hays, Interview by Samuel S. Taylor (Little Rock, Arkansas, 1937) Federal Writer's Project, United States Work Projects Administration; Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (1941): 223.

[156] George Eason, Interview by Edwin Driskell (Georgia, 1937). Federal Writer's Project, United States Work Projects Administration; Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (1941): 296-297.

W.P.A. interviewers that due to her work as a nursemaid, "…[I] et lak de white folkses."[157] Lewis Favors also noted not only eating similar fare, but also eating at the same table as his owner because of his position in the house.[158] Eating similar fare in the same space perhaps implied closeness between black and white bodies that increased slaves' sense of self-worth.

Fat Meat and the Rationalizing Racial Difference

For doctors and slaveholders, pork was the ideal ration for slaves. Collectively, Southern slaveholders and their medical allies contended that pork was necessary to compensate for slaves' physiological shortcomings and the physical rigors of bondage. The black body in the antebellum period operated as a critical site for establishing the basis for enslavement, the articulation of slave authority, and as a catalyst for fixing racial difference. In order to confirm African Americans' inferiority in both the North and South, some medical experts argued that slaves' biological inferiority was permanently fixed. For example, proponents of polygenesis argued that phenotypical difference was the marker of a different species. Fixing race on the body aided proponents of slavery because it buttressed their claim that black servitude was natural. Moreover, by fixing race difference on the bodies of African Americans, their bodies come to signify blackness and backwardness.

Agricultural journals throughout the South promoted swine ingestion as an essential part of a healthy diet for slaves and to rationalize these notions of racial difference; therefore, eating operated as part of a social process that informed understandings about hierarchy and bodily

[157] Easter Brown, Interview by Sadie B. Hornsby (Athens, Georgia, 1938), Federal Writer's Project, United States Work Projects Administration, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (1941): 137.

[158] Lewis Favor, Interview by Edwin Driskell (Atlanta, Georgia, 1938); Federal Writer's Project, United States Work Projects Administration, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (1941): 312-320.

difference. Rhetoric from antebellum Southern physicians and planters helped to rationalize the relationship between slave bodies and hog meat, especially fatty pork. Over time slave owners and Southern physicians began to normalize the link between fatty pork and slaves by promoting a discourse that stressed the importance fatty rations played in promoting productive cotton laborers. Pork was best suited to those who performed rigorous labor. Southern physician John S. Wilson wrote, "Fat meats, or something of the kind are required by people who are exposed to the rigors of a cold climate, and they may be taken with impunity by persons of active habits, even in warmer latitudes; but delicate persons, who lead an inactive life, and especially in a warm climate, cannot expect to enjoy health, if they indulge to any great extent in fat meats and city food."[159] Wilson's reflection on diet affirms why physicians and planters recommended pork for slaves. In this case, then, "active" and "delicate" become not individual matters but racial types. Ultimately, a fattier diet was most appropriate for those who lived in colder climates, performed rigorous outdoor labor, and for those who lacked the capacity for higher functions.

The prominent use of fatty pork for slaves led New Orleans physician and slavery apologists Samuel Cartwright to suggest that slaves could not work as hard without rations high in fat. He affirmed, "Their diet is of the most nutritious kind, and they will not labor with much effect on any other than a strong, rich diet."[160] Whereas some white bodies were thought to be delicate enough for a diet of fatty pork, Cartwright shows medical discourse about eating could also affirm differences between black and white bodies. In this instance Cartwright uses diet to reassert the association between enslaved corporeality and hard labor. Cartwright's reflection suggests that swine consumption animated black labor, and it also justified the rationing of fatty

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[159] John S. Wilson, "Over-Eating, Grease, Baths, Hydropathy, &c.," *Southern Cultivator* 18, no. 8 (1860): 295.

[160] Samuel Cartwright, "Philosophy of the Negro Constitution," *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* (September 1852): 197-198.

meat based on enslaved preference. Southern physicians, like Cartwright, helped to provide a medical rational for plantation management schemes by associating particular plantation practices with wellness and labor productivity. Drawing a similar connection between enslaved labor and swine consumption, other slave owners affirmed hog meat as an essential component of slave fare. Calling himself "A Lover of Good Ham," the writer in an agricultural journal affirmed, "Bacon, from long experience, is known to be the most healthy meat diet in the world, particularly for negroes, who do most of the labor on the cotton plantations."[161] "A Lover of Good Ham" underscores the fact that slaveholders cultivated a belief in the primacy of pork based in part on its frequent usage as a ration; moreover, he demonstrates how understandings about diet were shaped by concerns about labor productivity. Making a similar connection between pork and the slave's diet, Wilson also highlights the relationship between swine and slave labor: "Between negroes and hogs, there seems to be congeniality in more respects than one: fat bacon and pork are peculiarly appropriate for negroes on account of their habits of life."[162] Wilson's comments highlight the way that discourse about pork and slaves tended to naturalize relations – and contrast the bodies of – black and white Southerners. Physicians like Wilson and Cartwright used their standing as medical experts to defend the rationing of inferior provisions to slaves by drawing attention to concerns about health and wellness.

In the antebellum South, food remained central to conversations on racial difference and racial hierarchy. The routine rationing of swine to enslaved men and women in conjunction with the discourse about animal heat fostered a metonymic relation between fatty pork and black corporeality. In short, hog meat and black flesh became so intertwined in Southern discourse

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[161] A Lover of Good Ham, "Importance of Hogs: How the People of Georgia Are Imposed on by Spurious Breed," *Southern Cultivator* 1, no. 15 (1843): 115.

[162] Ibid.

that they began to represent one another. For slave owners, the regulation of slaves' pork consumption reinforced their control over black bodies and allowed them to create hierarchical distinctions related to race and gender based on the type of meat Southerners consumed. Pork was, therefore, an important marker of race and power.

Southern planters believed that pork improved African Americans' physical appearance in addition to improving their health. Eating pork, some Southern whites contended, improved slaves' bodies and gave them a more healthy looking appearance. "In the South," remarked Dr. John G. F. Holston, "from their sleek appearance and exemption from scrofula, you can at once distinguish the bacon-fed negro."[163] Sleekness among slaves was frequently connected to good health; an adequately provisioned slave looked well fed. Moreover, the writer highlights how both sufficient and insufficient rations left their mark on slaves' bodies. James Towns, a planter in Grenada, Mississippi, compared slave bodies to that of horses when he argued that both showed visible markers of being adequately fed. He affirmed, "…[A] negro shows when he is well fed as readily as a horse; and mine look slick and greasy"[164] Holston's statement highlights the fact that the adjectives "fat" and "sleek" were also used for livestock like horses in order to describe a healthy looking animal. Likewise, a North Carolina planter wrote in 1853, "Any man who knows anything about negroes can tell at first view whether that negro is well fed; he need not ask the question but only look upon his skin; if it is dry and 'husky,' you may be sure that many times when he sits down to his meals his meals he is only allowed to go through the motion. If he presents a sleek and greasy appearance, you may be assured that he holds frequent communion with mess pork." In this case, the Carolina planter notes the complexion of poorly

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[163] John G. F. Holston, "Proper Use of Pork as Food," Ohio Cultivator 13, no. 23 (1858): 367.

[164] James M. Towns, "Management of Negroes," *Southern Cultivator*, June 1851.

fed slaves literally pales in comparison to slaves who have been provisioned with sufficient pork.[165]

This belief in the restorative power of swine is exemplified by an encounter between Charles Ball, a Virginia slave sold to South Carolina, and his owner and overseer. Believing Ball to be too healthy looking, the overseer and owner accused Ball of stealing cotton to buy meat. "Charles," Ball's owner charged, "you need not tell lies about it; you have been eating meat, I know you have, no negro could look as fat, and sleek, and black, and greasy, as you, if he had nothing to eat but corn bread and river chubs."[166] The basis for this claim was not the confession of a fellow slave or poorly concealed animal remains, rather Ball's accusers believed proof of this consumption was evident on his body. In short, Ball's "fat, sleek, and greasy" appearance was a sign of pork consumption and, therefore, overall good health for a person of African descent. Charles Ball's narrative also illustrates the challenges slaves faced when they did secretly consumed hog meat. Longing to satisfy a personal craving for swine, he and a small group of slaves engaged in an illicit trade for a large barrel of pork. To avoid being discovered, Ball and his fellow slaves took special care by boiling their meat in order to minimize the smell. In order to evade detection, and certain punishment, Henry Clay employed guile, and convinced his slave owners this corporeal change they saw was due to a diet largely based on river fish.

Such concerns over appearance were, of course, economic in their intent, in that a slave who appeared shiny was thought to be healthy, and would subsequently fetch a heftier price in the antebellum slave market. For slaves in the antebellum South, then, no meat left a more indelible imprint on their flesh and overall value than pork. Ball's story suggests the significance

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165 John F. Thompkins, "'The Management of Negroes,'" *Farmers' Journal*, (May 1853): 52-54

166 Charles Ball, *Slavery in the United States a Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball, a Black Man, Who Lived Forty Years in Maryland, South Carolina and Georgia, as a Slave* (Pittsburgh: J.T. Shryock, 1853), 314.

slaveholders and their allies placed on swine consumption. Unlike other meats rationed to slaves, only swine, especially the fatty variety, could transform them into more effective laborers and give them a more sound-looking appearance. In a society where pork consumption was common, this kind of discourse helped distinguish between bodies based on its effects.

Swine Under Fire

Prior to the antebellum period, swine ingestion received little criticism either in the American South or in national discourse. In fact many held the belief that pork provided its consumers increased strength. This belief could be traced back to antiquity. Early Greek and Roman physicians, such as Hippocrates and Galen, spoke of hog meat's benefits arguing it was the healthiest meat. Further, Greek athletes trained on diets largely comprised of pork. John Bell, a Philadelphia physician who penned a treatise on diet in the 1840s, described the role swine played in these athletes' diets. For him, pork provided its consumers with vitality and strength, and offered fuel for those performing strenuous activities. The link with ancient Greece and Rome affirmed pork benefits to the body and civilization. Bell wrote, "[Pork] formed the chief animal aliment of the athlete of Greece and Rome, who complained of a sensible diminution of their strength, when they abandoned its use for any length of time."[167] The positive benefits of hog meat persisted widely into the nineteenth century; however, thinking about pork ingestion gradual changed beginning in the mid-1830s. Physicians and health reformers began to question Americans reliance on animal food, and pork became the least desirable meat for those promoting dietary change in the name of longevity.

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[167] John Bell, *On Regimen and Longevity: Comprising Materia Alimentaria, National Dietetic Usages, and the Influence of Civilization On Health and the Duration of Life* (Philadelphia: Haswell & Johnson, 1842), 296.

The first criticisms of swine ingestion came from individuals who argued that animal food posed a threat to the health of its consumers. These exponents ranged widely from physicians to ministers who contended that humans were not designed to ingest meat, thus, they suffered physical illness. Perhaps the most outspoken antebellum opponent of diets comprised of animal food was Sylvester Graham. Born in the Suffield, Connecticut, Graham became Presbyterian minister in the 1820s, and began advocating as a health reformer after becoming involved in the Temperance movement. Unlike other physicians who criticized meat consumption on a medical basis, Graham argued that animal diets promoted moral and physical decay. Developing a dietary regime that eschewed meat and processed flour, Graham encouraged his followers to avoid stimulating foods in favor of vegetable-based diets. In order to promote his beliefs about dietary reform, Graham delivered lectures around the United States and published widely. He argued that humans were not made to consume meat, and thus, its consumption caused sickness. "If man was destined to devour the flesh of animals," he wrote, "might we not, then, reasonably infer that his organs would correspond with his aliment?"[168] In short, humans' biological makeup proved they were unfit to be carnivores. Supporters of this movement for dietary reform became known as Grahamites. While Graham's criticism of meat consumption gained him only a small following, his advocacy of a vegetable diet underscored the changing perceptions about meat consumption. Graham focused his criticism on fresh hog meat. In particular, he believed this meat over- stimulated the consumer. Foods such as this posed a moral danger because they animated carnal passions.

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[168] Sylvester Graham, *A Defense of the Graham System of Living: Or, Remarks On Diet and Regimen. Dedicated to the Rising Generation* (New York: W. Applegate, 1835), 101.

While Graham's position was one of the more radical among reformers, other social advocates also drew connections between diet and morality. Offering a more scientifically based criticism of pork, doctors in the nineteenth century also argued swine ingestion could be a cause of sickness and disease. Physicians, like John Bell, encouraged both men and women to decrease their consumption of hog meat. Bell warned, "The artisan, and the citizen generally, who takes little out-door exercise, and whose digestion may, from other causes, be enfeebled had better avoid pork. It not unfrequently purges those who are unaccustomed to its use."[169] Thus, those who worked outdoors were less likely to suffer stomach ailment from swine ingestion; however, those whose work kept them indoors regardless of their gender could face gastro-intestinal maladies from eating hog meat. By the late antebellum period, this thinking about pork also circulated in periodicals like *Scientific America*. Based on the research of German chemist Justus Von Liebig, the editor warned readers to avoid pork because it caused disease. The editor wrote, "A fat hog is the very quintessence of scrofula and carbonic acid gas, and he who eats it must not expect thereby to build up a sound physical organism."[170] These comments on swine highlight how perceptions about pork consumption among those within the medical community changed. Not only did it fail to provide nutritional benefits to its consumers; it also could lead to an array of potentially harmful effects from indigestion to disease. For example, Scrofula is considered one of the world's oldest diseases. First documented by Greek physicians, the disease is a form of tuberculosis whose symptoms resembled a similar malady in swine. By associating pork with disease, these doctors hoped to highlight the danger that hog meat posed to

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[169] John Bell, *On Regimen and Longevity : Comprising Materia Alimentaria, National Dietetic Usages, and the Influence of Civilization on Health and the Duration of Life* (Philadelphia: Haswell & Johnson, 1842), 296.

[170] O.D. Munn, "Never Go the Whole Hog," *Scientific American* 8, no. 7 (October 1857): 53.

an individual's longevity. To stress the point, the editor affirmed, "Fat pork was never designed for human food."[171] Although these physicians did not advocate vegetable diets as a replacement for swine ingestions, they did hope to foster increased consumption of other meats like poultry and beef. Perceptions of swine ingestion at the beginning of the nineteenth century reflected older ideas about pork and diet that stretched back to antiquity; however, by the antebellum period opposition to pork consumption developed around concerns about morality and longevity. These criticisms of pork circulated widely, and influenced medical practitioners in the South.

By the 1860s advocates of dietary reform also questioned pork's role in Southerner's diets. Writing in the pages of the *Southern Cultivator,* John S. Wilson argued that pork adversely affected Southerner's health and appearance. Wilson offered the following thoughts on the link between pork and illness. He wrote, "No doubt a large amount of disease in the South and West is caused by the excessive use of fat bacon and salt pork; for, with a large class, they are the staple and almost exclusive articles of food for men, women, children and negroes."[172] Making a similar claim in the *Southern Cultivator,* an anonymous writer argued that eating swine led to a host of different maladies. He affirmed, "Wherever pork, especially salt pork, and, worst of all, smoked pork, is extensively eaten, there dyspepsia, biliousness, cutaneous eruptions, and skin diseases of all kinds, are sure to prevail."[173] Increasingly, white Southern discourse on diet linked swine consumption to sickness. This shows how discourse about pork consumption animated ideas about racial difference.

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[171] O.D. Munn, "Never Go the Whole Hog," *Scientific American* 8, no. 7 (October 1857): 53.

[172] John S. Wilson, "Health Department," *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine* (Philadelphia, October 1858).

[173] John S. Wilson, "What Shall We Eat?," *Southern Cultivator* 19, no. 2 (1861): 53.

Concerns about swine ingestion in the South were often linked to broader interests in dietary reform. Physicians advocated for greater moderation in the diets of white Southerners, particularly concerning pork ingestion. Immoderate consumption of hog meat was common among many classes of Southern whites. The decadent consumption of affluent Southerners was best exemplified by the large buffet-style dinners called "groaning tables."[174] Frequently, these dinners featured an assortment of pork-inflected dishes made of both hog meat and pork fat. Further, although smaller in scale, Southern yeoman also consumed generous amounts of pork. Thus, it was common for families to eat pork with every meal. These previously mentioned examples highlight the immoderate consumption of hog meat among Southern whites, and they shed light on the consumptive practices that physicians and others hoped to curtail.

According to critics, slaves' consumption of swine was acceptable, but white consumers need to eat in moderation. "We are no Grahamite," affirmed an anonymous farmer in the *Southern Agriculturalist,* "but we do believe, that there is far too much meat eaten, especially of salted pork, either as bacon, or as barrel pork."[175] By calling attention to salt pork and barrel pork, the writer does not just indict wealthy Southerners as over indulgent, rather he suggests that excessive swine consumption was a problem for all classes of Southern whites. To correct this issue, the anonymous farmer encouraged readers to pursue more varied diets that include meat and vegetables at their meals. Such advice mirrors the counsel offered by dietetics physician John Bell. Similarly, writing on dietary regulation on his farm, a slaveholder acknowledged his own lack of moderation in eating. He affirmed, "I have negroes here that have

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[174] Mary Titus, "The Dining Room Door Swings Both Ways: Food, Race, and Domestic Space in the Nineteenth-Century South," in *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts*, ed. Anne Goodwyn and Susan Van D'Elden Donaldson (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1997), 243–56.

[175] South-Western Farmer, "Vegetables," *Southern Agriculturist, Horticulturist, and Register of Rural Affairs* (Charleston, SC, March 1845).

had only a half pound [a week] each for twenty years, and they bid fair to outlive their master, who occasionally forgets his duty and will be a gourmand. I practice on the plan that all of us would be better to be restrained, and that health is best subserved by not over-eating."[176] Failing to manage his own consumption this planter determined to master that of his slaves, and thereby illustrates how imperatives about dietary management influenced the lives of master and slaves.

