

**Abstract** This article explores how thinking about the time of childhood through the lens of US slavery forces us to rethink both phenomena. According to many of the people who lived through it, enslaved childhood was a shifting, episodic phenomenon that had multiple points of definition. Throughout the nineteenth century, as their adult selves looked back on their early years, formerly enslaved people adopted a number of different strategies to understand and narrate how they came to be who they were and what their formative experiences meant in terms of the trajectory of their lives. They wrote within a literary culture that was itself partially responsible for creating (and certainly was instrumental in promoting and perpetuating) the temporal understanding of childhood as unidirectional, progressive, and only tangentially connected to material reality. But they also described quite different temporal patterns for slave childhood. These patterns are the focus of my analysis here: how African American narrators negotiated their vexed relationship to childhood as both never- and always-children in order to challenge the growing consensus on how childhood could and should be staged in literary texts. My primary sources are narratives by formerly enslaved people, written, as most slave narratives were, primarily but not exclusively for white readers.

**Keywords** slavery, child, time, narrative

**W**hat is the temporality of slave childhood? Depending on whom you ask, the answers are quite different: enslaved people in the United States were never children or were always children (at least under the law).<sup>1</sup> The enforced, unpaid work and chattel status of enslaved children meant, in Wilma King's (2011: xxii) words, "enslaved children had virtually no childhood, because they entered the workplace early and were subjected to arbitrary authority, punishment, and separation, just as enslaved adults were." At the same time, enslaved adults were often imagined as perpetual children, unable to care for themselves or sustain the rational thought inherent to real maturity. No less a figure than Thomas Jefferson (1904: 447) articulated a view

of Africans and African Americans that was reproduced again and again: “to give liberty to, or rather, to abandon persons whose habits have been formed by slavery is like abandoning children.”

Certainly, children were a crucial part of the system of chattel slavery in the United States. A significant number of people under the age of sixteen were brought to the Americas from Africa. Ships that made the Middle Passage with Africans on board were outfitted with child-size manacles and chains, and children’s smaller body size was calculated into the subdivision of space in the hold belowdecks. On some ships the number of children reached 80, even 90 percent, and by some estimates the average proportion of children on slave ships was about half (Duane 2010: 143). Even after the end of the international slave trade, the population of enslaved people under the age of eighteen far exceeded the number of those over that age (King 2011: 76). On plantations, life expectancy was short, and enslaved women were (often violently) impressed into replenishing the stock. After the outlawing of the international slave trade and the rapid growth of demand for cotton, a labor-intensive cash crop, enslaved workers were pushed to the point of exhaustion and often death.<sup>2</sup> The economics of American slavery demanded a continual stream of new bodies.

This intensification of domestic slavery coincided with (and, some argue, was co-constitutive with) the development of a new way of imagining white childhood that was closely imbricated with temporal thinking—a change from both rationalist concepts of the child as blank slate and earlier Puritan ideas of childhood depravity that must be both educated and beaten out. Richard Brodhead (1988) coined the influential term “disciplinary intimacy” to describe what replaced these earlier models, a phenomenon in which intimacy between parents and child—especially mother and child—is deepened and in which “enmeshing the child in strong bonds of love” is imagined to be “the way authority introduces its charge to its imperatives and norms” (20). While Puritan concepts of child-rearing were subtractive (take out the sin) and rationalist ideas were additive (fill an empty vessel with increasing amounts of virtue), nineteenth-century ideas circulated around two intertwined prerequisites: time and space for children to develop and an environment quarantined from the corruption of the outside world in which to do so.

As Karen Sánchez-Eppler (2005: 152) shows, this new sentimentalized childhood “entailed the creation of a protracted period in which the child would be protected from the difficulties and responsibilities

of daily life—ultimately including the need to work.” The role of the white child was to grow into its adult self slowly but unimpeded. Children were to focus solely on their cultivation by others: adults should impart lessons in secular knowledge, moral instruction, etiquette, and Christian faith, so that their charges would be prepared to move seamlessly into the next stage of life.

This model of child development is, at its core, a reworking of the passage of child time. The education that bourgeois white children were believed to require had to be imparted slowly, with gradually increasing levels of difficulty. This was as true of formal educational subjects like mathematics, history, or Latin as it was of more amorphous qualities such as patience, faith, and self-restraint. Indeed, childhood was (and is), as Sánchez-Eppler (2005: xxi) argues, less “a specific period of years” and more “a set of social conditions” bounded by race, class, and region, and those conditions were activated by norms of temporality.

In this article, I explore how thinking about the time of childhood through the lens of American slavery forces us to rethink both phenomena. According to many of the people who lived through it, enslaved childhood was a shifting, episodic phenomenon that had multiple points of definition. Throughout the nineteenth century, as their adult selves looked back on their early years, formerly enslaved people adopted a number of different strategies to understand and narrate how they came to be who they were and what their formative experiences meant in terms of the trajectory of their lives. They wrote within a literary culture that was itself partially responsible for creating (and certainly instrumental in promoting and perpetuating) the temporal understanding of childhood as unidirectional, progressive, and only tangentially connected to material reality. But they also described quite different temporal patterns for slave childhood.

These patterns are the focus of my analysis here—how African American narrators negotiated their vexed relationship to childhood as both never- and always-children in order to challenge the growing consensus on how childhood could and should be staged in literary texts. My primary sources are narratives by formerly enslaved people written, as most slave narratives were, primarily but not exclusively for white readers. Of course, adults are unreliable narrators of their own childhoods, for any number of reasons. First, memory is fickle and selective.<sup>3</sup> Second, what we remember is always filtered through the scrim of narratives that become available to us over time: we arrange our memories to conform to the narrative arcs that make our

lives comprehensible rather than a welter of experiences, feelings, and (inter)actions.<sup>4</sup> For adults, childhood is explanatory: how did I become the person I am now? For children, it is experiential: what's happening? This move from a phenomenological to a teleological approach to the events of childhood cannot help but shape memory.