For those who advocated moderation, overeating was perhaps the primary concern. By the late antebellum period, overeating was increasingly linked to sickness. John Wilson, a physician from Georgia, counseled the readers of *Godey's Lady Book and Magazine* about the danger of over-eating. Describing over-eating as "[the] greatest of all dietetic errors," Wilson advocated more regulation of women's consumption, particularly regarding meat. Excessive consumption of meat could have a deleterious effect on the body, so Wilson encouraged female readers to moderate their meat consumption to avoid potential illness. This could be done by basing how much meat one ate on the level of daily physical activity. "How injurious must it be," he asserted, "for literary persons, women, and others whose occupations confine them much within doors, to indulge in meat three times a day!"[177] For Southern physicians pork became a potential cause of stomach ailments and disease. These doctors, like John Wilson, urged white Southerners whose work kept them indoors to avoid hog meat.

Wilson's concerns about excessive meat consumption underscore how one's social status and gender affected dietary concerns. At the same time, medical experts linking pork consumption to poor health and appearance actively discouraged Southern white women from eating pork. For example, a writer in the *Southern Cultivator* affirmed, "We do not desire to

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[176] A Small Farmer, "Management of Negroes," *Debow's Review: Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources* 11, no. 4 (1851): 370.
[177] Wilson, "'Health Department,'" 372.

speak disrespectfully of our national diet—"hog and hominy"—but a sense of duty compels us to say here, and most emphatically too, that we believe pork should, as a general rule, be avoided by all white men and especially by all white women."[178] Wilson offered a similar observation for white women, in which he linked the problem of overeating and consuming swine flesh together in order to argue that both had a deleterious affect on appearance. "Women who eat too much and exercise too little, who consume too much gross, indigestible food, and too little pure air, are liable not only to...formidable maladies...but their skin becomes think, harsh, pimpled, and discolored, from the retention of foul excrementitious matter."[179] Thus, Wilson links over eating and swine consumption to poor complexion in order to underscore its negative affect on white women's bodies. Similarly, in an article titled, "The Secret of Beauty," D. H. Jacques noted that pork, like no other item, negatively affected white women's appearance. "No other single circumstance," Jacques affirmed, "…is so inimical to the female beauty in this country as our excessive consumption of swine's flesh. Gross food induces grossness of body."[180] Both Wilson and Jacques shed light on how consuming pork reinforces slaves' corporeal difference, as black women's appearance was not said to be adversely affected by eating swine.

Echoing concerns about meat consumption, particularly among white women, Bob White, a reader *of Southern Planter,* wrote to the farm journal regarding white women's excessive consumption of pork. He wrote, "There are many females, who certainly do not labor, that eat meat two or three times each day; and many more that cannot make a meal without meat. It is all a habit, and that there is no necessity, we have only to appeal to the analyses by

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[178] Wilson, "What Shall We Eat?," 53.

[179] Wilson, "'Health Department,'" 372.

[180] D.H. Jacques, "'The Secret of Beauty,'" *Southern Cultivator* 19, no. 5 (May 1861): 149.

celebrated chemists who have investigated the matter."[12] White called for reduced meat consumption among Southern white women based on a belief that the work they performed was less arduous. Wilson and White's commentary on meat consumption suggests that those whose work was more sedentary should carefully regulate meat and pork consumption. In short, pork was unfit for those whose lives take them away from arduous physical labor.

Calls for decreased consumption of hog meat also took on a gendered dimension. Doctors discouraged white women, in particular, from eating pork. Excessive consumption was a problem for many in the South; however, women were deemed as profligate eaters because their meat consumption exceeded their labor output. Perhaps this is because Southern men viewed only work done outside the home as labor. In short, the work of maintaining the home was not acknowledged as a true form of "work."[181] Women's consumption encoded their difference and marked their gender as lacking adequate control of their bodies.

The eating comportment of Southern white women shaped their perception as ladies both in history and memory. Margaret Mitchell's 1930s novel *Gone with the Wind* follows the life of Scarlett O'Hara, a Southern white woman, born to a Georgia cotton planter's family. When Scarlett refuses to eat before going to a barbecue, Mammy, her domestic servant, chastises her by asserting that young white women were to eat sparingly in public. Mammy affirmed, "I has tole you an' tole you dat you kin allus tell a lady by dat she eat lak a bird. An' Ah ain' aimin' ter have you go ter Mist' Wilkes' an eat lak a fe'el han' an' gobble lak a hawg."[182] Mitchell's novel marks

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[181] For more, see Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[182] Victor Fleming, *Gone With the Wind* (United States: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1939).

the differences between white women and black field laborers by the manner in which they eat. Thus, white women were to give the appearance of discretion when eating.[183]

This discourse on diet sheds light on the intersections of race, gender, and class in the antebellum South. When white Southerners praised pork for its benefits to black bodies, but criticized white consumption of the same meat, they invested the act of eating pork with racialized, gendered meaning. The perception that pork had divergent effects on black and white bodies sheds light on how notions about enslaved inferiority coalesced with understandings about pork consumption in order to affirm justifications for bondage. While overeating plagued many wealthy Southerners, the discourse suggested that white Southern women and slaves as the only groups that lacked the ability to police their own dietary habits. Food, especially pork, played an essential role in the establishment and maintenance of social hierarchy in the antebellum South.

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[183] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese notes that slave-holding women, particularly those of the planter class, aimed publicly to embody a combination of opulence and self-control. Thus, in Mitchell's novel, Scarlett dons expensive clothes, and must avoid over-eating in public in order to affirm her status as a white woman. Similarly, Catherine Clinton connects the need for self-control to concerns about piety, which were particularly important for a plantation mistress. Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind* (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1936), 64; Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 94-96; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 198-213. For more on the role of self-control and comportment, see Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: the Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 32-62.

Chapter 3: In Search of Good Earth: Geophagy and Culture in the African Diaspora

Ef you bleedzd ter eat dirt, eat clean dirt.

Plantation proverb

Fannie Glass was an earth eater. She routinely participated in geophagy, or *geophagia*, the practice of consuming earth or clay. Earth eating is a form of pica, which involves the ingestion of non-food materials. In an interview conducted in 1984 by a *New York Times* journalist, she affirmed a fondness for "hill dirt," extracted from upland areas in the Mississippi Delta.[184] The area was prized for its rich productive soil, and slave owners began constructing plantations there in the 1820s. The tradition of eating earth was a family practice: Glass learned it from her mother in childhood, and she perhaps learned it from her enslaved relatives in the Delta. According to the anthropologists who have examined earth eating among African Americans, the custom originated in Africa and emerged in the Americas during the Atlantic Slave Trade.[185]

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[184] William E. Schmidt, "Southern Practice of Dirt Eating Shows Signs of Waning," *New York Times*, April 13, 1984, A12. The relationship between pica and geophagy in antebellum discourse will be explored later in this chapter. For more on the medical history of pica, see Peter Abrahams, "Geophagy and the Involuntary Ingestion of Soil," in *Essentials of Medical Geology: Impacts of the Natural Environment and Public Health* (New York: Academic Press, 2005), 446-454.

[185] Modern anthropological research on geophagy in Sub-Saharan Africa largely examines the practice in the twentieth century; however, oral histories and archeological evidence support the argument that dirt eating among persons of African descent in the United States has its origins in West and Central Africa. For more on this, see John M. Hunter, "Geophagy in Africa and the United States: A Culture-Nutrition Hypothesis," *Geographical Review* 63, no. 2 (April 1973), 170-195; Donald E. Vermeer, "Geophagy in Africa and the United States: A Culture-Nutrition Hypothesis," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 65, no. 3 (1973): 414–24; Berthold Laufer, *Geophagy* (Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1930), 159-160.

When asked why she consumed earth, Glass asserted that she derived a sensory pleasure from earth ingestion. "Dirt," she said, "always tasted so good to me."[186] Perhaps, like other geophagists before her, Glass craved Delta clay for its sweet taste. The visceral satisfaction of geophagy was also reflected in the neo-slave narrative literary tradition.[187] From Sherley Anne Williams's *Dessa Rose* to Edward P. Jones's *The Known World*, authors of fictional texts that focus on the lives of the enslaved have interpreted geophagy as a cultural practice that affirms slaves' desire for pleasure. In *Dessa Rose*, Williams contrasts an enslaved woman's longing for her lover against a pregnant woman's desire for soil. "He had smelled like good earth after a short rain," Williams writes, "[the] kind make your mouth water for a taste of it and drive pregnant womens to eat dirt."[188] The passage explains both the pleasure of earth eating and highlights the practice among pregnant women – a common theme in historical commentaries on geophagy.

Furthermore, the conflation of the desire for a lover and for the soil underscores the writer's effort to discuss pleasure in the lives of slaves. The association of sexual desire and sensory pleasure encodes both practices as corporeally satisfying – even for people whose bodies were owned by slaveholders. In a similar fashion, Jones's *The Known World* evokes dirt eating as a component of enslaved subjectivity. Moses, an overseer, consumes dirt in the opening pages of the novel set in antebellum Virginia. "Moses…took a pinch of the soil and ate it with no more

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[186] Schmidt, "Southern Practice of Dirt Eating Shows Signs of Waning."

[187] Coined by Bernard Bell, the term refers to post-Emancipation fiction that examines bondage or freedom in the African diaspora. These literary works borrow on a black American folkloric tradition as part of their reflection on bondage. Charles J. Hegla, *Rethinking the Slave Narrative: Slave Marriage and the Narratives of Henry Bibb and William and Ellen Craft* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 148.

[188] Sherley Anne Williams, *Dessa Rose*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishing, 1999), 183-184.

thought than if it were a spot of cornbread."[189] The practice of earth ingestion in this novel's opening affirms an intimacy between Moses and the soil he tills during the day as a slave in the fields.

Novels like *Dessa Rose* and *The Known World* underscore one of the central goals of neo-slave narratives; collectively, this body of literature seeks to recover forgotten and overlooked aspects of enslaved culture. In this instance, the novels by Sherley Anne Williams and Edward P. Jones suggest the sensorial importance of geophagy. Historian Stephanie Camp argues that the bodies of slaves in the American South served as "a site of pleasure and resistance."[190] Thus, geophagists show how the slave's body could function as a space for enjoyment.

Conversely, historical analysis of earth eating has focused on the practice's medicinal significance. Historian Kenneth Stampp writes about the practice among slaves in antebellum Louisiana, asserting that geophagy was a symptom of a hookworm infection, and also an expression of dietary scarcity.[191] By contrast, medical historian Todd Savitt challenged the association between earth eating, hookworm infection and "dietary deficiency." He found that

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[189] Edward P. Jones, *The Known World* (New York: Harper Collins Publishing, 2003), 1.

[190] Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 68.

[191] Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution*, 304. Similarly, Robert Twyman argues that slaves' ingestion of dirt was a product of hunger and inadequate nutrition. Further, he speculates that dirt eating is an addiction, which first attracts practitioners based on the taste of the clay. Twyman's analysis fails to examine the cultural significance of geophagy among slaves, and in large measure, he reads the practice as dysfunctional. Robert W. Twyman, "The Clay Eater: A New Look at an Old Southern Enigma," *The Journal of Southern History* 37, no. 3 (August 1971): 439-448. More recently Harriet Washington also argued in her work that geophagy was the result of malnutrition. While it is possible that enslaved men and women did engage in geophagy to combat hunger, there are to date no historical anecdotes that affirm this a motivation for the practice. Harriet Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation* (New York: Random House, 2008), 44.

rather than being a cause of disease, geophagy was more likely a social custom.[192] Nonetheless, Savitt's work stops short of analyzing earth eating as a cultural practice. More recently, medical historians Kenneth Kiple and Virginia King echoed the conclusions of Stampp, arguing that earth consumption among slaves in the Atlantic World was most likely motivated by hunger and nutritional deficiencies.[193] The studies of the aforementioned historians have tended to emphasize what anthropologist Mary Douglass calls a "medical materialism."[194] Such an approach seeks to identify the physiological benefits of geophagy; however, this often neglects the potential cultural significance of this practice. The neo-slave narratives of Williams and Jones thus serve as efforts to illuminate overlooked cultural motivations that may have undergirded this practice among enslaved people. Moreover, these works suggest that earth eating held a sensory significance that is even linked to pleasure. When the historical scholarship on geophagy in the African Diaspora is read against the depictions offered in these neo-slave narratives, it becomes clear that historians have emphasized the potential medical benefits of this practice over social, political, and cultural understandings. These neo-slave narratives suggest the need for re-examination of geophagy.

This chapter departs from earlier historical studies of geophagy among American slaves in two significant ways. First, this chapter aims to understand the cosmological significance of dirt and earth eating within the African Diaspora, especially in parts of the Cotton South.

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[192] Todd Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery: The Diseases and Health Care of Blacks in Antebellum Virginia* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 66.

[193] Kenneth F. Kiple and Virginia Himmelsteib King, *Another Dimension to the Black Diaspora: Diet, Disease, and Racism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 119-121.

[194] William James first developed the concept of medical materialism, and Douglass uses it to highlight the ways that medical discourse supplants religious ideology. Mary Douglass, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Praeger Publisher, 1970), 29-32.

Second, this chapter analyzes two competing worldviews regarding dirt eating that emerged in the slave South - one from the slaves, the other from the people who owned slaves. Geophagy held both medicinal and metaphysical significance to slaves. Black people who ate dirt affirmed their own understanding of how to maintain healthy bodies, and the inability of whites to effectively police this habit sheds lights on the limits of slave holding authority to foreclose enslaved desire and institute total control over enslaved black bodies.

Geophagy in Sub-Saharan African

The practice of eating earth was brought to parts of the Caribbean and the United States by enslaved West and Central Africans during the Atlantic slave trade. Like the religious practice of conjure, geophagy was a cultural tradition that held significance for its sensorial, medicinal and metaphysical value. Geophagy in Sub-Saharan Africa dates back to the prehistoric period. Archeologists found evidence that early humans near Kalambo Falls in Tanzania consumed white-colored clay, which archeologists believed to be rich in calcium.[195] According to these scholars, the practice spread from this region in eastern Africa to the rest of the continent. Although examples of geophagy are found all over Sub-Saharan Africa, the practice was particularly common in West and Central Africa.

European explorers in the eighteenth century considered clay consumption a culinary oddity marking the difference between European and African civilization. Food historian Anna Suranyi notes that travel writers by the early modern period evoked dietary practices to note

[195] Peter W Abrahams, "Geophagy and the Involuntary Ingestion of Soil," in *Essentials of Medical Geology*, ed. Olle Selinus (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2013), 433–54.

distinctions between cultures.[196] For these travelers, food was more than just sustenance; the foods people consumed marked the parameters of nationality and civilization. Earth eating was one way that explorers conceptualized the Africans they encountered as a group different from their own.

By the eighteenth century, French soldier-turned-explorer Sylvain Meinrad Xavier de Golbéry encountered men and women who ate clay on the island of Los Idolos off the coast of Guinea. Similarly, German geographer T.F. Ehrmann encountered men and women who ate clay during his travels in Sierra Leone. The type of soil they consumed was said to be a soft dense earth, which resembled "melts like butter," and his hosts used the soil as a condiment by combining it with rice.[197] Golbéry argued that the clay eaten along the Guinea coast did not pose a serious health threat. To buttress this claim, he sampled the rice mixed with clay and offered the following observation. He wrote, "I have eaten rice lubricated with this earth, and found it extremely palatable, and far from being unpleasant in taste."[198] Ultimately, these travel writings suggest that earth eating was pleasing to the palate. Thus, its consumption was at least partly a matter of taste and desire and was shaped by culinary traditions in West Africa.

Dirt Eaters and Disease Narratives in the Caribbean

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[196] Anna Suranyi, "Seventeenth-Century English Travel Literature and the Significance of Foreign Foodways," *Food & Foodways* 14, no.1 (Fall 2006): 124-125.

[197] T.F. Ehrmann quoted in Berthold Laufer, *Geophagy* (Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1930), 156.

[198] Sylvain Meinrad Xavier de Golbéry and Francis William Blagdon, *Travels in Africa: Performed during the Years 1785, 1786, and 1787, in the Western Countries of That Continent, Comprised Between Cape Blanco in Barbary, Situated in 20^0 47', and Cape Palmas, in 4^0 30' North Latitude* (London: printed for James Ridgway, York-Street, St. James's-Square; by B. McMillan, Bow-Street, Covent-Garden, 1802), 335.

Enslaved Africans carried the practice of geophagy with them first to the Caribbean and later to the United States. Between 1450 and 1700, approximately 1,757,000 slaves came to the Americas as part of the Atlantic Slave Trade, most arriving in the Caribbean or South America.[199] Although scholars of African American Studies initially believed that trauma of enslavement robbed slaves of their African past, today historians of the African Diaspora provide a more complex picture of West and Central African cultural practices circulating throughout the African Diaspora.[200] Geophagy was one cultural practice that survived the brutality of the Middle Passage.

Enslaved men and women in the Caribbean attempted to reconstruct the practice of geophagy in their new environment. In order to do this they sought out soils that were similar in color and texture to those they formerly consumed in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to French official Thibaut de Chanvalon, slaves in Martinique say, "…the earth of the West Indies is not so easy of digestion as that of their country."[201] Perhaps the most commonly described soil that Sub-Saharan Africans consumed was a white clay similar to the type Sylvain Meinrad Xavier de Golbéry had observed being eaten off the coast of Guinea. Jamaican slaves sought out a similar

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[199] Herbert S. Klein and Ben Vinson III, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 51-52.