I acknowledge these obstacles to understanding children's experience. However, I'm less interested in excavating the *truth* of child slavery and more interested in the *narrative strategies* formerly enslaved people used within the genre of the slave narrative, expansively defined, to represent their childhoods. While I discuss some now-canonical narratives by former enslaved people (Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Elizabeth Keckley), I also draw on a wider archive of lesser-known texts to show how widespread these generic strategies were. How must they come up with new and flexible tools to describe a temporal trajectory so different from those their mostly white readers would recognize as "childhood"? To what extent do some narrators choose to gloss over their early years rather than engage in the contortions required to make their childhoods resemble those of their readers? When they do focus on themselves as children, how do they wrestle with the narrative challenges presented by what I call "enslaved time"?

I should say here that the rhetorical work of these narratives must not allow us to ignore the material realities of the lives of enslaved children. As Anna Mae Duane (2010: 143) has pointed out, in thinking about enslaved children, we must always keep in mind "the death and suffering slave children endured because of poor nutrition and ill care, the psychologically compelling scenes of separation and trauma that were experienced by so many enslaved children." Enslaved children were put to some kind of work at young ages: they "cleaned, cooked, washed clothes, and gathered wood, and they often watched younger siblings or the infants of friends and relatives" (Schwartz 2000: 123). Boys could start unskilled work in the fields as young as ten, and girls only a little later, pulling worms and bugs off crops (144). And I am fully alert to the ethical demands of this work. Brigitte Fielder (2017) points to the very different stakes of facing the realities of slave childhood for white and black children, and this difference analogizes for white and black scholars. As she argues, at every level "racialized violence and precarity are unequally distributed" (324). Moreover, "literary models of interracial sympathy tend to universalize and prioritize whiteness . . . as [a] narrative position of

readerly identification,” and literary analysis can instantiate that same dynamic (325). Similarly, Saidiya V. Hartman (Hartman and Wilderson 2003: 184), in conversation with Frank B. Wilderson III, has argued, “Every attempt to emplot the slave in a narrative ultimately resulted in his or her obliteration.”

Rather than attempting to emplot formerly enslaved people in a narrative of nineteenth-century childhood, I am concerned here with observing how these narrators *replot*, recast, and re-/de-temporalize the phenomenon of childhood that their white contemporaries were constructing, a phenomenon whose conditions of economic and social possibility were their very enslavement. Enslaved childhood does not build and ebb, become more or less difficult to deal with, or change with the maturing of the child (or, just as likely, her death). Suffering punctuates the experience of the enslaved child. It can generate the experience of childhood or force a sudden shift from childhood innocence to slave knowingness or even reconstrue the affective bond between enslaved mother and child. Enslaved childhood operates in a different kind of time.

To think about time is, of course, to think about culture, politics, and economics. In recent years, scholars of US culture have theorized time as a sociopolitical phenomenon, rather than a neutral, natural formation that treats all bodies and experiences equally. Michael O’Malley’s (1991: 10) analysis of shifting concepts of time within the United States identifies a variety of different kinds of time that determined preindustrial Americans’ understanding of temporality: rural time, which comprised a set of tasks done “in their season,” in which the length of daylight and the timetable of crops defined meanings of time; weekly time, which counted six days and then the Sabbath; annual time, which was oriented around and culminated in the Christmas and New Year holidays; and developmental time, which traced from infancy to unproductive childhood to productive youth and adulthood.

While O’Malley’s divide between predominantly agricultural and primarily industrial time is crucial to an understanding of how Americans experienced temporality over the course of the nineteenth century, it has uneven applicability to the lives of enslaved people. After all, numerous narratives by the formerly enslaved (as well as fictional representations of slavery) describe workers toiling well after sundown during the “press” of the season for cotton, tobacco, corn, and the like (see Douglass 2002; W. J. Anderson 2000; and McWhorter 1941). Enslaved people did not, on the whole, experience industrialization firsthand,

although the mechanization of cotton production and processing sped up and intensified the rhythms of their work.<sup>5</sup> And while the temporal divisions provided by Sabbaths and the Christmas season also shaped slave time, those interruptions of work signified very differently for enslaved people: Sundays were often devoted to housework, gardening, and other domestic labor, and the rest of Christmas was often far overshadowed by the customary establishment of New Year's Day as a time in which enslaved people were gathered and auctioned off, separating families and dispatching field-workers farther South.<sup>6</sup>

To develop a sense of what the temporality of enslaved childhood might look like, I draw on three recent theories of time: Lloyd Pratt's (2010) concept of "laboring time," Elizabeth Freeman's (2010) formulation of "queer time" versus "chrononormativity," and toward the end of this essay, Dana Luciano's (2007) notion of "sacred time." For Pratt (2010: 118), the "laboring time" of slavery is epitomized by "repetitive, unbroken, and unremitting labor." Laboring time is a continuous present that admits of no future beyond what exists now and has always existed: relentless work. It precludes progress, and its centrality to the experience of enslavement means that, as Pratt argues, "there is no unmediated version of time."

Freeman's analysis of queer time gives us a tool to think about enslaved people's resistant modes of temporality. Dominant forms of time, which she calls chrononormativity, "organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity" (2010: 3)—which is as good a description of slavery's shaping of temporality as any. I would expand her term beyond the current moment to define any version of naturalized, apoliticized structures of time. "Queer time," by contrast, constitutes "pauses or interruptions in the routinized rhythms of everyday life, in the sequences expected to unfold naturally from one another" (6).

Freeman's concept of queer time can extend beyond the quotidian to phenomena that are defined by the norms of bourgeois white supremacy: childhood, adulthood, parenthood, "the family." These are the norms that slavery rendered almost impossible. By design, slavery as a structure disregarded "the family" as a meaningful framework, even as enslaved people constructed family ties that resisted these norms. Parents and children were routinely separated by sale, escape, or death. "Enslaved time" challenges the inevitability and putative neutrality of the trajectory of the white life cycle.

**“Stirring Incidents”: Punctuating Enslaved Childhood**

Slavery, in reducing human existence to chattel, disrupted the kinds of stories nineteenth-century readers and writers could tell about the chronology of a life. Certainly, the omnipresence of laboring time in enslaved people’s lives denuded enslavement of the drama of the change of circumstances. While different locations may be more or less demanding, violent, or both, the identification of enslaved people with work militates against the developmental narrative arc intrinsic to novelistic storytelling. The structure of the story of childhood development, the *bildungsroman*, cannot function in this context. There are too many interruptions, too many dangers, and too much that does not fit into that frame. Indeed, in some narratives by formerly enslaved people, childhood barely appears. Thomas Anderson’s (2000: 1) narrative skips from “I was born a slave in Hanover County, Virginia,” to his misspent youth: “being very much exposed in my boyhood—no one taking any interest in my welfare—I became very wicked and remained so till I arrived at the age of nineteen.” In these texts, childhood is barely distinguishable from enslaved life more generally, not least because the only education the narrators receive is one in which the different stages of life do not signify. For William J. Anderson (no relation to Thomas), early life was no different from his later experiences. The section of his narrative titled “My Birth and Parentage” covers very little of either. Rather, he explains that “being young and inexperienced, poor and penniless”—at what age it’s not at all clear—“I was thrown among the slaves and had to fare just as hard as they did; under slave influence I had to live and suffer and was brought up. The truth is, I had no bringing up; I was whipped up; starved up; kicked up and clubbed up” (2000: 5). That is to say, Anderson is always already a slave and just has to learn how to inhabit that subjectivity from his elders. Similarly, John S. Jacobs (2003: 86) barely mentions childhood in his narrative and moves quickly to discuss the “real” subject of his story. After describing the place of his birth and the trades of his parents, he jumps a decade to tell his readers “Dr. N—, being related to the family of my owner, was permitted to take me from my father in my tenth year, and put me in his shop.”

Other narrators recognized this reluctance to dwell on childhood, even as they embraced the challenge. Elizabeth Keckley (1868: 17) implicitly acknowledges the tendency of slave narratives to skip over extended discussions of childhood and instead points to some vivid memories of her youth. “My recollections of childhood are distinct,”

she tells her readers, “perhaps for the reason that many stirring incidents are associated with that period.” For Keckley, her childhood merits narrating not for its own sake but by virtue of these “stirring incidents.” Keckley’s phrasing is striking too: the events of her childhood are unattached to her subjectivity; they do not happen *to* her but exist in a “period” of time, enslaved time.

Moreover, even as she narrates her childhood, Keckley implicitly challenges her white readers’ expectations of the temporal patterns into which child development is molded for white children. The “stirring incidents” that Keckley narrates are disturbing to twenty-first-century readers. At the age of four she is put in charge of the new baby of her owner Mrs. Burwell, which becomes Keckley’s “first duty” (18). “True, I was but a child myself,” she acknowledges, “but then I had been raised in a hardy school—had been taught to rely upon myself, and to prepare myself to render care to others” (18). In Keckley’s telling, the time of enslaved childhood is both shockingly short (four years old!) and surprisingly elastic. In four years she has already been “raised” into the adult virtue of self-reliance and been enlisted in a life of service.

Readers familiar with Susan Warner’s best-selling 1850 novel *The Wide Wide World* might be reminded by Keckley’s “first duty” of a crucial conversation between the protagonist Ellen Montgomery and her surrogate sister/mother, Alice Humphreys. Ellen’s “first duty” is, according to Alice, “the faithful, patient, self-denying performance of every duty as it comes to hand” (Warner 1986: 291). At this point in the novel, Ellen is eleven or twelve and has many years of education, both religious and secular, ahead of her. By contrast, young Elizabeth Keckley’s education in her “first dut[ies]” is already complete in one third of the time, as though slavery can stretch the edges of what days and years can contain. The difference in age between her charge and herself may be four chronological years, but within the logic of slave time it expands to far more, certainly enough to create a relationship of caregiver and care receiver.

This compression and attenuation of the time of childhood goes almost without saying in Keckley’s text, as we see in an episode early on in her text. Looking after the baby, she rocks its cradle too hard, and the child falls onto the floor. In a panic and “not knowing what to do, I seized the fire shovel in my perplexity, and was trying to shovel up my tender charge, when my mistress called to me to leave the child alone and then ordered that I be taken out and lashed for my carelessness” (1868: 20). Certainly, Keckley’s “perplexity” and her



unorthodox—even slapstick—solution can be attributed to her youth (it bears repeating: four years old), but stories of young women beaten for unintentional neglect of infants are common in narratives of slavery. Douglass recounts an incident in which a girl in her mid-teens enslaved by the Hickses, neighbors to Douglass, fell asleep tending the baby, and Mrs. Hicks beat her to death. Likewise, James Curry describes a particularly disturbing incident involving his mother and a white child she had nurtured:

After she had raised my master's children, one of his daughters, a young girl, came into the kitchen one day, and for some trifle about the dinner, she struck my mother, who pushed her away, and she fell on the floor. Her father was not at home. When he came, which was while the slaves were eating in the kitchen, she told him about it. He came down, called my mother out, and, with a hickory rod, he beat her fifteen or twenty strokes, and then called his daughter and told her to take her satisfaction of her, and she did beat her until she was satisfied. Oh! it was dreadful, to see the girl whom my poor mother had taken care of from her childhood thus beating her. (2003: 1)