[200] Today scholars writing about the African Diaspora explore the transformation of West and Central African practices in the Americas. While some focus on African survivals, others interrogate the way slaves sought to reshape formerly African traditions in new settings. This work seeks to show that dirt eating was not simply an African survival. Rather, enslaved men and women in the Caribbean and the United States transformed the practice as their worldviews changed during bondage. For examples of this scholarship, see Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, and James H. Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

[201] Thibaut de Chanvalon quoted in Alexander Von Humboldt, *Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of America* (London: Bell & Daldy, 1869), 497.

type of clay, which they called *aboo*. Plantation owner Paul Browne offered a description of the type of soil consumed by slaves on his plantation: "…apparently smooth, and greasy, and somewhat cohesive in nature; but dissolves easily in the mouth. The Negroes, who make frequent use of this substance, say that it is sweetish…."[202] The description Brown offers of the earth consumed by slaves closely resembles a soil eaten by men and women in West Africa. Further, he suggests that slaves desired this earth because they enjoyed its texture and taste. Likewise, Chanvalon suggests the practice is a social custom that offers enjoyment to consumers: "…Negroes, who came from the coast of Guinea, eat earth; not from a depraved state, or in consequence of a disease, but from a habit contracted at home in Africa, where they eat, they say, a particular earth, the taste of which they find agreeable, without suffering any inconvenience. They seek in our islands the earth most similar to this, and prefer a yellowish red volcanic tufa."[203]

Regardless of colonists' observations that slaves derived pleasure from dirt eating, Europeans in the Caribbean increasingly began to view the habit as a symptom of disease. The efforts of slaves in the Caribbean to engage in geophagy met opposition from colonial officials and slaveholders who increasingly viewed the practice as fatal. Travel accounts from the Caribbean in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries described dirt eating as an unnatural consumptive habit that endangered the health of slaves. French cleric Pere Labat was one of the first to link geophagy to sickness. Travelling to the island of Martinique in the 1660s, Labat sought to promote Catholicism on the newly established French colony. According to Labat,

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[202] Patrick Browne, *The Civil and Natural History of Jamaica: In Three Parts* (London: T. Osborne and J. Shipton, 1756), 64.

[203] Thibaut de Chanvalon quoted in John Le Conte, "Observations on Geophagy," *The Southern Medical and Surgical Journal* 1, no. 8 (1845): 417–44.

slaves in Martinique were drawn to consume earth as an expression of sadness. This sense of melancholy, he believed, sprung from their sorrow at being forcibly removed from Africa. Although dirt eating began with earth consumption, Labat argued that dirt eaters quickly turned to other non-food items. He wrote, "Cette mélancolie noire qui porte les nègres à manger de la terre, des cendres, de la chaux et autres choses de cette nature, est ordinaire aux sauvages. Elle est encore commune parmi nos créoles, et surtout aux filles qui ont du penchant pour le dernier sacrement. Dans cet état elles mangent mille ordures."[204] For Labat eating non-food items was potentially fatal, and this compulsive consumption of inedible objects was spurred by the practice of geophagy. This representation of earth consumption underscores how this West and Central African tradition came to be framed as deviant by the late seventeenth century.

Labat and others further maligned geophagy by associating the practice with death. The French colonist suggested that slaves who engaged in the practice did so out of a desire for death. To stress this point, Labat argued that slaves ate dirt when they requested last rites. The conflation of Catholic practice, through last rites, with the African practice of geophagy illustrates how Martinique slaves adapted an older cultural practice to their new environs. Others echoed Labat's affirmation of the harmful nature of dirt eating in the eighteenth century. Patrick Browne, an Irish physician who worked in the Caribbean, argued that dirt was like a toxin for slaves who practiced geophagy. Eventually, he argued, compulsive eating of soil overwhelmed slaves' bodies. Browne affirmed, "…[M]any get a habit of eating it to such excess, that it often proves fatal to them. It is the most certain poison I have known, when used for any length of time; and often enters so abundantly into the course of the circulation, as to obstruct all the minute capillaries of the body; nay, has been often found concreted in the glands, and small

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[204] Jean-Baptiste Labat, *Voyages Aux Iles Françaises de l'Amérique* (Paris: Chez Lefebvre, Imprimeur-Libraire, 1831), 72.

vessels of the lungs, so far as to become sensibly perceptible to the touch…"[205] Narratives about geophagy like those offered by Labat and Browne helped to shape the medical discourse about the practice that tied it to disease.

By the late eighteenth century, medical experts viewed dirt eating as a cause of a fatal disease known as Cachexia Africana, or Mal D'Estomac, because it was believed to cause severe stomach distress. Medical historian Kenneth Kiple notes that stomach complaints among slaves were common in the Caribbean because enslaved persons used stomach pain as a way to describe general bodily discomfort.[206] Other symptoms of Cachexia Africana included fatigue, heart palpitations, and abdominal swelling. Moreover, colonists claimed the disease also caused a physical transformation in geophagists, who could be distinguished by their yellow eyes, ashen complexion, and discolored tongue and gums. The overall sunken appearance was said to be common in slaves in the final stages of this malady.

The pathologizing of geophagy by physicians in medical narratives led many to affirm the practice as potentially lethal if it was not moderated, or discouraged early on, by slaveholders. Barbadian physician Walter Caddell argued that geophagy-related deaths accounted for three-quarters of all slave deaths in 1812.[207] Likewise, military physician John Hunter argued that dirt eating accounted for half of all slave deaths on the island of Jamaica in the same period.[208]

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[205] Browne, *The Civil and Natural History of Jamaica*, 64.

[206] Kenneth Kiple, *The Caribbean Slave: A Biological History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 100.

[207] B. W. Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807-1834* (University of West Indies Press, 1995), 781.

[208] Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807-1834*, 781.

Although the practice of geophagy was generally deemed fatal, in parts of the Caribbean the stigma attached to earth eating began to undergo a change after the end of slavery. In 1835, one year after the process of abolishing slavery began in Jamaica, colonial surgeon James Maxwell argued that earth consumption was neither deviant nor deadly. Rather, earth consumption was a cultural practice. He affirmed, "[T]he moderate use of [clayey] earth is considered by negroes neither dangerous nor disgraceful; and those who eat it, take it as much to gratify an acquired taste, similar to that of chewing tobacco or opium, as to satisfy any morbid desire. Prepared in the manner described, it is used by many as a social habit.[209] Maxwell's comments highlight how slavery framed white interpretations of earth consumption. Anxiety over earth eating was linked to control over black bodies. The demise of bondage in Jamaica meant that whites were not concerned about black fatality and the accompanying loss of property; therefore, geophagy went from being an example of an aberrant practice to a benign social custom similar to tobacco consumption.

Dirt Eaters in the Antebellum American South

Depictions of enslaved earth eaters circulated widely in the Atlantic World by the beginning of the antebellum era. The growing awareness of geophagy in the United States was due, in part, to the studies of Caribbean physicians like John Hunter and the reflections of pro-slavery ideologues like Thibaut de Chanvalon. Interest in the practice gained a wider audience in the 1830s, especially with the publication of F.W. Cragin's popular analysis of dirt eaters in the *American Journal of Medicine*. The article garnered attention beyond the medical community

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[209] James Maxwell, "Pathological Inquiry into the Nature of Cachexia Africana, as it is Generally Connected with Dirt Eating", *Jamaica Physical Journal*, 2 (1835): 409, quoted in Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807-1834*, 295.

when newspapers like the *Boston Courier* reprinted Cragin's ideas.[210] Physicians in the United States noted the practice of earth eating among slaves in the South. At the time they viewed geophagy as a symptom of Cachexia Africana or "negro consumption," which they understood in terms virtually identical to their earlier peers in the West Indies.

Narratives about dirt eating in the antebellum South were representative of a Southern racial discourse that linked disease, racial difference, and slave status. Southern physicians were the most frequent documenters of this practice, publishing accounts about this habit in Southern medical journals. Dr. John Le Conte informed readers of the *Savannah Medical Review* that the practice of consuming earth ran rampant throughout the South. "In the Southern States," he wrote, "geophagy prevails to a considerable extent, particularly among the Negroes."[211] While acknowledging that whites in Georgia might also consume earth, Le Conte's assertion tied earth eating to blackness.

Race animated understandings about disease during the antebellum period, as white Southerners employed diagnoses such as Cachexia Africana to highlight apparent differences between the races. As medical historian Karl Figlio writes, "The ambiguity in the phrase 'the social constitution of illness' is intentional. It is intended to convey that the disease as a clinical object, structures a cluster of social relations and at the same time is itself socially constructed."[212] In short, disease pathologies are often embedded with social meanings, because

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[210] F.W. Cragin, "Observations on Cachexia Africana or Dirt-Eating in the Negro Race," *American Journal of the Medical Science* 17 (1836): 356–64.

[211] John Le Conte, "Observations on Geophagy," *The Southern Medical and Surgical Journal* 1, no. 8 (1845): 430.

[212] Karl Figlio, "Chlorosis and Chronic Disease in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Social Constitution of Somatic Illness in a Capitalist Society," *Social History* 3, no. 2 (May 1978): 167.

they are shaped by political, social and economic understandings. The promotion of diseases particular to slaves in the antebellum period illustrates how Southern medical knowledge helped to establish biological difference as a basis for bondage.

Slaveholders in the Caribbean and the American South circulated stories about diseases particular to slaves in order to affirm black inferiority. Noted physician Samuel Cartwright exemplifies the way physicians promoted racialized notions about disease. They linked disease to biological matters of racial inferiority and susceptibility rather than social matters of resistance, rebellion, and sadness. To explain the proclivity in some slaves for running away, Cartwright diagnosed these men and women with a condition he called Drapetomania. This disease produced a physical longing within slaves that compelled them to run away from their plantation.[213] In a similar vein, Southern physicians pathologized dirt ingestion because it adversely affected a slave's ability to work. The promotion of dirt eating as a black disease fixed race on the bodies of its practitioners and tied enslaved socio-cultural customs to illness.

Doctors in both the Caribbean and the American South pathologized black bodies through discourse on disease and dirt eating. When physician W.M. Carpenter described dirt eating as "the most fatal disease of the negro race," in the *New Orleans Medical Journal*, he racialized the practice.[214] Physicians' medical narratives helped to establish geophagy as a trans-Atlantic disease that uniquely affected blacks.

Instances of geophagy spanned the antebellum South, stretching from Virginia to Texas. In 1850, James Duncan, a physician from Louisiana, noted that geophagy was prevalent on plantations in the state. He wrote, "A very common disease among negroes on plantations in this

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[213] Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery*, 112-113.

[214] W.M. Carpenter, "Observations of Cachexia Africana, or the Habit and Effects of Dirt-Eating in the Negro Race," *New Orleans Medical Journal* 1, no. 3 (1844): 147.

part of the country is a state of anemia, very often attributed, and perhaps justly, to the pernicious habit of dirt-eating. On examining negroes on plantations, a medical man is surprised to meet with so many of these cases. Almost every large plantation has three or four, and sometimes more of them."[215] Prior to the antebellum period in the South, dirt eating among slaves went largely undiagnosed. Duncan highlights the challenges that Southern doctors faced in detecting this elusive practice.

Earth eating in Louisiana garnered attention both in and out of the state. From scientists to journalists and physicians, narratives about geophagy in Louisiana gained a wider audience. Frequently, writers on the practice in Louisiana cast dirt eating as an aberrant behavior, and to underscore the bizarre nature of earth eating commentators, they conflated the habit with more extreme examples of pica. The Georgia *Daily Morning News* offered a story about an enslaved man suspected of eating dirt who was later found to be consuming cloth instead.[216] The article's close association between dirt eating and the ingestion of other non-food objects mirrors a similar narrative about dirt eating promoted within the Caribbean. For example, the earliest writers on geophagy, like Labat, argued that the practice was dangerous because it could give way to the consumption of other non-food articles. The similarities in the accounts of geophagy suggest that ideas about the practice circulated widely in the Atlantic world. Collectively, these narratives underscore the ways commentators framed dirt eating as an unnatural practice, one that transgressed traditional consumptive norms and underlined slaves' inferior racial status.

Slave owners were troubled by geophagy because disease impaired plantation productivity. Historian Ira Berlin notes the challenges that disease placed on slaveholders'

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[215] James B. Duncan, "Report on the Topography, Climate and Diseases of the Parish of St. Mary," *Southern Medical Reports* 1, no. 1 (1850): 194.

[216] "No Accounting for Taste," Savannah, Georgia, *Daily Morning News*, June 23, 1852, 103.

efforts to establish cotton plantations.[217] Farm journals frequently show days lost to ailing slaves. The records from Babcock Plantation in the Alabama's cotton-rich Black Belt show how sickness could impair cotton cultivation. The overseer noted thirty-five enslaved men and women incapacitated by temporary illness in 1859. On average a typical slave remained away from work for 2-4 days per year.[218] These plantation records suggest how illness could impair labor on Southern plantations.

Southern physicians argued that dirt eating was prevalent throughout the South in order to stress the danger it could pose to Southern slaveholders' livelihoods. Physician Daniel Drake, who visited several plantations along the coast of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, noted that geophagy caused slaves to miss work due to illness and sometimes took their lives. Drake wrote, "On many plantations the strange habit prevails of eating dirt or clay, the common soil of the fields, particularly that of the Mississippi bottoms, producing serious and fatal diseases. I was told of one estate in South Alabama, on which fourteen slaves had died from this cause, and visited another in Louisiana, on which I saw nearly half that number unable to work from the same practice."[219] Drake's observation highlights the danger which illicit consumption posed to both slave labor and mortality. Slaves' behavior could lead to loss of capital for their owners. The Gulf Coast states that Drake visited were central to the developing slave societies built

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[217] Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 174-175.

[218] D.H. Smith Plantation Book, 1859, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

[219] Daniel Drake, "Disease of the Negro Population in a Letter to Rev. Mr. Pinney," *The Southern Medical and Surgical Journal* 1, no. 6 (1845): 341.

around cotton and sugar.[220] By causing slaves to miss work, or worse, die from the practice, dirt eating posed a threat to the western expansion of slavery.

Further, legal wrangling about dirt eating in warranty suits underscored how the practice influenced the buying and selling of slaves. The domestic slave trade was a vital part of the Southern economy; it was second only to plantation agriculture in terms of financial importance. Slaves, in short, were people with a price.[221] The value of a slave depended on many factors including, gender, age, skin color and health. Infirm bondsmen and women were less valuable, particularly if the malady was of a chronic nature. For slave buyers in Georgia, certificates of "soundness" could be issued by a doctor, which guaranteed the slave was healthy at the time of sale. If a slave became suddenly ill after purchase or failed to perform assigned tasks due to illness, slave buyers and sellers frequently contested the terms of slave purchases through warranty suits.

Successful litigants in warranty cases had to prove the slaves' inability to work was the result of either a vice or unremitting infirmity. Further, the plaintiff had to prove that the slave acquired the alleged vice or disability prior to his or her sale. Southern doctors were frequently called to testify in warranty cases because they were charged with investigating the health of slave before or after purchase.[222] Physician Juriah Harriss described what conditions were necessary to find a slave unsound in the *Savannah Medical Journal*: "I believe no disease will constitute unsoundness, unless it is of a chronic or constitutional character, and incapacitates the negro for the performance of the usual duties of his calling, viz: hard labor, or tending to shorten

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[220] See Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press: 2005); Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*.

[221] For more, see Johnson, *Soul by Soul,* 19-44; Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 142-173.
[222] Gross, *Double Character*, 122-152.

life; or an acute disease of such a character as will probably leave a sequence of chronic infection, which will more or less incapacitate the negro for manual labor; or again an acute disease, which will render the negro liable to subsequent attacks of the same affliction."[223] Based on the aforementioned description, dirt eating of a persistent nature could lead a slave to be pronounced unsound because the practice inhibited labor, resisted treatment, and potentially caused death. In the *Ramsey v. Blalock* case, tried in Georgia in 1860, an enslaved woman named Martha was found to be unsound because she had dropsy brought on by dirt eating. The association of earth ingestion with maladies like dropsy was common as physicians ascribed dirt eating as a symptom in a variety diseases.[224]

Because of the peculiarities of Louisiana law, geophagy troubled slave trading in that crucial southwestern slave market. The buying and selling of slaves in Louisiana was covered under redhibition statues, which stated the buyer had to show that the slave possessed a "vice of character" or a "vice of the body" to overturn a sell. Following the completion of a slave purchase in this state, slave owners had one year in which to contest the transaction through the courts. Among the types of cases involving slavery presented to the Louisiana Supreme Court, warranty suits were one of the most common.[225]

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[223] Juriah Harriss, "What Constitutes Unsoundness in the Negro?" *Savannah Journal of Medicine* 3 (September 1858): 145-146.
[224] Edward O. Jenkins, *Reports of Cases in Law and Equity, Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of the State of Georgia* (Macon: Edward O. Jenkins, 1869), 376-379; Gross, *Double Character*, 142; Samuel W. Logan, "Case of Transportation of the Heart, Stomach, Liver and Spleen—with Rupture of the Heart," *New Orleans Medical Journal* (July 1844): 43.

[225] The rehidibition statues were the result of Louisiana's colonization by the French. Judith K. Schafer, *Slavery, the Civil Law, and the Supreme Court of Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 127-147.

During the 1850s the Court presided over two cases involving dirt eating. In *Dupre v. Desmaret*, the plaintiff filed suit against a slave buyer who refused to pay for John Bull, an enslaved man, because he was said to have become addicted to dirt eating prior to being sold. A lower court found in favor of the slave buyer, and awarded him fifty dollars. The ruling reflects the fact that in this instance dirt eating was treated as a "vice of the body." Under this designation a disease of a chronic nature could be used as grounds to invalidate a slave sell. The plaintiff appealed this verdict, and in 1851 the Louisiana Supreme Court overturned the verdict of the lower court. They ruled that the defendant failed to prove that John Bull was a dirt eater prior to his sale.[226] Although this case was overturned, it illustrates how geophagy affected slaves' value even after they were sold.