William McWhorter told a Federal Writers' Project interviewer a similar story:

One night my ma had been nussin one of dem white babies, and atter it dozed off to sleep she went to lay it in its little bed. De child's foot cotch itself in Marse Joe's galluses dat he had done hung on de foot of de bed, and when he heared his baby cry Marse Joe woke up and grabbed up a stick of wood and beat ma over de head 'til he 'most kilt her. Ma never did seem right atter dat and when she died she still had a big old knot on her head. (1941: 99)

While Keckley does not describe her own beating with such pathos, she notes its harshness. But both Keckley and the unnamed person deputed to whip her take this as a matter of course, however cruel, and “the blows were not administered with a light hand, I assure you, and doubtless the severity of the lashing has made me remember the incident so well” (1868: 21).

Keckley remembers this incident due to its violence, not her youth. Indeed, according to her, she remembers her childhood because of such “stirring incidents,” rather than the other way around, which suggests that otherwise her childhood would not have been worth comment. After informing her readers that she “determined to render

[Mrs. Burwell] all the assistance in my power,” although “my young energies were taxed to the utmost,” Keckley draws a veil over childhood, rushing to get to the real story. “I must,” she says, “pass rapidly over the stirring events of my early life” (31).

How do we think about Keckley’s use of the phrase “stirring incidents [or events]” (which, after reading her account, seems far too euphemistic)? And whom are these incidents imagined to stir? Her use of the word *incident* is notable, not least because it invokes for the twenty-first-century reader Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, published about a decade earlier in 1859. An incident is not the same as an event or an occurrence or a happening. Events can be recurring; an incident happens only once.<sup>7</sup> These incidents stir Keckley to remember them and stir us to pay attention to them—they define and are coterminous with her childhood.

For Keckley, then, childhood is worth remembering only if it is punctuated by incidents that have narrative power both for her and for the reader. Indeed, her childhood would not exist in her memory or in her narrative (and, as far as the reader is concerned, not at all) were it not for these *incidents*. Keckley’s characterization of these events points us toward how the temporality of her childhood is implicitly shaped by enslaved time. The rhythm of enslaved time, of enslaved childhood, is not a smooth progressive narrative but one characterized by moments of explosion and long stretches of tedium and exhaustion. Enslaved time is *punctuated* in the sense of its Latin roots—it is pierced and punctured by violence, paused and marked by massive changes that take place over a brief period.<sup>8</sup> These moments resemble Roland Barthes’s (1980: 27) definition of the punctum (although in the very different context of photography), “the accident which pricks me (but it also bruises me, is poignant to me).”<sup>9</sup> Enslaved childhood, in the accounts of formerly enslaved writers, more often than not consists of a short undifferentiated period of racial unconsciousness followed by a sharp puncture of that time by the realities of slavery.

At the same time, this punctum is not a stop. Childhood does not exactly end, but it doesn’t continue under the same conditions. Indeed, enslaved childhood is a series of sharp blows that presage but don’t constitute full initiation into the subjectivity of enslaved *person*. The piercing violence of slavery stops time temporarily, but after that punctuating moment, everything continues as it has, even if the enslaved child’s experience of self in the world has changed radically. The punctum ruptures the child internally and intensely, even as it

weaves him or her into the larger extensive fabric of slavery in which childhood is constructed by context.

To illustrate this, let us look at perhaps the best-known punctuating moments that suture childhood and slave subjectivity: those in Douglass's 1845 *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. These moments in which the young Douglass begins to understand the horrors of slavery have been interpreted many times by leading critics in the field of African American literary studies. In particular, Hartman's (1997: 3) analysis of the trope of the "bloodstained gate" and the scene of whipping as the image of slave suffering that defined (and fetishized) enslavement for the white reader originates in and has provided the blueprint for subsequent readings of Douglass's narrative.

For Hartman, the central event of this scene is the sexual humiliation and violent physical abuse of Douglass's Aunt Hester. Viewing Hester's victimization is the young Fred's initiation into the realities of slavery, from the liminal space of the closet in which he's hiding, through the "bloodstained gate" to the hell that constitutes enslaved life. In Hartman's words, "The passage through the bloodstained gate is the inaugural moment in the formation of the enslaved. In this regard it is the primal scene" (3).

But the primal scene for *whom*? For the white reader for whom this scene is narrated? Or for the black child for whom a new knowledge of the economies of sex, violence, and white male dominance operative within (or even determinative of) slavery pulls him out of the space in which he can be invisible to those economies and into the workings of slavery itself? For Douglass this moment punctuates his childhood, both making him aware of and intensifying his status as a child and ending his childish state of unknowing. Douglass's introduction to this scene rests on the role of violence in the memory of enslaved children. The brutality of his aunt's torture burns the scene onto his memory visually and aurally, as he reeses the blood and rehears her screams. To emphasize the unadulterated, unfading, and punctuating power of this event on his mind, Douglass (2002: 6; emphasis added) repeats variations on the word *memory* or its lack throughout this paragraph: "I *remember* the first time I ever witnessed this horrible exhibition. I was quite a child, but I well *remember* it. I never shall *forget* it whilst I *remember* any thing." At the same time, the inextricability of the memory from childhood renders his own experience of the scene unrepresentable—he lacks the language to describe the affective power of what he is seeing, as teleology (the

point of this event for his later development) is flooded and overwhelmed by phenomenology. “It was,” he says “a most terrible spectacle. I wish I could commit to paper the feelings with which I beheld it” (6). The “awful force” with which this incident strikes him punctuates his text and returns Douglass back to the moment itself, leaving him suspended between the literate eloquence of his adulthood and the voiceless terror of childhood.