By contrast, in *Demoruelle v. Sugg* (1852), the Supreme Court of Louisiana rescinded a slave sale on the basis of geophagy. The Court affirmed, "The habit of dirt eating is not necessarily a redhibitory vice. It is the cause of disease, but not the disease itself."[227] The Court reversed the slave sale, contending that earth eating was a symptom, not a disease in and of itself. Moreover, by arguing that dirt eating contributed to disease, the court affirmed the transgressive nature of the practice. Ultimately, dirt eating became a source of concern for slaveholders and physicians because illicit consumption challenged enslavers' efforts to operate productive slave plantations and threatened slaves' value as chattel property.

Slaves' consumption of dirt became an issue of white mastery over black bodies. Physicians and slave owners faced significant challenges to their authority as they tried to police

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[226] Louisiana Supreme Court, *Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of Louisiana*, Volume 56, (New Orleans: T. Rea Publishing, 1851), 591-592.

[227] W.M. Randolph, *Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of Louisiana*, Vol. 7 (New Orleans: T. Rea, 1854), 42-44.

and treat the practice of geophagy on farms and plantations. The transgressive nature of geophagy eluded all efforts to police the behavior. Louisiana physician James Duncan affirmed, "But I never heard a negro admit that he was addicted to the habit. Some admit that formerly, years ago, they ate dirt, but do not now; and others, trusty, truth-telling negroes on other subjects, on this will lie most pertinaciously to the last, unless detected in the act."[228] Part of the danger posed by earth eating stemmed from the fact that Southern slaves typically consumed earth outside of the slaveholder's sight. John Le Conte, the physician in Savannah, Georgia, described the resourcefulness of one slave who consumed earth. Charged with treating a sixteen-year-old slave, Le Conte noted that the enslaved woman persisted in eating dirt despite confinement to her bed. "But nothing could prevent the gratification of the invincible craving for earthy substances," he concluded, "for the cunning plans of the patient to procure her desired repast eluded the utmost vigilance."[229] By indulging in earth consumption away from the gaze of slaveholders, enslaved men and women could persist in this act of illicit consumption.

Dirt eating complicated slaveholders' control over the bodies of their slaves; therefore, violence played a significant role in slave owners' attempts to deter geophagy. Tom Haynes, born a slave in Alabama in 1859, noted that one day he was sitting outside eating dirt with such zeal that it covered his face. Haynes's slave owner, Henry Franks, saw the young boy eating dirt and approached him. Grabbing Tom forcefully, Franks demanded to see the young boy's tongue. Hoping to discourage the continued practice of dirt eating, Franks warned Tom that if he ever caught him doing this again that he would cut off the boy's tongue. To ensure this threat had its intended effect, Franks asked the three-year old, "Now you think you can quit eatin' that

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[228] Duncan, "Report on Topography, Climate and Disease of the Parish of St. Mary, LA," 194.

[229] Le Conte, "Observations on Geophagy," 430.

dirt?"[230] In order to re-affirm his authority, Franks threatened the enslaved boy with bodily mutilation. In addition to physical threats, slaveholders also used confinement as a way to deter geophagy. For example in Louisiana, slave owners used iron masks similar to those used in the Caribbean.[231] Through violence, slaveholders attempted to re-assert their mastery over black bodies.

The practice of geophagy likely began during childhood. Speculating on the practice among children, physician John M.B. Harden in Georgia noted that slaves frequently learned this habit from fellow slaves when they were children. He wrote, "Among the negroes here, I believe it to be a very common habit, and one that is taught them from childhood. I remember to have eaten clay myself when a child from the example which was set me by negro children."[232] Harden suggests that dirt eating could have been a communal ritual for children since it was often learned by example. A former slave from Tennessee told W.P.A. interviewers in the 1930s that he and other enslaved children on his plantation ate dirt and green fruit as a children; however, they were careful to do this secretly in order to avoid punishment from his slave mistress. The former slave from Tennessee recalled, "We'd eat green apples, eat dirt and things like that and if [our mistress] caught us we would hide it behind us, and if she asked what we had, we'd say, 'Nothing.'"[233] Eating both dirt and green fruit, this anonymous slave engaged in multiple forms of illicit consumption.

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[230] Tom Haynes, Interview by Bernice Bowden (Pine Bluff, Arkansas, April 12,1937), Federal Writer's Project, United States Work Projects Administration, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (1941): 227

[231] Fenner, 128.

[232] Harden, 232.

[233] Fisk University Social Science Institute, *Unwritten History of Slavery: Autobiographical Accounts of Negro Ex-Slaves*, Vol. 1 (Nashville, TN: Microcard Editions, 1968), 139.

Dubbed "unseasonable eating" by slaveholders, the ingestion of green fruit also frustrated slave owners because it could impair a slave's ability to work. The practice of unseasonable eating came to be associated more with sickness than disease; however, it underscores how slaveholders aimed to mark the boundaries of edibility for slaves in order to ensure productivity. Alabama slave owner William Gould captures the anxiety that some slave owners felt regarding the affects of the practice. In the summer of 1856, as the enslaved men and women on Hill of the Howth plantation prepared to return to work following an unknown illness, Gould feared his slaves would ingest ripening plums and fresh blackberries that would make them sick. "Monday," Gould wrote in his diary, "is always a bad day for sickness, especially if there is fruit of any kind."[234] Gould's slaves shared a different opinion regarding this fruit; he later wrote in his diary that the only way to prevent the enslaved men and women on the plantation from eating wild fruit and becoming sick would be to shackle them.

These practices among slaves, and the consternation it triggered in slaveholders, highlight the ways that eating could influence antebellum body politics. Debow, for example, asserted that black slaves were, in part, defined by their inability to control their consumption. For him, "unseasonable eating" was a racialized practice that justified white surveillance and mastery.[235] But the enslaved men and women on Williams Gould's plantation had an alternate perspective on what was proper for their diet. Perhaps these enslaved men and women intentionally ate this wild fruit to make themselves ill and avoid working in the cotton fields. While this act of illicit

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[234] William P. Gould quoted in Charles Shepard Davis, *The Cotton Kingdom in Alabama* (Montgomery, AL: Alabama Department of Archives and History, 1939), 86.
[235] James Dunwoody Brownson DeBow, "The Negro," *Debow's Review: Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources* 5, vol. 3 (1847): 420.

eating may have allowed slaves to re-gain a limited control over their bodies, it also induced illness and caused physical pain.

Slaves may also have ignored the sanctions against the consumption of indigestible foods like dirt and because Africans in the Caribbean and the American South imbued the practice of geophagy with symbolic meaning. Based on beliefs with antecedents in continental Africa, black dirt eaters demonstrated their belief in restorative power of dirt. African women, for example, often consumed dirt for medicinal reasons. Expectant mothers ate dirt to provide additional mineral supplements.[236] Geophagy among women in bondage was based on slaves' personal understanding of their bodies. Whereas slaveholders believed dirt to be primary cause of sickness, women expressed a preference that transgressed slaveholder authority.

The association of dirt with the practice of divination known as "conjure" may explain why some slaves practiced geophagy. Conjure, also known as hoodoo or root work, was an aspect of Afro-Christianity, the creolized religious expression of slaves. Historian Sharla Fett defines conjure as "an African American practice of healing, harming and protection performed through the ritual of harnessing spiritual forces."[237] Conjure provides another example of how slaves maintained a worldview that was partly shaped by Africa. Historian Michael Gomez writes, "Throughout pre-modern Africa, it was commonly believed that causality lay in unseen realms."[238] Divination was an integral part of rootwork, and often conjurers used the practice to determine the source of a slave's problems or illness. Enslaved men and women in the

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[236] For more, see Donald E Vermeer, "Geophagy Among the Tiv," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 10, no. 2 (1966): 197–204; C Otutubikey Izugbara, "The Cultural Context of Geophagy among Pregnant and Lactating Ngwa Women of Southeastern Nigeria," *The African Anthropologist* 10, no. 2 (2003): 108–99.

[237] Fett, *Working Cures*, 85.

[238] Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 284.

antebellum South used conjure both in conflicts with slave owners, and in conflicts within the slave community.

Consumption of earth solidified the relationship between the body and the spiritual realm. Conjurers often carried small pouches, or amulets, around their neck that were filled with everything from animal bones to graveyard dirt. Also known as gopher dust, graveyard dirt was especially powerful. This may also be linked to African practice. The Ekoi of Central Africa believe that Obassi Nsi, the creator of the Earth, also rules over the underworld. When the Ekoi bury their dead in the ground, those bodies return to Obassi Nsi.[239] Because of the creator's presence in the dirt surrounding the gravesite, the burial ground becomes the connection between the spiritual and material worlds.

Graveyard dirt remained significant throughout the African Diaspora. As folklorist Zora Neale Hurston noted, "[S]oil from deep in an old grave has prestige wherever the negro exists in the Western world."[240] Henry Green, a former slave from Alabama, referred to dirt that had been freshly taken from a new grave as "good conjure."[241] According to enslaved cosmology, dirt taken from a gravesite could harbor malevolent spiritual forces; some slaves took special care not to track fresh dirt from a grave back into their residences. While slaves in the United States no longer asserted that Obassi Nsi or Ala inhabited this soil, they continued to imbue this earth with

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[239] Percy Amaury Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush* (London: W. Heinemann, 1912), 17-21.

[240] Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 237. Similarly, religious historian Albert Raboteau writes that graveyard dirt held important cosmological significance; see Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 277-278.

[241] Henry Green interviewed by Watt McKinney (Barton, Arkansas, May 11, 1938), Federal Writer's Project, United States Work Projects Administration, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (1941): 94-95.

cosmological significance. Thus, conjurers filled amulets with graveyard dirt, which they then tied around their necks and used during the practice of divination.

In parts of the Atlantic World, the ingestion of grave dirt served as an important component in enslaved rituals. Caribbean slaves employed gopher dust in order to make oaths. Conjurers combined dirt from a fresh grave with water, rum, and animal blood in order to forge pacts between slaves. Once both parties consumed the concoction the slave who broke the bond risked death at the hands of the spirits who inhabited the grave earth.[242]

The belief in the metaphysical power of grave dirt also shaped slave cosmology in the United States. Among slaves in South Carolina, grave earth played a role in detecting theft. Enslaved individuals accused of stealing another slave's possessions were encouraged to drink a mixture of grave earth and water. If the person was guilty of theft, the individual would die instantly and his or her body would go to hell. Slaves in South Carolina combined formerly African traditions with European Christianity in this ritual. Nonetheless, throughout the Atlantic world, grave earth's significance further affirmed the metaphysical importance of earth. Geophagy, then, represents another way antebellum body politics could be shaped by the practice of eating. The connections between conjure and dirt eating further highlights how geophagy, as an act of illicit consumption, could be premised on slaves' personal cosmologies, thereby eclipsing white efforts to regulate black behavior and control slaves' consumption.

Dirt Eating and Whiteness

After establishing dirt eating as a slave disease that grew out of pathological behavior, planters and physicians later used the phenomenon to police other white people – namely,

[242] Walter C. Rucker, *The River Flows On: Black Resistance, Culture and Identity Formation in Early America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 45-46, 85.

women and all poor whites. Within the American South, earth eating did not always mark a difference between blacks and whites, then; sometimes it affirmed class and gender hierarchies among Southern whites. As part of a racialized, gendered discourse developed by slave owners that confirmed white male hierarchy, dirt eating became useful in establishing the parameters of whiteness and authority.

The link between dirt eating and blackness undoubtedly made disapproving white Southerners further view the practice as unsavory. It is unclear what motivated Southern whites to eat clay; however, some may have learned this practice from slaves. Slaves often raised black children near or alongside white children in the plantation South, so white children witnessed geophagy first hand. Physician John Harden noted that he engaged in clay eating at an early age because he watched his family's slaves ingest earth: "I remember to have eaten clay myself when a child from the example which as set me by negro children."[243] Since black women were typically charged with handling white children, and were reputed to consume dirt, geophagy among those white children reared by enslaved African women is unsurprising. Like spirit possession, earth eating may be a practice that Southern whites adapted cultural practices from the slaves that grew and cooked their food, cleaned their homes, and raised their families. Nonetheless, Harden's comments suggests geophagy was a practices closely associated with enslaved men and women.

Although the children of slaveholders may have learned to consume earth from African Americans, popular depictions of white dirt eaters focused on poor whites. Portrayed as loathsome in memoirs and fiction about the South, white dirt eaters represented the shiftless nature of poor Southern whites. Following a rise in the popularity of cotton cultivation in the

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[243] Harden, 79.

nineteenth century, more affluent slaveholders seized the best lands, and poor whites were left to work on more fallow plots in isolated regions of the South. Landless whites sometimes worked for larger slaveholders as laborers or overseers. In some cases, they even worked alongside slaves.[244] Poor whites, then, may have also learned to consume earth by watching slaves.

The documented practice of dirt eating among poor whites in the South affirmed the stereotype of this group as degenerate. Typically, white earth eaters lived in the piedmont and piney regions of the Southeast in states like Georgia and North Carolina.[245] These economically depressed Southern whites lived in homes held together by clay, not unlike some slaves. According to contemporaries, these material conditions also contributed to the practice of clay ingestion. One observer noted, "The mud with which they daub the interstices between the logs of their rude domiciles must be frequently renewed, as the occupants pick it out in a very short time and eat it."[246] Not only did Southern whites eat clay, but they were also marginalized for their non-normative appetites.

Dirt eating among Southern whites is further encoded as depraved because of the habit's effect on the body. Ransy Sniffle, a fictionalized dirt eater in Augustus Longstreet's "The Fight," subsisted in his youth on a diet of raspberries and "red clay." Sniffle's ingestion of dirt transformed his body and gave him a ghastly appearance. "This diet had given to Ransy," Longstreet writes, "a complexion that a corpse would have disdained to own, and an abdominal

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[244] For more, see Jeff Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 20-22.

[245] Robert W. Twyman, "The Clay Eater: A New Look at an Old Southern Enigma," *Journal of Southern History* 37, no. 3 (Fall 1971): 440-441.

[246] Guion Griffis Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1937), 73.

rotundity that was quite unprepossessing."[247] The change in appearance underscored the dangerous nature of the practice. Frequently, poor diet was linked to bad complexion. Writing about white North Carolinians before the Civil War, one commentator noted, "[M]any of them are clay- or dirt-eaters, which is said to cause their peculiar complexion."[248] Emily Burke, a white schoolteacher in Georgia in the 1850s, also noted the white clay eater was marked by a change in complexion. She wrote, "When a person has once seen a clay-eater, he can ever after, instantly recognize any one of their number by their sickly, sallow, and most unnatural complexions."[249]

Just as earth consumption confirmed slaves' alleged inferiority, it also marked economic disparities and define status among Southern whites. Affluent Southerners considered earth-eating white people to be less cultivated or refined. Southern literature evoked the practice of dirt eating among Southern whites to reaffirm class difference. "The Dirt Eaters," a short story printed in the *Southern Literary Journal* in 1836, offered a fictionalized cautionary tale about the perils of geophagy among Southern whites. The story follows a traveler in antebellum Florida who witnesses the devastating affects dirt eating has on a young plantation mistress and a poor white family. The habit of ingesting earth transforms the once beautiful plantation mistress, giving her "ghastly countenance." In this way, earth eating had a similar affect as fatty pork on some white bodies. Yet, poor dirt eaters meet a more tragic end. The story concludes as the traveler encounters a poor white farmer whose children dies slowly from the ravages of

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[247] Augustus Longstreet, *Georgia Scenes, Characters, Incidents in the First Half of the Republic* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1850), 54-55.

[248] Guion G. Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1937), 124.

[249] Emily Burke, *Reminiscences of Georgia*, (New York: J. M. Fitch, 1850), 205-206.

geophagy. Grabbing a handful of yellow clay, the farmer affirms, "…[T]his is the poison that has done all the mischief…"[250] Although a fictionalized account of dirt eating among Southern whites, the story highlights the cultural stigma white Southerners attached to the practice of earth ingestion. If dirt was filth, those who consumed earth must also be dirty as well.

Regardless of the fact that portions of black and white Southern communities consumed dirt, slave owners argued that, unlike white Southerners, slaves could not stop the practice. Carpenter thought that it was much easier to discourage white children from the practice of eating earth. "Children take up the habit of eating dirt, and in these the symptoms are more variable and less grave, and the habit more easily subdued than in the disease of the negro race."[251] The difficulty attached to curing the black earth eater further underscores a difference between black and white bodies in the antebellum period. For slaveholders, African Americans' resolve to continue the practice of excessive consumption showed their lack of control over their bodies, which further justified the need for white control. Slaves who could not manage themselves needed white supervision.

But physicians and slave owners faced significant challenges to their authority as they tried to police and treat the practice of geophagy on farms and plantations. The transgressive nature of geophagy eluded all efforts to police it. Ultimately, then, clay eaters called into question the issue of bodily ownership. Eating provided a way for slaves to negotiate mastery of their bodies. By reclaiming at least a limited authority over their own consumption, geophagy troubled efforts by slaveholders to enforce total controlled over black bodies. Geophagy

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[250] Annonymous, "The Dirt Eaters," *Southern Literary Journal* 1, no. 1 (1837): 9–13.
[251] Carpenter's article enjoyed gained a wider audience as it was reprinted in medical periodicals in the North and South. W.M. Carpenter, "Observations on the Cachexia Africana, or the habit and effects of dirt-eating in the negro race," *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* (October 1844): 147-148.

highlights how some eating practices could be premised on slaves' own personal cosmologies and their own understandings of health and medicine, thereby eclipsing white efforts to regulate black behavior and control slaves' consumption. In this way, then, this discussion of geophagy illustrates the relationship between eating, power, and understandings of racialized bodies in a slave society.

Chapter 4: Narratives of Consumption: Provisions and Politics in the Antebellum Period

Introduction

Few opponents of Southern bondage were more outspoken than Frederick Douglass. Following his 1838 escape from slavery in Maryland, he entered the abolitionist movement in 1841, delivering speeches and writing extensively in support of an immediate end to slavery. Through *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass's second autobiography published in 1855, Douglass offered a first-hand criticism of enslavement.[252] Not only did Douglass's narrative expose the constant threats of violence slaves faced daily; it also spotlighted the scarcity of resources within the slave community and the failure of slave owners to adequately provide for bondspeople.

For the chronically underfed slaves on Douglass's Maryland plantation, food was a primary concern. After describing the weekly rations of slaves, Douglass estimated that field hands subsisted on roughly "a quarter of a pound of meat per day, and less than a peck of corn-meal per week."[253] By drawing attention to slaves' material conditions, Douglass challenged the claim that enslaved men and women were better fed than other workers around the world. "It is the boast of slaveholders," Douglass asserted, "that their slaves enjoy more of the physical comforts of life than the peasantry of any country in the world. My experience contradicts this."[254] Here, Douglass called upon his personal experience in bondage to trouble the claims

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[252] For more on Frederick Douglass, see C. James Trotman, *Frederick Douglass: A Biography* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2011), 33-58.

[253] Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage, My Freedom* (New York: Miller, Orton, Mulligan, 1855), 100.

[254] Ibid.

slave owners made about diet. Through this commentary on enslaved fare, Douglass transformed eating from a material practice into a political concern. Diet, thus, became a lens through which Douglass could address the hardships of slavery, the shortcomings of Southern mastery, and the limits of Southern honor.

Like Douglass, Frederick Law Olmsted, journalist and anti-slavery critic, also noted the frequent references to enslaved fare in justifications of enslavement. Olmsted wrote, "…[V]ery few Southern writers, on any subject whatever, can get through a book, or even a business or friendly letter, to be sent north, without, in some form or other, asserting that Northern laborers might well envy the condition of the slaves."[255] Olmsted's comments highlight the frequency with which slaveowners discussed enslaved material conditions in formal and informal discussions about Southern bondage in the antebellum North. The writings of Douglass and Olmsted draw attention to the ways that eating and concerns about food informed discussions about enslavement in the antebellum period. In particular, opponents of slavery like Douglass and Olmsted drew attention to enslaved material conditions, from scarce rations to rancid fare, in order to cast doubt on slaveholder claims about enslaved well-being.

During the antebellum period, pro-slavery supporters and their allies crafted narratives about well-provisioned bondspersons in order to defend the institution. By the 1830s, pro-slavery southerners had established what I call the "trope of the well-fed slave" in an effort to defend their livelihood against anti-slavery challenges. Their writing invoked eating and food imagery in order to affirm enslaved contentment, and by the 1840s, they used the trope to deflect abolitionists' criticisms by invoking more troubling examples of suffering among free laborers in the United States and Europe. The growth of the pro-slavery defense in the antebellum period

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[255] Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveler's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States, Vol. 2* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1862), 242.

was influenced by the rise of plantation reform, which had gained momentum in 1820s. The language used to discuss such reform came to influence the pro-slavery arguments of the antebellum era. Employing a rhetoric that emphasized enslaved people's material well being, slaveholders and their allies increasingly drew attention to the quantity of the food they provided to slaves as a means of affirming planter benevolence. Representations of the well-fed slave provided a justification for enslavement by promoting a representation of slaves that linked fare and contentment. The trope of the well-fed slave circulated within political discourse, newspapers, and pro-slavery fiction during the antebellum period, and influenced the creation of laws designed to govern slave rations.

This chapter examines narratives about enslaved consumption in pro-slavery and abolitionist rhetoric in order to show how eating influenced understandings of Southern bondage and body politics in the antebellum period. Responding to growing criticisms of enslavement, some slave owners advocated plantation management schemes in order to address charges about maltreatment leveled by abolitionists. These efforts to promote better plantation practices represent an attempt to modernize cotton cultivation. A second aim of this chapter is to show how white Southern culture, as exemplified through literature, also aimed to defend the practice of slavery. This can be seen in the wave of novels that aimed to respond to Harriet Beecher's Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* after 1852. The total defense of southern bondage increasingly rested on the notion that slaves constituted what apologist James Henry Hammond called a "mudsill"—that is a necessary laboring class upon which civilization rested.

Beyond pro-slavery rhetoric, the chapter also examines abolitionists' discussions of diet. Studies of abolitionists' discourse often focus on themes of violence. The work of Saidiya Hartman offers an important contribution in this vein. In *Scenes of Subjection*, Hartman

examines the ways terror and violence was encoded in abolitionist discourse.[256] In a similar vein, historian Elizabeth Clark analyzes the trope of the "suffering slave" in order to shed light on evolving ideas about morality in the antebellum period. She shows how both conservative and liberal Evangelical Christians in the antebellum period understood slavery to be transgressive due to the pain slaveholders frequently inflicted upon bondspeople.[257] Likewise, historian Margaret Abruzzo interrogates the symbolic meanings of pain in order to understand how humanitarians imbued suffering with social and political meaning. By examining abolitionist writings alongside pro-slavery discourse, Abruzzo demonstrates the interplay between these modes of thought.[258] These works interrogate narratives of violence that often involved the lash; however, they do not explore diet or consumption, which also shaped pro-and anti-slavery rhetoric.

More recently, Kyla Wazana Tompkins interrogated the connection among diet, slavery, consumption, and the enslaved body. For Tompkins, the bodies of slaves operated in antebellum novels as an object to be consumed in order to affirm white racial superiority.[259] Building on this work, this chapter explores how narratives about eating could inform understandings about pro and anti-slavery rhetoric, and how this discourse about consumption was animated by sectional politics and concerns about Southern slavery.

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[256] Saidiya V, Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3-17.

[257] Elizabeth B. Clark, "The Sacred Rights of the Weak": Pain, Sympathy, and the Culture of Individual Rights in Antebellum America," *Journal of American History* 82, no. 2 (1995): 463–93.

[258] Margaret Abruzzo, *Polemical Pain: Slavery, Cruelty, and the Rise of Humanitarianism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011), 1-15.

[259] Kyla Wazana Tompkins, *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 1-52.

Creating the Trope of the Well-Fed Slave

The origins of the trope of the well-fed slave date back to the controversies surrounding Missouri's admission to the Union in 1820. In that year, New York representative James Tallmadge introduced a measure that would have prohibited slavery in Missouri, and set in motion the gradual end of slavery as a part of Missouri's admission as a free state. Tallmadge and others who supported his legislation argued against Missouri's admission as a slave state because they opposed the continued spread of Southern bondage. Siding with Representative Tallmadge, Representative Arthur Livermore of New Hampshire described slavery as "the foulest reproach of the nations."[260] These Northern politicians offered criticism of Southern slavery that questioned the morality of slave ownership.[261]

For Southern politicians, the Missouri crisis marked a critical turning point in the transformation of pro-slavery rhetoric. During the Missouri crisis, Southern politicians and their allies idealized slavery through a discourse that focused attention on slave provisions. Freeman Walker, a representative from Georgia, stated that slaves did not live in "intolerable vassalage"; rather they were "well clothed, well fed, and treated with kindness and humanity."[262] Walker stressed the themes of material welfare and benevolent management. Others, including Charles

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[260] Arthur Livermore quoted in Horace Greeley, *A History of the Struggle for Slavery Extension or Restriction in the United States, from the Declaration of Independence to the Present Day. Mainly Compiled and Condensed from the Journals of Congress and Other Official Records, and Showing the Vote by Yea or Nays on the Most Important Divisions in Either House* (New York: Dix, Edwards, 1856), 20.

[261] For more on anti-slavery politics and the Missouri Compromise, see Robert Pierce Forbes, *The Missouri Compromise and Its Aftermath: Slavery and the Meaning of America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 33-68.

[262] Freeman Walker quoted in Jeffrey Robert Young, *Domesticating Slavery: The Master Class in Georgia and South Carolina, 1670-1837*, 165.

Pinckney, echoed similar sentiments. The South Carolina senator noted that slaves were often better off than workers in England or Northern blacks, whom he described as "half-starved, half-naked, and in the most wretched state of human degradation."[263] Collectively, the speeches of Walker and Pinckney create a dichotomy that juxtaposes well-fed, contended slaves in the Cotton South with underfed and poorly nourished white and African American workers in the antebellum North. This dichotomy aimed to deflect criticisms about slavery's immorality, and affirm Southern bondage as a benefit to people of African descent. The Southern politicians who came to the defense of slavery during the Missouri crisis helped lay out a blueprint that supporters of Southern bondage could follow during the antebellum period.

Southern slaveholders and their political allies marshaled a discourse in support of slavery that called upon paternalism.[264] Paternalism was a plantation management scheme, which gained prominence in the 1810s. As an ideology, paternalism revolved around a series of mutual obligations that tied master and slave together in a family that consisted of both black and white.[265] In order to defend the institution against anti-slavery opponents, it became necessary to

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[263] United States Congress, *Abridgment of the Debates of Congress, from 1789 to 1856: Dec. 1, 1817-March 3, 1821*, ed. T.H. Benton, Vol. 2 (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1858), 537.

[264] Coalition-minded Northern Federalists acquiesced to Southern demands to protect slavery in the early national period. This coalition began to unravel by the 1810s. In its place the politics around slavery assumed a clearer regional divide. See Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 218-253.

[265] A number of different historians have examined the topic of paternalism. Perhaps, the historian best known for his work on this topic is Eugene Genovese. For more, see Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 1-3. In more recent years historians have called Genovese's assessment of paternalism into question. For more, see Stephen Kantrowitz, "The Two Faces of Domination in North Carolina, 1800-1898," in *Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and Its Legacy*, eds. Timothy B. Tyson and David S. Cecelski (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 95–112; Walter Johnson, "A Nettlesome Classic Turns Twenty-Five: Re-Reading Eugene D. Genovese's Roll, Jordan, Roll," *Common-Place*, 2001; Ford, Deliver Us from Evil, 141-296.

alter popular perception. Historians contend that paternalism as an ideology emerged as a way to "domesticate" slavery.[266] In the 1820s, Southern slave owners and their allies increasingly looked to paternalism as part of a defense of bondage.[267]

The trope of the well-fed slave continued to develop in the antebellum period through the writings of paternalistic Southern politicians who emphasized enslaved contentment. Examples of this line of thought in the 1830s appear in the writing of William Harper and William Gilmore Simms. Although born in the Caribbean, Harper gained prominence in South Carolina as a lawyer and leading figure in the nullification debates. Adding to a growing body of pro-slavery tracts, Harper published "A Memoir on Slavery" in 1837. This tract was reprinted by the *Southern Literary Messenger* and, later in 1852, in a pro-slavery anthology.

The larger goal of Harper's essay was to acknowledge a need for continued reform in Southern slavery, while asserting strong opposition to ending the practice. For Harper, slavery played a vital role in helping to establish a civilized society exemplified by the development of an elite class.[268] Contrasting the alleged dietary habits of continental Africans with those of bondsmen and women in the West Indies, Harper used eating to show how slavery promoted civilization. He wrote, "The man who has seen the wild African, roaming in his native woods, and the well fed, happy looking negro of the West Indies, may perhaps, be able to judge of their

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[266] Jeffrey Robert Young, *Domesticating Slavery: The Master Class in Georgia and South Carolina, 1670-1837, 1-16*; Lacy K. Ford, *Deliver Us From Evil: The Slavery Question in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

[267] Ford, *Deliver Us from Evil*, 142-203.

[268] Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 335-343; James Oakes, "The Peculiar Fate of Bourgeois Critique of Slavery," in *Slavery and the American South*, ed. Winthrop D. Jordan (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 29–56.

comparative happiness; the former I strongly suspect, would be glad to change his state of boasted freedom, starvation, and disease, to become the slave of sinners, and the commiseration of saints."[269] Contrasting the "wild" and "roaming" African with the "well-fed" and "happy-looking" slave, Harper suggests that slavery provides greater comfort and a safer, settled life. Through a discourse on eating, Harper attempts to establish the presumed inferiority of continental Africans, whose hunting and gathering practices both proved insufficient to ward off starvation and marked them as less civilized. This image of sickly and malnourished bodies in Africa was contrasted with that of healthy, well-provisioned slave bodies. Thus, Harper vindicated both slavery and planter regulation of enslaved bodies.

Similarly, noted novelist and essayist William Gilmore Simms used the trope of the well-fed slave to comment on eating and Southern bondage. Born in South Carolina, Simms was perhaps best known for his contributions to Southern literature. In novels like *The Partisan Leader* and *The Yamassee*, he offered vivid narratives that examined Southern landscapes and history.[270] He gained attention in 1837 for his efforts in defense of slavery following a review he wrote that criticized British abolitionist Harriet Martineau's *Society in America*.[271]

Drawing on stereotypes about cannibalism in continental Africa, Simms argued that under slavery bondspersons were spared the pain of hunger and danger of cannibalism. He wrote:

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[269]William Harper, "Memoir on Slavery," *Southern Literary Messenger* 4, no. 10 (1838): 626.

[270] Paul C. Jones, *Unwelcome Voices: Subversive Fiction in the Antebellum South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005), 27.

[271] Young, *Domesticating Slavery*, 1-16. For more on William Gilmore Simms, see Drew Gilpin Faust, *A Sacred Circle: the Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840-1860* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986).

> Regard the slave of Carolina, with a proper reference to the condition of the cannibal African from whom he has been rescued, and say if his bondage has not increased his value to himself, not less than to his master. We contend, that it found him a cannibal, destined in his own country to eat his fellow, or to be eaten by him;--that it brought him to a land in which he suffers no risk of life or limb, other than to which his owner is equally subjected;—that it increases his fecundity infinitely beyond that of the people from whom he has been taken--that it increases his health and strength, improves his physical symmetry and animal organization—that it elevates his mind and moral—that it extends his term of life—that it gives him better and more certain food, better clothing, and more kind and valuable attendance when he is sick.[272]

Simms offered a more nuanced example of the trope of the well-fed slave in his rebuttal. He first compared alleged African cannibals with routinely provisioned bondspersons. In doing so, Simms exposed another aspect of the trope, which is the notion that slaves are incapable of managing themselves. Cannibalism in the nineteenth century was synonymous with barbarism.[273] Using the reference to cannibalism he suggested that, outside of slaveholders' supervision, enslaved men and women would resort to depraved eating habits. Thus, an aspect of the trope of the well-fed slave is a dismissal of any notion of black corporeal autonomy. Further, Simms invoked the idea that slavery was a positive good through an embodied discourse. Employing, references to bodily imagery, such as "fecundity," "physical symmetry," and "animal organization," Simms suggested that Southern bondage improved the slave's body.

The writings of Harper and Simms show how understandings of enslaved consumption circulated not only in political discourse but also in in popular discussions of Southern slavery in the press and in fiction. This way of thinking helped to promote what writer and educator Sterling Allen Brown termed the "contented slave." Brown argued that the "contented slave"

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[272]William Gilmore Simms, "The Morals of Slavery," in *The Pro-Slavery Argument: As Maintained by the Most Distinguished Writers of the Southern States: Containing the Several Essays on the Subject, of Chancellor Harper, Governor Hammond, Dr. Simms, and Professor Dew* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, & Company, 1853), 273–74.

[273] Erin Pearson, "Savage Hunger: Cannibalism and the Discourse on Slavery in the United States and Caribbean," Ph.D. diss., University of California, Irvine, 2014.

was a frequent trope in nineteenth-century United States literature. This trope was premised on the belief that black Americans, due to their inferiority, were happy to work in exchange for provisions and shelter.[274]

The development of the trope of the well-fed slave coincided with efforts to reform slavery by changing practices in agriculture. The mounting economic costs of slavery led a growing number of slaveholders to look for ways to modernize plantation practices. By utilizing the latest innovations in science, slave owners could increase the value of soil and improve slave management practices in order to extend the lives of their slaves.

Edmund Ruffin emerged as the preeminent spokesman for Southern agricultural reform in the antebellum era. Born to a wealthy plantation-owning family in Virginia in 1794, he operated two large plantations by the 1820s. Due to soil exhaustion from intensive tobacco farming on Virginia plantations dating back to the 1600s, much of the soil in that region was unproductive by the 1800s. In an effort to address these issues, Ruffin began experimenting in order to find a way to restore the soil. Eventually, he began to mix marl, a combination of clay and shells, into the soil around his plantation. This mixture neutralized the soil's acidity and allowed for a return to intensive planting. In the 1830s, Ruffin began publishing the *Farmers' Register* in order to promote more scientific farming methods.[275] The interests in agricultural reform led to the growth of Southern farm journals and agricultural societies, which aimed to establish slavery as a more permanent institution.

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[274] Sterling Allen Brown, *The Negro in American Fiction* (Washington, D.C.: The Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1937), 26-28.

[275] John Majewski, *Modernizing a Slave Economy: The Economic Vision of the Confederate Nation* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 53-80.