Douglass’s childhood is profoundly ruptured by this episode. And it isn’t. When, after digressions to show the reader the lay of the land in Talbot County, Maryland, and the depredations that slavery visits on its people, Douglass returns to the narrative of his own life, he is still a child. “As to my own treatment while I lived on Colonel Lloyd’s plantation,” he reports, “it was very similar to that of the other slave children. I was not old enough to work in the field, and there being little else than field work to do, I had a great deal of leisure time” (26). He played with young Master Daniel Lloyd, who “became quite attached to me, and was a sort of protector of me” (26). He may have passed through the bloodstained gate, but he came out the other side as much (and as little) a child as he entered.

Douglass’s childhood doesn’t end with his initiation through the bloodstained gate. In some ways, it has an asymptotic relationship to white childhood even as it intersects with signifiers of enslaved adulthood. Barred from literacy because of his enslavement, the young Frederick (re)inscribes himself as a child in the margins of young Thomas Auld’s copybook from *Webster’s Spelling Book*, the paradigmatic text of alphabetization and the formation of American children (Crain 2016: 132). He competes with young white boys on the street, bringing the work of writing and spelling out of the schoolhouse and the parlor and into the street. He merges the worlds of (enslaved) work and (child-identified) learning: “During this time, my copy-book was the board fence, brick wall, and pavement; my pen and ink was a lump of chalk” (Douglass 2002: 41).

These moments of self-education suggest development and progress—the logic of the archetypal American life writing of, say, Benjamin Franklin. But this growth in knowledge does not open the door to increased opportunity or a potential road out of slavery. Indeed, not long after this Douglass is sent to Mr. Covey’s, and the rhythms of laboring time intervene in and almost erase his earlier intellectual advances. Twelve-year-old Fred is more independent, more accomplished, and more self-conscious than sixteen-year-old Fred; he is both more adult and more child at both junctures. Douglass’s time in

Baltimore is one punctuating episode, his fight with Covey another, and the narrative itself draws little connection between them. Baltimore allows him to be a child—in part through his proximity to the accoutrements of white childhood—and connect to the narrative of intellectual and emotional development. His time with Covey returns him to the permanent, undifferentiated phenomenon of laboring time even as it provides an incident in which “the slave” (child?) becomes “a man.” Enslaved time ruptures and reverses any expectation of progress. In Baltimore, Douglass takes the opportunity to develop out of slavehood *into* childhood, which presupposes an eventual entrance into manhood. At Covey’s he devolves from childhood back into slavery and then, through a violent punctuating incident, into manhood—a state from which he can again use the developmental skills gained in his Baltimore childhood such as reading, writing, and intellectual analysis, skills that he lost while at Covey’s. To be (the equal of) a (white) man, he has to have developed from a child, not been transformed from a slave. When he returns to the Lloyd plantation he deploys the skills he learned during his sojourn into childhood in Baltimore—literacy, oratory, rhetoric—in order to effect his freedom and that of his friends. To be a “real” man, he must be able to refer back to being a preadult, not a nonadult, a child, not a slave.

### The Punctum of Enslaved Girlhood

The rhythm of punctuation extends into later childhood as well, especially for female narrators. Nazera Sadiq Wright has written at length about the interruption of childhood that black girlhood represents. For her, “girlhood” is not an extension of childhood but a foreclosure of it, a rushed and often violent introduction to sexual maturity and “knowingness” that precludes childhood innocence. As Wright (2016: 61) argues, “Extreme hardship and danger hasten the maturation of youthful girls, and the move from youthful to prematurely knowing girlhood occurs when black girls gain independence or a deepened awareness of their precarious positions and seek methods for survival.” While I agree that the theme of premature knowingness is a hallmark of narratives by black women about their girlhoods, I don’t see the same sharp break from youthfulness to knowingness. I would argue that for Harriet Jacobs and Elizabeth Keckley, for example, girlhood is a *separate* stage of development from childhood, on the one hand, and womanhood, on the other, even as it draws on and can coexist with both.

This blurring of boundaries between childhood and womanhood encapsulated in “girlhood” is clear in Keckley’s chapter “Girlhood and Its Sorrows.” Keckley shifts perspective throughout the chapter, repositioning herself in relationship to her child, “girl,” and adult selves. At the age of fourteen she was moved to the home of her owner’s son. In the next paragraph she tells the reader, “The years passed slowly, and I continued to serve them, and at the same time grew into strong, healthy womanhood” (1868: 32). The bulk of the chapter covers about a week, in which a Mr. Bingham, a neighbor of the family who enslaved her, whipped her and (implicitly) attempted to rape her. It’s in this episode that the chapter’s title seems most inappropriate: Keckley draws attention to the fact that she, at “eighteen years of age, was a woman fully developed,” expressing shock and humiliation that Mr. Bingham insists she take off her dress so he can whip her (33). While she resists, she is ultimately subdued, and he visits a “torture” on her that leaves her “stunned with pain, bruised and bleeding” (36).

Her struggle with Mr. Bingham—sexualized if not explicitly sexual—is a kind of rupture out of childhood into a subjectivity embodied not by Keckley’s physical maturation but by her role as sexual prey for unscrupulous white men: that is, as girlhood. Bingham’s repeated violence toward her is a version of the bloodstained gate but is *her* blood. While Douglass’s initiation into the adult world of slavery is vicarious, Keckley’s entrance into enslaved girlhood, signified as both childhood by her chapter’s title and womanhood by its content, could not be more direct. It is a short step from this to her actual rape by an unnamed white man in town.