Abolitionists and the Ill-Fed Slave

While pro-slavery supporters worked to cast slavery as a more benign economic institution, the abolitionist movement gained steam. Prior to the emergence of abolition in the 1820s, earlier supporters of anti-slavery had largely supported gradual emancipation, which was to be accompanied by black colonization on continental Africa. This early cadre of anti-slavery proponents took inspiration from rhetoric of the American Revolution and worked toward a gradual end of slavery in the Northern United States. It was due to the efforts of these individuals that many Northern states enacted measures to abolish slavery by the 1820s. Nonetheless, the anti-slavery movement of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century was largely made of white Northern men who also believed the emancipated slaves should not remain in the United States, and, moreover, that efforts to end slavery should not upset or alarm Southern slaveholders.[276]

With the transition from anti-slavery to abolition, a different kind of opposition to Southern bondage took shape. Unlike the early reformers, those who supported abolition advocated an immediate end to slavery. These anti-slavery supporters also sought to address social challenges that black Northerners faced, such as restricted access to public transportation. Frequently, free blacks were actively involved in supporting abolition, forming organizations geared to ending slavery. Yet, the most distinguishing characteristic of the abolitionist movement was its interracial character. Black Americans in the North, both former slaves and

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[276] James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), 11-34; Paul Goodman, *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and the Origins of Racial Equality* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1998), 1-12.

freeborn people, joined together with a small group of white allies to advocate for an end to Southern bondage and racial equality.[277]

From newspapers to anti-slavery organizations and novels, the abolitionist movement employed a variety of means to bring about an immediate end to Southern bondage. One of the earliest signs of the growing abolitionist movement was the development of the black press. In 1827, two black men, Samuel E. Cornish and John B. Russwurm, created a newspaper called *Freedom's Journal.* From its inception, the newspaper criticized bondage.[278] "Slavery," the journal stated, "is an evil, a great abomination, and one which is continually becoming more dreadful."[279] Cornish and Russwurm affirmed the moral threat posed by slavery, and also drew attention to this institution's expansion. Their reflections on slavery, likewise, mirrored the criticism offered by Representative Livermore during the Missouri debates. This opposition to slavery marked a central part of this first black newspaper.[280]

For abolitionists, the fare of slaves did not promote enslaved contentment nor was it evidence of slaveholder largess. Rather, abolitionist literature from the antebellum period frequently evoked themes of hunger in order to highlight the failure of plantation management schemes. Further, through an analysis of enslaved eating, abolitionists also called the ideology of paternalism into question.

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[277] Ibid., 23-35.

[278] Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1991), 85-89; James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 196-198.

[279] John B. Russwurn, "People of Colour," *Freedom's Journal*, March 23, 1827.

[280] Jacqueline Bacon, *Freedom's Journal: The First African-American Newspaper* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 13-36.

For abolitionists, contesting pro-slavery claims about enslaved fare was vital. The inadequacy of the food rationed to slaves provided another way to expose the immorality and violence of Southern slavery. Early on, papers like *Freedom's Journal* contested pro-slavery efforts to justify Southern bondage. In particular, abolitionists challenged the claims made by Southern politicians and others, which affirmed Southern bondage as a more economically vital and productive institution than free labor. These contentions about slavery increased in frequency following the Missouri Compromise. In the pages of *Freedom's Journal*, Russwurm argued that slave labor was often more expensive because free men worked harder than slaves. To strengthen this argument, Russwurm borrowed from the words of Adam Smith, the noted philosopher and political economist, who wrote, "A person who can acquire no property, can have no other interest but to eat as much and to labour as little as possible."[281] Russwurm uses Smith to draw attention to the ways that slavery discouraged productivity and also fostered overeating. In this context Russwurm uses consumption to draw attention to slavery's inherent immorality. Finally, Russwurm troubles the association between blackness and laziness, which was a part of the embodied defense, by arguing the institution of slavery could lead to laziness. In short, this was not an innate characteristic common to black Americans.

The development of abolitionist organizations in the 1830s further aided the cause of anti-slavery. Collectively, the work of abolitionists laid the groundwork for a national organization. Founded in Philadelphia in December of 1833, the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) became a critical organization in the fight against slavery. Although the leadership largely consisted of white Northern men, such as businessman Lewis Tappan and William Lloyd Garrison, black Americans formed a critical part of this organization. This was particularly true

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[281] John B. Russwurn, "Of the Causes Why Slave Labor Is Dearer Than Free Labor," *Freedom's Journal*, January 8, 1827.

for former slaves who provided key firsthand accounts of Southern bondage.[282] By the late 1830s, the efforts of abolitionists, like those in the AASS, led to a campaign that sent over 400,000 petitions to Washington, D.C., in opposition to slavery. In response to the flood of petitions, the United States Congress passed a gag rule that tabled discussion of the topic of slavery, particularly barring discussion of the abolition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia and of slavery in the territories.[283] The abolitionist movement increased the growing political divide within the United States, and the 1830s underscore the ways anti-slavery politics reshaped national concerns over slavery.

Abolitionists challenged the trope of the well-fed slave and called for an end of slavery through the publication of periodicals, tracts, novels, and slave narratives. Throughout the 1830s, abolitionists' writing employed moral suasion to garner support for their cause. Moral suasion relied upon moral appeals rather than electoral or military force to induce slaveholders to end bondage.[284] The hope was that once people realized the inherent immorality of Southern bondage, they would work to pressure slaveholders to end the practice. Those who employed moral suasion also aimed to unite abolitionist sentiment from both sides of the Atlantic. For this

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[282] Owen W. Muelder, *Theodore Dwight Weld and the American Anti-Slavery Society* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2011), 7-35.

[283]Stephen David Kantrowitz, *More than Freedom: Fighting for Black Citizenship in a White Republic, 1829-1889* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 54; Susan Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery, and Women's Political Identity* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 119-120. For more on the "gag rule" and its political consequences, see: William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*: *Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 287-352.

[284] James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: the Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), 61-74; Ford Risley, *Abolition and the Press: the Moral Struggle Against Slavery* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 41; Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship*, 35.

reason, Garrison and other supporters travelled to London, where support for abolition led the British to end slavery in the West Indies by the 1830s. To generate opposition to slavery, anti-slavery publications emphasized the use of violence on Southern plantations, the separation of families through the domestic slave trade, the prevalence of sexual assault, and frequent material neglect of bondsmen and women.

Abolitionists' focus on slave diet took place within a broader world of social reform. While opposition to slavery was critical, some reformers combined commitments to both dietary reform and moral uplift. These included supporters of temperance and food reform. Food reformers believed that improving health through diet not only promoted longevity, but also promoted morality through healthy living. Among the better-known supporters of dietary reform were vegetarians who advocated vegetable-based diets as a means of self-improvement. Prominent food reformers also took part in the abolition movement. Similarly, from Charles Finley to Theodore Weld, prominent abolitionists also supported dietary reform.[285]

Writing a prominent anti-slavery tract for the AASS, Theodore Weld and Angelina Grimké offered a new challenge to the image of the well-fed slave that brought together abolition and dietary reform. Weld was born in Hampton, Connecticut, in 1803. Reared in upstate New York, he came of age in an evangelical family shaped by the Second Great Awakening. By the 1820s, his Christian beliefs led him to support colonization as a means to end slavery, but he later came to support abolition in the 1830s. William Lloyd Garrison and his writing in *The Liberator* influenced this shift. In 1834, Weld organized a series of talks at Lane Seminary in Cincinnati that spanned eighteen days and aimed to foster support for abolition. Following these

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[285] Adam D. Shprintzen, *The Vegetarian Crusade: The Rise of an American Reform Movement, 1817–1921* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013); James Gregory, *Of Victorians and Vegetarians : The Vegetarian Movement in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007).

talks, Garrison helped start the Lane Anti-Slavery Society. This organization sought to support abolition through moral suasion; its members opposed political activism and rebellion as means to end slavery. The group also worked to support free blacks in Cincinnati by holding literacy classes. Made mostly of students, the organization was asked to leave the school as opposition to their activities grew in the city.[286]

Following his departure from Lane Seminary, Weld worked as a speaker for the American Anti-Slavery Society. In 1838, he married fellow abolitionist Angelina Grimké, who came from a slaveholding family in South Carolina. After an illness forced Weld to end his efforts as a lecturer in support of abolition, he turned to writing to support the cause. He is best known for two books. The first was *The Bible against Slavery* released in 1838. This volume aimed to refute the case for slavery made by pro-slavery clerics. Weld's second book, *Slavery as It Is,* was written with his wife. Published in 1839, the work took over ten years to complete. It consisted of first-hand accounts from newspapers that aimed to expose the violence and mistreatment in Southern bondage.

Drawing the claims of pro-slavery advocates into question, abolitionists aimed to contest the view that slaves were well fed. Diet was the first area of Southern bondage interrogated by Weld and Grimké. Food offered a way to depict the day-to-day challenges facing slaves and to sway others to the cause of abolition. Through their discussion of slave fare, Weld and Grimké sought to show slavery's inherent cruelty for its failure to address enslaved men and women's most basic need for sustenance. This critique must be understood in light of food reform. Using anecdotes from newspapers and other first-hand accounts from white Southerners, Weld and

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[286] Robert H. Abzug, *Passionate Liberator: Theodore Dwight Weld and the Dilemma of Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Owen W. Muelder, *Theodore Dwight Weld and the American Anti-Slavery Society* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2011).

Grimké aimed to prove that hunger was common among men bondsmen and women. For Weld and Grimké, food provided a lens into other types of exploitation. If a slaveholder failed to feed his slaves, then he was capable of inflicting even greater harm: "He who can habitually inflict on others the pain of hunger by giving them insufficient food, can habitually inflict on them any other pain."[287] Grimké and Weld connected slavery and starvation in order to show how slaveholders' callousness to hunger led to other privations.

Continuing their analysis of hunger and slavery, Weld and Grimké next trouble the association between Southern slaveholding and civilization. While slaveholders and their allies like William Gilmore Simms and others affirmed the superiority of Southern society because of the presence of bondage, Weld and Grimké used slaveholders' failure to adequately feed slaves as proof that planters were actually uncivilized:

> If any thing can move a hard heart, it is the appeal of hunger. The Arab robber whose whole life is a prowl for plunder, will freely divide his camel's milk with the hungry stranger who halts at his tent door, though he may have just waylaid him and stripped him of his money. Even savages take pity on hunger. Who ever went famishing from an Indian's wigwam? As much as hunger craves, is the Indian's free gift even to an enemy. The necessity for food is such a universal want, so constant, manifest and imperative, that the heart is more touched with pity by the plea of hunger, and more ready to supply that want than any other.[288]

Weld and Grimké juxtapose practices with those of presumably uncivilized Arabs and American Indians in order to suggest the latter were more capable of humane treatment. Ultimately, Grimké and Weld interrogate slave consumption in order to promote wider support for an immediate end to slavery.

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[287] Theodore Dwight Weld, *American Slavery as It Is Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1839), 37.

[288] Ibid.

The primary goal of Weld's reflections on diet in *Slavery As It Is* was to cement the link between the day-to-day challenges facing bondsmen and women and the issue of dietary neglect.[289] In order to prove that slaves were underfed, Weld and Grimké marshaled evidence to show that slaves went hungry and subsisted largely on a vegetable diet consisting of indigestible corn. They argued that those who perform manual labor need protein. To prove this claim, they offered the words of slaveholders in the South. Virginia legislator Alexander Smyth affirmed, "By confining the slaves to the Southern states, where crops are raised for exportation, and bread and meat are purchased, you doom them to scarcity and hunger. It is proposed to hem in the blacks where they are ILL FED."[290] Weld and Grimké drew attention to the fact that the Cotton South placed a higher importance on cotton than on maintain adequate rations.

The trope of the well-fed slave in the 1830s worked to buttress the cause of slavery by drawing attention to the ways enslavement promoted civilization. To do this, pro-slavery supporters, like Simms and Harper, stressed the ways dietary changes offered under slavery improved enslaved bodies. But abolitionists, like Weld and Grimké, troubled the association between civilization and enslavement by challenging the trope of the well-fed slave. By drawing attention to the persistent problems of hunger and starvation within American slavery, Weld and Grimké brought slaveholder's claims about generously provisioned slaves into question. Moreover, using the lens of consumption, Weld and Grimké suggested slaveholders concerns for profit eclipsed any rhetorical interests in civilization or enslaved corporeal improvement through diet. By the 1840s, the trope of the well-fed slave drew on differences between free labor and

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[289] Johnathan Earle, "The Making of the North's Stark Mad Abolitionists': Anti-Slavery Conversion in the United States, 1824-58," *Slavery & Abolition* 25, no. 3 (2004): 59–75.

[290] Alexander Smyth quoted in Theodore Dwight Weld, *American Slavery as It Is Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1839), 28.

slave labor. Increasingly, debates about the economic advantages of Southern bondage focused on the material conditions of laborers.

Anti-Slavery and the Narrative of the Trope of the Well-Fed Slave in the Antebellum Period

The growth of anti-slavery sentiment in the 1840s contributed to a transformation of the narrative of the trope of the well-fed slave. Following the annexation of Texas in 1845, anti-slavery opposition in the U.S. Congress increased. In 1846, Pennsylvania Senator David Wilmot introduced a measure designed to prohibit slavery in newly acquired lands from Mexico. Wilmot argued that these new lands needed to be protected against slavery, and opened up for use by white landowners. After passing the House of Representatives, the Southern majority in the U.S. Senate helped defeat the measure. Nonetheless, the Wilmot Proviso divided the nation's political parties along sectional lines as Northern Democrats, and Whigs supported the proviso while politicians throughout the South opposed the legislation.[291] Northern support for anti-slavery developed further following the Wilmot Proviso. Evidence of this can be seen in the growth of the Free Soil Party. Unlike earlier supporters of anti-slavery and abolitionists, free labor advocates came from a variety of different backgrounds, but they were united in opposition to the Westward spread of slavery.[292]

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[291] For more on the Wilmot Proviso, see Eric Foner, "'The Wilmot Proviso Revisited,'"*Journal of Southern History* 56, no. 2 (1969): 262–79; Johnathan H. Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 123-143.

[292] For more on the Free Soil Party, see Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854*, 144-198.

By the 1840s, slaveholders used the trope of the well-fed slave to defend themselves as benevolent paternalists and to show that Southern bondage was economically superior to the system of free labor in the North and England. Shifting from the focus on civilization common in the 1830s, by the 1840s the trope frequently drew enslaved men and women and free laborers into comparison. In the 1840s, the trope of the well-fed slave offered a way to justify slavery and assert the supremacy of Southern bondage as the superior economic system. To accomplish this, those who invoked the trope often did so in light of free labor. Although earlier such comparisons between free laborer and slaves occurred in the 1820s, by the 1840s growing support for free labor ideology led supporters of slavery also to invoke bodily differences between these groups as a means of justifying enslavement.

Pro-slavery advocates from James Henry Hammond to slave owners in farming periodical invoked wage laborer suffering to argue for the merits of Southern bondage. The narrative of the trope of the well-fed was central in these efforts to construct a defense of slavery shaped by concerns about consumption. Slavery apologists marshaled the trope against attacks from both abolitionists and free labor advocates. To do this, they cast free laborers in a negative light and argued that they faced more challenging lives than slaves. To prove this claim, supporters of slavery gestured to differences in material conditions. Those who invoked the trope of the well-fed slave promoted the belief that slavery was beneficial to African Americans because they were less exposed to the suffering and starvation that wage laborers had to face.

The debate between James Henry Hammond and British abolitionists Thomas Clarkson foreshadowed this change. James Henry Hammond stressed the problems of poverty and hunger in England in his effort to rebut the criticism of the English abolitionist: “There have been found such occurrences as seven, eight and ten persons in one [English] cottage, I cannot say for one

day, but for whole days, without a morsel of food. They have remained on their beds of straw for two days, under the impression that in a recumbent posture the pangs of hunger were less felt."[293] Hammond criticized English working-class society by asserting that it promoted hunger and poverty. He suggested that thousands in the British Isles were forced to lie motionless in order to navigate the pains of hunger. Hammond drew a dichotomy between English workers and slaves, which stressed the harsher material conditions of British workers.

Writing in the pages of the *Farmer's Register*, an anonymous planter from Charlotte County, Virginia, acknowledged the belief that slaves were better provisioned than free white workers in Europe:

> The most important subject to attend to in the management of negroes, is to give them a sufficiency of food. I have heard many comparisons made between negro slavery and the operative classes of old countries, to prove that too much meat was given them. But it is no argument to a humane master, to starve and half clothe his slaves, because the poor Irish are naked and get meat only once a week. I am clearly of opinion that a half starved hireling in Russia, Germany or Great Britain, exhibits to his employer the most degrading attitude that one portion of the species ever stood towards the other, and I do not believe that any lesson can be learned from them, either beneficial to Virginia slave or his master.

The anonymous planter connects planter benevolence to meat rations. To underscore a belief in planter largess, the writer argues that outside the South such rations are seen as excessive. In this way, the anonymous planter locates hunger and neglect outside of the slaveholding South, and instead, he suggests wageworkers in Europe faced starvation more frequently than slaves in the Cotton South. The writer also shows how concerns about eating informed pro-slavery discourse, which worked to affirm slavery as a superior economic system.

The focus on economic differences between slave and free labor occupied the attention of many pro-slavery supporters in the late antebellum period. Exponents like Edmund Ruffin

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[293] James Henry Hammond, *Gov. Hammond's Letters on Southern Slavery* (New York, NY: Walker & Burke, Printers, 1845), 17.

employed themes related to consumption in order to highlight the advantages of slaveholding in the 1850s. Offering a critique of free labor, Ruffin argued, "In the so-called free countries, in addition to the sometimes most oppressive government--or it may be under free constitutional government--there is the slavery of class to class--of the starving laborers to the paying employers. Hunger and cold are the most exacting of all task-masters." Ruffin suggested that inadequate fare served as a motivating factor for work in free labor societies. By contrast he argued that slave societies guided by benevolent slave owners diminished poverty.