Jacobs’s own entry into enslaved childhood begins less violently than Keckley’s or Douglass’s. As she remarks, “I was born a slave; but I never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away” (1987: 11). The death of her mother leads to her discovery of her enslaved status and her growing understanding of the generational parallels of enslavement: “My mother’s mistress was the daughter of my grandmother’s mistress. She was the foster sister of my mother; they were both nourished at my grandmother’s breast” (14). These mirror images of black and white families and their parallel tracks of mothers and daughters (and grandmothers and granddaughters) are rendered impossible by slavery, however, which suggests why Jacobs’s pseudonymous alter ego, Linda Brent, begins to be aware of slavery and her own place within it at about the time she recognizes the quasi-familial relationships between white and black women. After

her own mother dies, Linda goes to live with and work for her mother's enslaver. While Linda sees this woman as a kind of surrogate mother, she recognizes that the stakes of *her* death are much higher than those of Linda's own mother and that Linda's status as virtual daughter is determined or undone by the economics of slavery.

Linda has strong filial affective ties to this older woman and grieves her eventual death. Six years after her mother's death, her "kind mistress sickened and died. As I saw the cheek grow paler, and the eye more glassy, how earnestly I prayed in my heart that she might live! I loved her; for she had been almost like a mother to me" (15). But while her actual mother's death reveals the realities and inequities of slavery to Linda, the death of her "mistress" causes a sharper puncture with more enduring ramifications in her life. Despite Linda's familial feelings toward her mistress, emotions that are returned in affective terms, the economic dictates of slavery outstrip crossracial fondness. Like her mother before her and her grandmother before that, Linda is still a piece of movable property, and she forms the next link on the generational chain, being willed to her owner's niece, a girl of Linda's generation.

Each of these punctuating incidents deepens Linda's understanding of what it means to be an enslaved child. The loss of her mother opens her eyes to the inextricability of herself and her older female relatives from slavery because of, not despite, the integrity of the white family. The death of her "mistress" extends the grip of deeply embodied enslavement from her grandmother and mother—Linda's mother is weaned so that her white counterpart can be nursed—down another generation, yoking Linda's future to that of the newest female child of the enslaving family. For the enslaved family, the passage of generational time is actually a kind of stasis in which the slave–slave owner relationship is reenacted in the same way at different chronological moments.

Linda's movement from childhood to girlhood opens the space for this generational link to be used as an alibi for abuse (this time sexual), exploiting Linda's relationship as property to the young Miss Flint. The chapter in which Jacobs chronicles Dr. Flint's exploitation of Linda is, similar to Keckley's, titled "The Trials of Girlhood," signaling to readers the porous boundaries, and punctuated trauma, that the temporality of enslaved girlhood entails. Even sexual maturity is not necessarily the entryway to girlhood—as Jacobs herself points out: "Even the little child, who is accustomed to wait on her mistress

and her children, will learn, before she is twelve years old, why it is that her mistress hates such and such a one among the slaves. . . . She listens to violent outbreaks of jealous passion, and cannot help understanding what is the cause. She will become prematurely knowing in evil things” (45). Female children have partial access to the threats of girlhood through premature knowledge of sexual matters before they themselves are initiated into it, much as Douglass witnesses the torture of his Aunt Hester before he himself experiences the violence of slavery. But unlike Douglass, who can return to a kind of child subjectivity after his experience, enslaved female children are shunted by this knowledge into the gender-specific identity of “girl,” an identity in which sexual awareness and sexual threat are inextricable.

Dr. Flint himself recognizes the shifting borders among childhood, girlhood, and enslaved womanhood. His address to Linda embraces all three age registers as he bullies and intimidates her: “Poor child! Don’t cry! don’t cry! I will make peace for you with your mistress. Only let me arrange matters in my own way. Poor, foolish girl! you don’t know what is for your own good. I would cherish you. I would make a lady of you” (56). Dr. Flint vacillates in his characterization of Linda’s age category. Is she a child? A girl? A potential lady? All three? As the one who holds the power in the narrative of enslaved girlhood, he can manipulate these various temporalized identities to his own advantage—he can make Linda be a child (the companion to his own young daughter), a girl (the recipient of sexualized threat), and a lady (a version of the light-skinned “fancy woman” in the iconography of slavery).

To fully understand the racial specificity of this meaning of girlhood for enslaved female children, we can contrast this explicit sexual threat with a scene of implicit sexual violence toward Ellen Montgomery, the paradigm of white girlhood in Warner’s *Wide Wide World*. Riding home from a nearby village, Ellen is accosted by her nemesis from an earlier episode in the novel, Mr. Saunders. Although she is on a horse and Mr. Saunders is on foot, Ellen can only enact bourgeois white girlhood—simultaneously privileged and powerless—when he harasses her. She begs him again and again, “*please* let us go. . . . I want to be home!” as he flicks her horse with his whip and tries to force her to jump a fence (Warner 1986: 400). Unlike Linda, she cannot imagine resisting or fighting back, and she cannot use Mr. Saunders’s tactics against himself, even though the stakes for her are far lower: once she rides away it’s entirely possible that she might never



encounter Saunders again. She can only sit frozen on the horse until she is rescued by her Byronic guardian, John Humphreys.

Linda's torment is not less serious than Ellen's because Linda has learned how to fight back, not least because Linda sees as her only option finding a white man to attach herself to sexually in order to protect her from Dr. Flint. Indeed, the opposite is true. Later the same day, Ellen reflects on her experience with Mr. Saunders by exclaiming, "Oh, how could he! how could he! . . . how could he do so!" (404), as though male sexual violence is inexplicable. And there is no question within the logic of the novel that Ellen will not be rescued from the villainous Saunders just in time by her white male guardian. Linda has no such illusions, not least because adult white men are the source of threat, not salvation. She understands that the temporal slippage among enslaved childhood, girlhood, and womanhood is the result of the power of white men—and women—to sexually exploit her and other enslaved young women. That is, enslaved girlhood is not a period of time as much as it is a space of potential black female subjection, a space Linda can escape only via a less dangerous white male partner, thereby taking on the definitive signifier of womanhood: becoming a mother.