By contrasting the material conditions of slaves with those of white laborers in both Europe and the North, supporters of Southern slavery aimed to cast wage labor as the more exploitative system. Thus, it was not uncommon to find references to European and northern poverty and hunger in Southern periodicals. For example, Brantz Mayer, in an article on mining in Mexico, took a detour to draw attention to this issue: "…[T]housands of human beings rise daily from the obscure and comfortless dens in the British isles, who do not know how they shall obtain employment for the day, by which they may purchase a meal."[294] Promoting an association between poverty, hunger and free labor, Brantz echoes the writings of Hammond and others who suggested that slavery freed bondpeople from the stress of having to worry about securing daily necessities. These critics of wage labor aimed to show that this economic system more frequently promoted neglect and want. Ruffin, Brantz, and Hammond drew on an idealized slavery where rations were consistent, and where economic concerns were secondary to enslaved material welfare. Therefore, the trope of the well-fed slave became part of a defense of Southern bondage, which aimed to recuperate the image of the slaveholder by promoting a belief in a more benevolent mastery.

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[294] Brantz Mayer, "Mexican Mines and Mineral Resources in 1850," *Debow's Review: Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources* 9, no. 1 (1850): 31–44.

Abolitionists also worked to counter the narrative of the trope of the well-fed slave's focus on free labor. Frederick Law Olmsted also contributed to the abolitionists' effort to counter stories of well-fed slaves. Olmsted was born in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1822 to wealthy family. Although he planned to attend Yale College, an untimely illness forced him to table his college plans. Eventually Olmsted went to work as a journalist for the *New York Daily Times,* where one of his first assignments took him South of the Mason-Dixon line to report on life there. Between 1853 and 1857, Olmsted travelled widely throughout the South from Virginia to Texas. As he moved from one state to another, he wrote dispatches chronicling his excursions and describing both slaves and slaveholders. Although he was a proponent of gradual emancipation, Olmsted initially sought to offer a balanced and sympathetic depiction of Southern slavery.

Throwing support to popular belief about slave fare, Olmsted echoed Hammond and others who claimed that slaves were the world's best-fed laboring class. Offering readers a view of enslaved fare in Virginia, Olmsted recalled a conversation with a slaveowner who described his slaves' diet. The slaveowner argued that while there were occasional seasonal meat shortages, slaves seldom went without meat. Further, the landholder noted that slave owners who shorted their slaves' rations faced communal sanction as "nigger killers." Based on this conversation and his personal observations of slave rationing in Virginia, Olmsted concluded, "I think," Olmsted, wrote, "the slaves generally (no one denies that there are exceptions) have plenty to eat; probably are fed better than the proletarian class of any other part of the world."[295] Early on then, Olmsted defended the narrative of the trope of the well-fed slave.

[295] Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States, 1853-1854* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1861), 110.

By the time he published *The Cotton Kingdom* in 1861, however, Olmsted abandoned this position. In fact, in an extended discussion of "Slavery and Poor Law," he sought to counter the frequently iterated claim that slaves were the best-fed workers. He began by noting that no other assertion was more prevalent than the claim that slaves were materially better off than other laborers:

> Many of our newspapers of the largest circulation, and of great influence among people—probably not very reflective, but certainly not fools—take the contrary for granted, whenever it suits their purpose. The Southern newspapers, so far as I know, do so without exception. And very few Southern writers, on any subject whatever, can get through a book, or even a business or friendly letter, to be sent North, without, in some form or other, asserting that Northern laborers might well envy the condition of the slaves.

Olmsted noted the pervasiveness of the trope of the well-fed slave by highlighting the frequency with which the material conditions of slaves were compared with those of other kinds of workers. He even confessed that he for a time was compelled to believe such claims.

Defending free labor on the grounds of diet and consumption, Olmsted argued that after examining the fare of field workers in Europe and the North, he found slaves' diets poorer in quality than those of other workers. Further, seeking to dispute the claim that slaves were the best-fed workers, he compared the diet of agricultural laborers in Massachusetts with the typical fare of slaves in the South. Olmsted found that not only did the laborer in Boston have a higher quality of food, but there was also a greater variety of cuisine. Further, the free laborer in Boston also spent nearly three times as much on his diet. For Olmsted, the free labor system was not without flaws; however, it was certain that field workers in free labor systems enjoyed a better quality of fare. The inferior fare of slaves was of the routine daily violence that accompanied slaveholder regulation. Olmsted's analysis of slavery in relation to poor law also threw

slaveholders claims about slaves' food into question. His later work shows that the trope is part of larger discursive performance enacted by slave owners to defend Southern bondage.

Further, challenges from former slaves also contested the trope of the well-fed slave and offered first-hand accounts of the ways slavery promoted hunger and hardships. The abolitionist movement underwent change in the 1840s as participants increasingly met white Northern resistance, which at moments took the form of violent mobs. These confrontations led many to question the effectiveness of moral suasion as a strategy to end slavery. By the 1840s, anti-slavery writing began to take a more confrontational tone. This can be seen in slave narratives from the period. Former slaves frequently played a critical part in opposing slavery by offering firsthand accounts of Southern bondage. Slave narratives aimed to provide white Northern readers with a glimpse into the experience of slavery, often chronicling a slave's quest to escape bondage. Writers sought to articulate personal incidents that were also representative of the larger slave experience.

Sold through the abolitionist press, these works went through multiple printings. The first slave narrative published in the United States was released in 1825, but they became increasingly popular by the 1840s. By the close of the Civil War in 1865, nearly fifty slave narratives had been published. The popularity of these narratives was due in part to shifts within Northern society. Slave narratives emerged at a moment when literacy was on the rise, production costs were in decline due to new printing technologies, and a growing number of Americans writers reshaped the profession of writing in a more democratic fashion. Nonetheless, slave narratives had to employ certain literary strategies common to fiction and

memoirs at the time. Thus, there was an emphasis on virtue, family life, religious practice and a focus on sensibility.[296]

Former slaves often provided evidence of the falseness of slaveholder claims about slave rations. Former slave Henry Watson described the fare of slaves in Virginia in his 1848 narrative, and he was careful to highlight the poor quality. Reflecting specifically on the fare of slaves working in the field, he wrote, "…[T]hey would eat their breakfasts, which consisted of strong, rancid pork, coarse corn bread, and water…"[297] Kidnapped and sold into slavery, Solomon Northup wrote a narrative of his life as a slave in Louisiana that was published in 1853. Northup also noted that the meat slaves were given sometimes spoiled despite efforts to preserve: "This thorough smoking is necessary to prevent the bacon from becoming infested with worms. In so warm a climate it is difficult to preserve it, and very many times myself and my companions have received our weekly allowance of three pounds and a half, when it was full of these disgusting vermin."[298] Northup's recollection indicted Southern slaveholders and called into question claims about the pork rationed to slaves. Similarly, Frederick Douglass recalled the poor quality of fare. He wrote, "The pork was often tainted, and the fish was of the poorest quality--herrings, which would bring very little if offered for sale in any northern market. With

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[296] William L. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 1-31; Frances Smith Foster*, Witnessing Slavery: the Development of Ante-Bellum Slave Narratives*, 2nd ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 3-23; Lois E. Horton, John Oliver; Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 255-256.

[297] Henry Watson, *Narrative of Henry Watson, A Fugitive Slave* (Boston: B. Marsh, 1848), 17.

[298] Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853, from a Cotton Plantation near the Red River, in Louisiana* (Auburn: Derby and Miller, 1853), 173.

their pork or fish, they had one bushel of Indian meal--unbolted--of which quite fifteen per cent. was fit only to feed pigs."[299] Collectively, the reflections of Watson, Northup and Douglass highlight the ways former slaves invoked enslaved fare in order to trouble planters' assertion that slaves were well-fed. Further, they troubled the rhetoric of mastery that undergirded discourse about provisioning slaves. In particular, rations of rancid meat suggested the hollowness of paternalist rhetoric.

Challenging the narrative of the trope of the well-fed slave in a different manner, former slave Henry Bibb argued that freedom was more important than material comfort. Born in Kentucky around 1815, Bibb was the son of an enslaved woman and a white politician. Bibb escaped to freedom in 1837 when he ran away to Cincinnati, Ohio. By the 1840s, he had become a well-known speaker in the abolitionist movement and eventually published a slave narrative, which described his time as a slave in Kentucky.[300]

Seeking to challenge the rhetoric of pro-slavery advocates, in 1852 he wrote a fictional letter to his former slave owner in which he called into questions some of the most common defenses of slavery. In particular, Bibb called into question the trope of the well-fed slave. "It is better to starve and be free," he asserted, "than be enslaved and be the subject of another."[301] He continued, "Freedom to act for ones-self though poorly clad, and fed with a dry crust, is glorious

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[299] Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 100.

[300] Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 61-62.

[301] Henry Bibb, "Henry Bibb Public Letter to Albert G. Sibley, 'A Letter to My Old Master' from 23 September and 7 October 1852 *Voice of the Fugative*," in *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb: An American Slave*, ed. Charles J. Heglar (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 235–40. Bibb's interests in enslaved rations can also be seen in his slave narrative where he comments both on the quality of rations, and also immorality of underfeeding enslaved men and women. Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb: An American Slave* (New York: The Author, 1849).

when compared with American slavery, even if it should, appear dressed in broad cloth, and fed with all of the luxuries which the human appetite could desire."[302] Rather than accept the provisions offered to slaves as a benefit of enslavement, Bibb asserted individual autonomy is more important than daily provisions. Further, Bibb reminds the reader that power to control one's body is perhaps an innate desire that is more critical than material concerns about diet. Bibb calls slaveholders' assertion, that argued free blacks in the North were worse off than those in bondage in the South, into question. Ultimately, no provisions provided to slaves could be more desirable than freedom.

Bibb next moves to suggest that autonomy over one's person is a basic right even prized by animals in nature. He wrote, "…[T]he miserable little screech owl, while he is tied by the leg, or boxed up in a cage though well fed he is made the sport of children."[303] Here the owl's rations of food do not make up for its debasement. Continuing the analogy between captive animals and enslaved persons, Bibb concludes, "The startling scream of the wild panther, or roar of the lion--it is majestic and independent in their native desert. Not so when they are chained in a cage to be fed by a 'kind master' on Johnny cake, roast beef, or no beef just as he chooses."[304] Bibb ultimately suggests that investing slave owners with power over the bodies of another robs the slave of a complete sense of self. He reminds the reader of the violence endemic to slavery. Further, by choosing two fearsome animals in the panther and lion, he shows that captivity reduces even the most powerful.

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[302] Bibb, 239.

[303] Bibb, 239.

[304] Bibb, 239.

Bibb, Douglass, and other former slaves argued that Southern slaveholders failed to provide adequately for their laborers. The practice of providing weekly rations to slaves affirmed notions of Southern honor. Historian Kenneth Greenberg notes that slaveholders frequently used the language of "gifts" to describe the provisions provided to slaves.[305] When abolitionists like Douglass, Northup and Bibb challenged the trope of the well-fed slave, they called Southern slaveholders' honor into question as well. Abolitionists aimed to use slaveholders' inability to provide wholesome fare as a way to invalidate both Southern bondage and slaveholder authority.

Challenges to the trope of the well-fed slave continued into the late antebellum period. Frequently abolitionist periodicals addressed this issue through accounts of slavery in the Deep South. For example, an article in the *Zion Watchman*, a New York anti-slavery newspaper, compared the fare of slaves in Mississippi with that of convicts. The article noted while corn was frequently the primary component of slaves' diets, convicts received bread, meat, and vegetables. Beyond arguments that slaves were inadequately fed, journalists also aimed to show that slaves were poorly fed. Some slaves received rotten pork as part of their weekly rations. Capturing the link between planter regulation of diet and tainted meat, a writer for *Practical Christianity* noted that pork purchased at markets in New Orleans for slaves was sometimes maggot-infested. "…[T]he meat," the writer noted, "is often the most loathsome, disgusting, rotten mass that can be imagined." The writer continued, "[The pork was]…so rotten that the bones had become loose and separated from the meat, and when they were opened for examination of the Planter, maggots would roll over the side of the cask upon the floor."[306] The

[305]Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor & Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 237.
[306] Ibid.

account concluded by reflecting on why this meat was purchased by slaveholders. In other words, slaveholder claimed that it was necessary because of the declining price of cotton. In short, slaveholders' efforts to provide food were mediated by their concern for the bottom line. Further, the purchaser argued this was fit for slaves, and in this way he reminds the reader of medical slavery apologists who contended that slaves were able to digest coarser fare. Criticisms of the quality of slave fare in the 1840s and 1850s often reflected changes made in slave rationing due to agricultural reform. Anti-slavery exponents sought to show that despite these changes, enslaved consumption remained a concern.

The Trope of the Well-Fed Slave and Pro-Slavery Fiction in the 1850s

Defending slavery through discourse was not only an activity for politicians; by the late antebellum period, Southern novels also offered support for bondage, especially in response to the antislavery arguments found in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Released in 1852, *Uncle Tom's Cabin or Life Among the Lowly*, quickly became popular with readers around the country. In one year, Stowe sold over 300,000 copies in the United States, and in 1853 international publication began in London. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* followed the lives of two slaves who were to be sold by benevolent slaveholders in Kentucky in order to pay a debt; however, the novel depicts harsh violence and sexual exploitation.

Like other abolitionists, Stowe also addressed concerns about eating and hunger within the Slave South, and in doing this she troubled the trope of the well-fed slave. Recalling his childhood as a slave, Tom notes that he was so desperate for food that he would "have been glad

to take the bones they threw to their dogs."[307] This passage reflects that ways labor shaped enslaved access to provisions. In this instance, Tom's hunger reflects the practice of providing meager rations to enslaved children who did not perform field work. Echoing the claims of former slaves about the inferior quality of slave provisions, Stowe also notes the coarseness of enslaved fare. She writes, "The small village was alive with no inviting sounds; hoarse, guttural voices contending at the hand-mills where their morsel of hard corn was yet to be ground into meal, to fit it for the cake that was to constitute their only supper."[308] This passage not only criticized Indian corn as a ration, it also challenged slave owner claims about consistent rations of pork. Here Stowe clearly suggests slaves received only rations of corn, but there was no ration of meat.

Following the rise in tensions surrounding the sectional crisis and the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "anti-Tom" novels brought positive depictions of slavery to wider audiences around the country. Writers in both the North and South aimed to contest the charges of violence and neglect through stories that depicted contented slaves and impoverished Northern blacks and whites. The first of these novels appeared in 1852, within months of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*'s publication. Over twenty of these novels were written over the following decade. Writers like Caroline Lee Hentz, Charles Jacob Patterson, and Caroline Rush offered novels that portrayed a more benevolent slavery and incorporated the trope of the well-fed slave. In this way, novels helped connect ideas about the advantages of Southern bondage with eating and food imagery.

Among the many Southern novelists who came to the defense of slavery was Caroline Lee Hentz. Although born in Massachusetts in 1800, Hentz worked and lived in a number of

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[307] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin: A Tale of Life Among the Lowly: Or Pictures of Slavery in the United States of America*, Vol. 1 (London: Ingram, Cooke & Co, 1852), 8.

[308] Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 275.

different Southern states from North Carolina and Kentucky to Georgia and Alabama and Florida. Her primary occupation was teaching, but she also wrote fiction actively from the 1830s through the 1850s. Published in 1854, her novel *The Planter's Northern Bride* offered a sympathetic depiction of Southern bondage. The novel chronicles the marriage of Russell Moreland of North Carolina to a Massachusetts-born bride named Eulalia, who is the daughter of an abolitionist. Traveling to Massachusetts to wed his bride, Russell Moreland brings with him a slave named Albert. When a group of concerned Northerners question Albert about his experiences with slavery, he recounts this experience to his owner, who is troubled by the interrogation. Reflecting on the condition of his slaves in North Carolina, Hentz writes of Moreland:

> He thought of the poor and subservient in other lands, and compared them with our own. He thought of the groaning serfs of Russia; the starving sons of Ireland; the squalid operatives of England…of the free hirelings of the North…and then he turned his thoughts homeward, to the enslaved children of Africa, and, taking them as a class, as a distinct race of beings, he came to the irresistible conclusion, that they were the happiest subservient race that were found on the face of the globe…the slaves of the South were blest beyond the pallid slaves of Europe, or the anxious, care-worn laborers of the North.[309]

Hentz contrasts the conditions of slaves in the South and laborers in Europe and the North and asserts that slaves are treated better than these other groups. Ultimately, Russell Moreland is able to resolve his role as a slaveholder because by comparison to the hungry and impoverished workers in Europe, slaves in the South were content. Adjectives like "groaning" and "starving" are used to describe laborers in Europe, while slaves are depicted as the "happiest." This claim reflected paternalism and its associated practice of rationing food and clothing. Finally, Hentz drew upon antebellum racial thinking as; she noted slaves were "a distinct race." This

[309] Caroline Lee Hentz, *The Planter's Northern Bride* (Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson and Brothers, 1854), 31-32.

description further suggests how racial inferiority also formed a component of the trope of the well-fed slave.

Other supporters of Southern slavery also sought to draw attention to the differences between the material conditions of Southern slaves and workers in both the North and Europe. Philadelphians Charles Jacob Peterson and Caroline Rush offered novels that sought counter the depictions of slavery in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. While Peterson focused on European workers, Rush explored poverty in the North. Peterson was a prolific nineteenth century writer who in the 1840s served as editor for *Graham Magazine* and the *Saturday Gazette*. He also founded and edited *Ladies National Magazine* in 1848. Writing under several different pseudonyms he also published works of fiction. In the wake of the release of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, he published *The Cabin and Parlor* in 1852.[310] The novel follows the lives of the slaveholding Courtenay family following the death of the father, which leaves the two children in tremendous debt. The novel contrast the lives of the Courtenays' slaves, who are sold into relative comfort, with both their former white owners who travel north and become destitute.