#### **"The Tears of My Poor Mother": Enslaved Childhood and Maternal Grief**

As I have shown above, narratives by former slaves complicate and challenge the progress narrative of white bourgeois childhood. However, as I argue in this section, they also appropriate and rework other kinds of childhood temporality to lay claim to the kind of sentimental subjectivity nineteenth-century readers recognized as "child." The logics of enslaved time prevented slave children from claiming the trajectory of childhood on their own merit: their uneven and episodic interface with the narrative of childhood development interfered with that. However, access to the sentimental power of childhood, if not its actual rhythms, was within reach for formerly enslaved narrators through representations of the mother-child bond. That is, the love and grief of enslaved mothers bestowed "childness" on enslaved children, creating a kind of performative production of "the child" in the scene of American slavery.

As Elizabeth Maddock Dillon (2004: 197) has argued, "The bond that bears the most weight in the sentimental text is . . . that between mother and child." That bond exists outside market forces, outside

gender, outside age; maternal love “does signify freedom in sentimental discourse, and it does so because it is *nonutilitarian*” (199). For the sentimental text, the predominant impetus for maternal love to be displayed in its fullest form is the death of the child, a death that appears again and again in sentimental poetry, novels, sermons, and other texts. Sánchez-Eppler (1999: 65) is not wrong when she claims that “dying is what children do most and best in the literary and cultural imagination of nineteenth-century America.”

Maternal love is inextricable from maternal grief in the sentimental imagination—indeed, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s harshest indictment of Marie St. Claire in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) is not her representation of Marie’s cruelty, her pettiness, or her self-indulgence (although she doesn’t spare judgment of those either). It is her degraded maternal self, manifested in her inability to grieve authentically for her dead daughter, Eva. Marie sees the child’s death as first an incursion on the centrality of *her* supposed frailty and then upstages all other mourners with her extravagant expressions of sorrow. By contrast, a true mother’s sentimental grief mirrored the intensity of her selfless love, a love “divorced from a world of necessity and constraint” that was a constituent part of “bourgeois liberty and emotional subjectivity” (Dillon 2004: 199).

In order for children to be mourned within the sentimental model, they must be otherwise useless and nonutilitarian. Once they enter adulthood they lose access to the “freedom and moral truth” childhood embodies (Dillon 2004: 205). To maintain this moral truth, the white bourgeois child must, like the white bourgeois family itself, be positioned as outside the public realm, only to be invaded by the violence of loss from the outside. Dillon formulates this dynamic neatly: “Pain, suffering, and violence are . . . intrinsic to the sentimental discourse despite—or, as I am suggesting, because of—the sentimental emphasis on the closure, privacy, and freedom of the domestic space” (208).

While I am convinced by Dillon’s argument about the ultimately manipulative promise of the sentimental domestic scene—it must be private to function and it must always be invaded by some kind of public violence to signify—I think the logics of maternal love are less predictable, especially temporally. Indeed, as Luciano (2007: 127) argues in *Arranging Grief*, “Emotional attachment has its own pace—a slower and essentially nonlinear relation to the value of human existence,” especially in the context of sentimental discourse. Moments of authentic love and intimacy between mother and child exist in “time out of time” for sentimental writers.

Of course, this extratemporal relationship coexists with a knowledge that childhood itself is not permanent. According to Luciano, “The sentimental home’s primary affectionate bond”—that is, that between mother and child—“existed in doubled temporality, at once timeless and of necessity transient, insofar as children were both to be cherished and to be raised, and hence to grow away from the mother who remained behind at home” (122). Implicitly, then, the death of the child slows and even halts that second temporal movement and allows the grieving mother to stay, at least in part, outside time, in timelessness. But whether a child be living or dead, it is the task of the mother to both dwell in timelessness and orient the child toward a progressive future: “Maternal affection was held to be the most effective means of launching the subject forward on a *dual* trajectory, bound at once for the progressive and cumulative temporality that saw the education and refinement of the child as a contribution to the growth of race and nation and for the perfected celestial time of the redeemed” (127). Maternal love exists in the register of what Luciano calls “sacred time,” in which the rhythms of quotidian temporality cease.

The temporality of paradigmatic sentimental childhood, then, is determined not by the experience of the child but by the love of the mother, who is acutely sensitive to the pain and suffering of her child. Ironically, given the systemic disarticulation of slavery from the structural integrity of the nuclear family, the enslaved mother is supremely equipped to take on this affective work. She is continually confronted with the spectacle of her children in pain, a pain that more often than not cannot be resolved into “the perfected celestial time of the redeemed.” Quite the opposite: the temporality of enslaved maternal love has no endpoint, since grief is so often occasioned by familial separation by sale, in which the fate of the parent or child can never be known, or by extreme violence, which is by definition endemic to slavery and has no foreseeable conclusion. If for white children and their mothers childhood is a set of practices that keeps those children in a holding pattern until they are adequately prepared to fly—either up to heaven or out into the world—for enslaved children and their mothers it is a series of traumas and crises through which black mothers produce childhood *for* their children by the expression of grief. The white child can be “led, gradually, through repetitive training and habit, into its own linear, teleological development” (128); the enslaved child is pushed through the punctuating events of violence and separation into the nonlinear, episodic world of slavery.

The primary sites of grief for enslaved mothers represented in narratives by formerly enslaved writers is not the death of their children, not surprising given how often enslaved children died. Mortality rates for children (and their mothers) in slavery were shockingly high. Richard H. Steckel (1985) approximates that at least 30 percent of newborns died within the first month of life, not including stillbirths, which Steckel estimates as the result of between 10 and 15 percent of all pregnancies (435). Infant mortality for enslaved children overall was 17 percentage points higher than that of their white counterparts (428). In the final analysis, enslaved women lost more than half of their pregnancies due to stillbirth and mortality up to the age of four (452).