Peterson borrows on the established pro-slavery idea of contrasting the conditions of enslaved blacks with that of English laborers. As one character laments, although English workers enjoy freedom, they have little else Peterson writes, "But the English laborer can spend his wages as he likes." Another character responds, "Much benefit that is to him. He never receives enough to get even the necessaries of life. Under such circumstances, to talk of a man's having a choice as to the way he shall spend his wages, is hypocrisy. In truth, the condition of

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[310] Sarah Nelson Roth, *Gender and Race in Antebellum Popular Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 160-161.

such a laborer is worse than that of a slave. The latter has, at the worst, plenty to eat."[311] Here it is the absence of paternalism that leads to suffering. Peterson's comparison deploys the trope of the well-fed slave, stressing that Southern bondspeople, while denied autonomy over their bodies and fare were not left to starve. The presence of these narratives in fiction about the American South shows that concerns about enslaved fare circulated widely in debates about Southern bondage.

Like Peterson, Caroline Rush also lived in Philadelphia and wrote fiction that affirmed Southern slavery as more benevolent than Northern free labor. In *North and South*, Rush's first novel, published in 1852, she challenged Stowe's depiction of slavery and argued that blacks in bondage were often well provisioned. Thus, she describes Tom, a critical character in Stowe's novel, as "hardy, strong and powerful negro."[312] Invoking the narrative of the trope of the well-fed slave, Rush aimed to challenge free labor society and to call attention to the needs of Northern whites. In her second novel, *Dew Drop*, Rush describes a Southern woman who travels North and offers aid to laborers in need. In one passage she depicts a female character's poor physical conditions: "She is pale and haggard, and her sunken cheeks and bony hands tell you a piteous tale. They speak to you ceaseless labor; of nights stolen from sleep; of meager pay for labor, when completed; of the scanty food the widow is able to procure…"[313] Rush employs the white laborer's body here to offer a depiction of the harsh treatment of Northern laborers. In

[311] Charles Jacob Peterson, *The Cabin and Parlor* (T.B. Peterson and Brothers: Philadelphia, 1852), 169-70.

[312] Caroline E. Rush, *The North and South, Or, Slavery and Its Contrasts: A Tale of Real Life* (Philadelphia, PA: Crissy & Markley, 1852), 14.

[313] Caroline E. Rush, *The Dew-Drop of the Sunny South: A Story Written from Every Day Life* (Philadelphia, PA: Crissy & Markley, 1851), 204-205.

contrast to Peterson, Rush promotes the narrative of the trope of the well-fed slave by suggesting that white Northern women wage laborer were underfed and the true victims.

Legal Reform and the Narrative of the Trope of the Well-Fed Slave

Opposition to slavery encouraged further development of the trope of the well-fed slave, which circulated in newspapers, agricultural periodicals and pro-slavery texts. Pro-slavery ideologues stressed that slavery was a positive good in order to justify the expansion of the institution, and they used the trope of the well-fed slave to buttress their claims. But their defense of slavery was not just rhetorical; they also used law to designed to codify changes in dietary practices.

A few southern legislatures had taken up the issue of enslaved material conditions, particularly the topic of diet in the early 1800s. Under the Code Noir passed in June 1806, Louisiana slaves were to be provided regular rations of corn. The law stated, "Every owner shall be held to give his slaves the quantity of provisions hereafter specified, to wit: one barrel of Indian corn, or the equivalent thereof, in rice, beans, or other grain, and a pint of salt, and to deliver the same , to the said, slaves, in kind, every month, and never in money, under penalty of a fine of ten dollars for every offence."[314] South Carolina passed a similar law in 1806. In most cases, however, these states seldom enforced those laws in the early nineteenth century. By the 1840s, though, more southern states would pass laws regulating slave rations, and this change

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[314] Meinrad Greiner, ed. *The Louisiana Digest: Embracing the Laws of the Legislature of a General Nature, Enacted from the Year 1804 to 1841, Inclusive, and in Force at ThisLast Period* (New Orleans: Benjamin Levy, 1841). For more on the Code Noir in Louisiana, see Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Slavery, the Civil Law, and the Supreme Court of Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 1-27.

occurred at the same time that anti-slavery advocates increasingly voiced concerns about the spread of slavery, and the abolitionist movement in the North gained momentum.

As sectional tensions over slavery intensified in the 1840s and 1850s, slave states also passed more laws designed to standardize slave rations. In those decades, states located west of the Mississippi River like Texas became part of the Union, which led to heightened concerns among anti-slavery advocates and abolitionists about the expansion of the institution. By the late antebellum period, the newer slave states of the Southwest had passed laws that regulated the treatment of slaves. Some states also aimed to establish minimum weekly rations. For example, the state of constitution of Texas affirmed in 1845 that slaveholders were obligated to provide regular rations of food and clothes to their slaves.[315]

Between 1852 and 1856 several other Southern states passed laws that governed provisions, including Kentucky, Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama. Both Alabama and Georgia passed laws that sought to protect slaves from being denied fare. Slaveholders found guilty of mistreating slaves by "withholding proper food and sustenance" would be charged with a misdemeanor and face a possible fine or imprisonment. Similarly, in Alabama, slave codes aimed to protect bondspersons from being starved.

In *Cheek v. The State of Alabama*, the state indicted Randall Cheek in 1862 for failing to provide adequate rations, shelter and clothing to his slaves. In testimony given by the plantation overseer, named Snelgrove, he asserted that slaves received roughly a quarter pound of pork per day or approximately one and a half pounds per week. Snelgrove believed this was insufficient, and the court agreed with the overseer stating, "…less than three pounds, or three and a half, per

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[315] Randolph B. Campbell, ed., *The Laws of Slavery in Texas: Historical Documents and Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 54-55.

week, was not sufficient quantity of bacon for a plantation slave."[316] The court's statement about enslaved people's pork rations reflected the influence of plantation reform. Nonetheless, the case of Randall Cheek ended in 1864 following his death, but legal historian Thomas Morris notes that similar cases appeared on court dockets in other parts of Alabama and Mississippi.[317]

Despite the infrequent enforcement of these laws, their passage highlight attempts to "domesticate slavery" in order to present a more benevolent image of Southern bondage. The focus on enslaved material conditions, and particularly on rations, highlights the ways the trope of the well-fed slave could influence concerns about the domestications of slavery. Further, the trope of the well-fed slave highlights the ways that concerns about provisions also influenced political issues. The heightened attention paid to the passage of these laws occurred at the same time that abolitionist criticism of slavery reached a fevered pitch. From agricultural to legal reform, efforts to improve slavery aimed to address growing criticism. Nonetheless, these reform measures also increased surveillance of enslaved bodies through a heightened emphasis on regulation. While these laws were not enforced on a large scale, the fact that the majority of southern states passed these laws during the sectional crisis shows that abolitionists had mounted a significant attack on slaveholders' notions of paternalism and honor. The passage of laws that governed slave rations, thus, aimed to publicly justify and reaffirm the sanctity of white male mastery.

The trope of the well-fed slave highlights the connection between concerns about enslavement and diet in the antebellum period. Developed through political debates about slavery in Missouri, the trope later influenced pro-slavery discussions in both the press and

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[316] Alabama. Supreme Court, *Select Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of Alabama, During the Years 1861-'62-'63*, ed. John W. Shepherd (Montgomery, AL: Montgomery Advertiser Book and Job Office, 1864), 109.

[317] Thomas D. Morris, *Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619-1860*, 193-196.

Southern fiction. By focusing concerns about enslavement on material conditions, the trope of the well-fed slave allowed slaveholders and their allies to deflect claims about maltreatment while also advancing a more benevolent type of servitude. Further, through the narrative of the trope of the well-fed, slave owners were cast as paternalistic managers of bonds people. Contesting the trope of the well-fed slave, abolitionists sought to show how concerns about eating shed light of deeper problems within Southern bondage. By exposing the widespread problem of underfeeding, and by shedding light on the inferior rations of enslaved men and women, abolitionists aimed to show how slavery denied bonds people humanity. Further, abolitionists drew slaveholders into question by demonstrating how their claims about "well-fed" slaves were based less in reality than fiction. Capturing this, the legal reforms around diet in the late antebellum period show the limits of the trope of the well-fed slave. Although this was a type of pro-slavery discourse, which sought to justify bondage through discussions of enslaved provisions, slave owners' practices on the ground did not match their rhetoric about enslaved fare.

Conclusion

In 1977, the groundbreaking television mini-series called *Roots* made its debut. *Roots* was based on a novel by Alex Haley, which tells the story of a young West African man named Kunta Kinte who was captured by slave traders, forced to endure the brutal journey over the Atlantic Ocean, and sold into bondage in Virginia. Kunta Kinte begins his life as a slave in Spotsylvania, Virginia, on a plantation owned by John Reynolds. A short time after his arrival here, Kunta Kinte meets an older enslaved man named Fiddler who has the responsibility of acclimating Kunta to slavery in Virginia.

Food plays a central role in shaping one of the earliest meetings between these two characters. The scene opens as Fiddler enters a locked room where a shackled Kunta Kinte struggles to free himself. Carrying a plate with fat pork and grits, Fiddler hands the plate over to Kunta Kinte. Initially, Kunta refuses to eat, perhaps because he was unfamiliar with the fare given to slaves. Hoping to entice the reluctant Kunta, Fiddler takes the fork and announces, "I made sure Rachel dipped you up a nice piece of pork fat."[318] Fiddler's generous gesture was met with revulsion by Kunta Kinte, who was a practicing Muslim. After knocking the pork to the ground, Kunta proceeds to quickly consume the plate of grits. As the scene closes, Fiddler exits the room leaving Kunta behind, but a resourceful Fiddler has picked up the pork off the ground, and he exits with the meat in his possession.

The encounter between Kunta Kinte and Fiddler reveals two important concerns about the relationship between diet and enslavement in the U.S. South. First, Kunta's rejection of pork

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[318] Marvin J. Chomsky, "Roots" (United States: American Broadcasting Company, 1977). The scene involving Fiddler, Kunta Kinte and the plate of pork is absent from Haley's novel. While the novel does note Kunta's refusal to eat pork, there are no comparable scenes in the text. Alex Haley, *Roots* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1976), 281 and 368.

highlights the limited autonomy slaves held over both their diets and bodies. Yet, while television audiences were struck by Kunta's resolve, his actions had serious consequences, since rations of meat were limited in the 1700s when this scene is set. Thus, like those antebellum geophagists examined in this dissertation, these actions came with potentially serious consequences.[319]

The scene also suggests the continued symbolic significance of enslaved diet in the twentieth century. In particular, Alex Haley invoked popular concerns about the continued consumption of pork by black Americans in the 1970s. By the time of *Roots* television premiere, a growing number of African Americans opposed pork consumption for health reasons, and due to its association with enslavement.[320] The encounter between Kunta Kinte and Fiddler highlight a symbolic rejection of slavery and the historical connection between pork and the black body.

Food consumption marked social hierarchies, fueled political debates over slavery, and shaped ideas about embodied racial difference. For slave owners, their ability to monitor and dictate what types of food slaves ate helped to reinforce their authority over the black bodies they owned. The body was a critical site for establishing the permanence of racial differences in the antebellum United States. Those seeking to shore up the link between blackness and enslavement turned to the body for proof of African American inferiority. By establishing that slaves' bodies made them innately inferior, proponents of slavery could justify this institution

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[319] Historian Walter Johnson reminds us that while "cultural forms" like geophagy were not resistant acts, they helped forge a community that could serve as a basis for more formal challenges to enslavement. For more, see Walter Johnson, "'On Agency,'" *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 1 (2003): 113–24.

[320] See Elijah Muhammad, *How to Eat to Live* (Chesapeake, Virginia: ECA Associates, 1972), 95-96; Althea Smith, "A Farewell to Chitterlings," *Ebony Magazine* (Chicago, September 1974). For more on the Nation of Islam and the meanings of dietary regulation, see Doris Witt, *Black Hunger Food and the Politics of U.S. Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 108-110.

and cement its connection to black corporeality. Through the deployment of an embodied defense, the bodies of slaves functioned as constitutive elements in the defense of Southern bondage. The embodied defense buttressed pro-slavery efforts to provide an ideological defense of slavery. Further, it reflected an effort to normalize enslaved corporeal inferiority through the production of a medicalized system of knowledge.

The alleged inferiority of black slaves could be addressed through dietary management. Therefore, the limitations in the production of animal heat could be overcome with diets rich in heat generating foods, like Indian corn and pork. For slave owners in parts of the Cotton South, few rations held greater import than pork. Enslaved people's pork consumption also represented slaves' inferior status. Pork eating likewise shed light on the ways racialized understandings about the body were influenced by eating.

Diet shaped racial hierarchy in the antebellum South. The consumption of fatty pork in Southern discourse sheds light on how racial difference was articulated through diet. Since it was believed that slaves who consumed pork were larger and healthier looking, pork took on an increased importance in slaves' diet. The Southern planter discourse on pork consumption suggested that it improved black flesh and increased longevity; conversely, pork consumption jeopardized the health of white women and more sedentary white men working in Southern towns and cities. The discussion of fatty pork highlights the interrelatedness of diet, health, and the slaves' body in planter and medical discourse in the nineteenth century. Although some questioned fatty pork as a slave ration, other planters continued to advocate its use. Nonetheless by the 1850s fatty pork was increasingly seen as the fare best suited to slaves and other men performing hard labor. Meanwhile, physicians discouraged pork consumption, particularly among affluent white women and men who performed sedentary tasks. For this group, swine

ingestion could lead to a blemished complexion or even dyspepsia. The consumption of fatty pork in Southern discourse further shows how hierarchy was articulated through diet.

While slaves consumed other kinds of meat, only pork gained an association with wellness and vitality in plantation management and medical discourse. The regulation of diet also involved policing enslaved eating practices. Among the practices of consumption that slave owners found troublesome and potentially lethal, geophagy gained the ire of slave owners in both the Caribbean and the American South. Linked to a dreaded disease known as Cachexia Africana, slave owners dubbed geophagy "dirt eating" in order to stigmatize the practice.

Eating served multiple purposes to men and women in bondage. The eating habits of slaves shed light on their understandings of their own bodies in the face of violently enforced white ownership. Enslaved West and Central Africans brought the practice of eating earth to the Caribbean and the United States during the Atlantic slave trade. Like the religious practice of conjure or musical tradition of the banjo, geophagy was a cultural practice that held significance for its sensorial, medicinal, and metaphysical value. Earth eating for slaves became a way to articulate an enslaved cosmology, which intertwined with their tasks as agricultural workers. Ultimately, geophagists remind us, as Christine Marks writes, "Eating is an agricultural, ecological and political act."[321]

Likewise, underscoring eating as a political concern, pro and anti-slavery writers invoked food imagery in an effort to defend and challenge Southern bondage. These concerns about eating were part of a broader world of antebellum politics. By the 1830s, Southern slave owners and their allies increasingly looked to narratives that pointed to well-provisioned slaves in order

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[321] Christine Marks, "Creole Cuisine as Culinary Border Culture: Reading Recipes as Testimonies of Hybrid Identity and Cultural Heritage," in *Dethroning the Deceitful Pork Chop: Rethinking African American Foodways from Savery to Obama*, ed., Jennifer Jensen Wallach, Psysche A.Williams-Forson; Rebecca Sharpless (Fayetteville, Arkansas: University of Arkansas, 2015), 79–92.

to defend slavery. The trope of the well-fed slave sought to justify slavery by invoking slaveholder benevolence. Further, these narratives supplemented paternalist rhetoric about Southern bondage.

By emphasizing enslaved contentment, the affirmations of Southern pro-slavery politicians aimed to shift the focus away from enslaved neglect. While first promoted in the arena of politics, this trope circulated widely in the antebellum United States through the publication of pro-slavery essays and fiction. Whereas slaveholders and their allies told stories of contented slaves, abolitionists promoted narratives about enslaved hunger. Both black and white called into question slaveholder claims about slave provisioning and drew attention to the ways rationing promoted both misery and violence.

These concerns about eating were part of a broader world of antebellum politics, and legacies of theses discourses about eating continued to persist even after slavery's demise. The symbolic link between pork and enslavement animated postbellum dietary reform common in the discourse of Booker T. Washington. Known as the Wizard of Tuskegee, he founded a historically black college in the heart of the Alabama Black Belt in 1881. The university's curriculum offered industrial training for both men and women. But diet was also a concern for Washington and other administrators at Tuskegee Institute. "Washington and his administrative staff," Jennifer J. Wallach, writes, "went to great lengths to micromanage the campus diet."[322] Wallach asserts, "They did so believing not only that food was a source of physical nourishment but that it came to the table embedded with messages about culture, status, politics, and economics." In the twentieth century other black American leaders from Elijah Muhammad to

[322] Jennifer Jensen Wallach, "Dethroning the Deceitful Pork Chop: Food Reform at Tuskegee Institute," in *Dethroning the Deceitful Pork Chop: Rethinking African American Foodways from Savery to Obama*, ed. Rebecca Sharpless, Jennifer Jensen Wallach and Psyche A. Williams-Forson (Fayetteville, Arkansas: The University of Arkansas Press, 2015), 165.

entertainers like rapper KRS-One would take up the issue of dietary reform, and they to would link this to concerns about Black Nationalism.[323] Collectively, these thinkers and entertainers attempted to trouble the legacy of enslaved eating and also reshape black American body politics in freedom.

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[323] Witt, *Black Hunger,* 79-101; Edward E. Curtis, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1975* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009). For more on the topic of dietary reform and hip hop, see Jerome K. Dotson, "No More Park Sausages Mom Please": Eating and Body Politics in 80s and 90s Hip Hop" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, Atlanta, Georgia, September 2015).

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