Where infant mortality is represented in these narratives, it is treated with mixed feelings at best. Harriet Jacobs tells of a woman who had been raped by her owner, whose baby was stillborn and whose other child died shortly after. In Jacobs's (1987: 24) account, "The girl's mother said, 'The baby is dead, thank God; and I hope my poor child will soon be in heaven, too.'" Jacobs herself feels profound ambivalence about her own child. Although she "loved to watch his infant slumbers . . . always there was a dark cloud over my enjoyment. I could never forget that he was a slave. Sometimes I wished that he might die in infancy" (96). It is hard to imagine a white sentimental female protagonist wishing for the death of her own child. Historians bear out this thread of infanticide through the years of enslavement. Wilma King attributes at least some child mortality to infanticide by women who could not bear to see their children live under slavery or could not live with reminders of their rape by white men.<sup>10</sup>

Enslaved mothers' grief reaches its apex in these narratives when they are separated by sale, not by death. And rather than tending to suffering children on their deathbeds, enslaved mothers care for their children's mutilated bodies that have been torn apart by whipping. In these scenes, the subjectivity of the narrator (that is, the child who is witnessing or to whom these things are happening) recedes, and the mother takes center stage. The sacred time out of time that Luciano attributes to white sentimental motherhood and the intimacy between mother and child appears, but it is compressed and recast: it lasts only a few minutes or hours and is invoked not as a site of nurture and training but as a response to violence toward the enslaved mother's children.

A paradigmatic example of this dynamic is John Thompson's 1856 narrative. While the text seems to be engaging in the trope of initiation into slavery—he says, "The first act of slavery I recorded in my

memory was the sale of my elder sister” (2000: 14), who was eleven years old—Thompson quickly moves to focus on the grief of his mother at this sister being sold. Searching out her daughter among the “trader’s drove,” his mother approached the trader, “fell upon her knees, in tears begging to be permitted to see her daughter, who was soon to be dragged away from her embrace, probably to be seen no more in the flesh” (14). His mother’s visible sorrow performs sentimental grief and produces Thompson and his sister as authentic subjects of childhood. Her lamentation gives permission for him to express his own feelings through the language of sentiment, as “I thought my heart would break, as the time drew near for our departure. I dreaded the time when I should bid farewell to my beloved sister, never more to see her face” (15). When his mother, after begging the trader until she wears him down, manages to see her daughter one more time, they embrace but are unable to speak, as though language would mark the passage of time toward the moment when Thompson’s sister is taken away. Here silence operates as a temporal drag, slowing time down to open up both space and time for mother and daughter to have intimacy, to *be* mother and child.

In Thompson’s narrative, enslaved mothers must seize whatever opportunities they have to bring their children into the timelessness of the mother-child bond. On the farm where Thompson lives, the time of enslaved childhood is shrunk down to almost nothing. John, the school-age son of the owner of this plantation, enacts the relations of slavery in microcosm and is cruel to the point of sadism toward the children too young to work in the fields: “When at home from school, he would frequently request his grandmother’s permission to call all the black children from their quarters to the house . . . so that he might oversee them” (20). White John’s play requires the work of his enslaved counterparts, and unsurprisingly he inhabits the role with relish. Imitating his elders, John, “whip in hand . . . walked about among [the children], and sometimes lashed the poor little creatures, who had on nothing but a shirt, and often nothing at all, until the blood streamed down their backs and limbs, apparently for no reason whatever, except to gratify his own cruel fancy” (20).

Thompson immediately turns his narrative attention back to his mother. We follow her back from the field to her home, where she “would find her little children’s backs mangled by the lash” (20). Through the ministrations of their mother, John and his siblings are restored to the space and time of childhood, released from their violent impressment into the adult world of slaves and masters. They are

restored from the subjection enacted by white John's transforming them into his playthings to a child subjectivity made possible by a loving mother. What is fascinating about this moment, though, is how Thompson represents both the whipping and the scene of his mother's devoted care. Up until this point, Thompson has been absent from the action: he describes John's cruelty as if he is an onlooker rather than a victim. The recipients of John's violence are "all the black children," including him, but the most genuine sufferer is John's mother: "I well remember the tears of my poor mother, as they fell on my back, while she was bathing and dressing my wounds" (21).

Throughout this episode, Thompson recedes from view, opening up space and time for his mother's affective work. She does not just tend to his bloody back; she enacts the primary mode of maternal love, weeping onto his wounds. Her suffering as a mother transforms him from one of "all the black children" into his mother's child. His value is at that moment incalculable, since it is defined by his mother's love and care. Even as his body bears the signs of the punctum of enslaved childhood, the scene he narrates lifts him out of slave time and into the sacred "time out of time" of the sentimental child.

### No Future?

The logic of the punctum, of the incident, is that it places the narrator in a present moment that stands out from and even erases past and future. It's not surprising, then, that narratives of enslaved childhood focus on specific moments rather than trajectories of development: they have to carve out a place for childhood, a state that presupposes a future self, within the structure of chattel slavery, which precludes thinking about the future. Slave narratives help us understand childhood as and in relation to others, to structures of power, to modes of utility and productivity. Enslaved childhood is resistant to even as it cannot escape the relations of power (hence, the ambiguous and ambivalent status of slave girlhood). It claims space out of time, in interstitial moments like copybook lines between which Douglass writes. It resists the domination of white bourgeois figurations of child time, and imbricates and implicates it with slave time.

These strategies are, as I hope I have shown, masterful in their simultaneous critique of the atemporality of slavery and the teleology of white nineteenth-century childhood. But at the same time, we might ask what are the costs of being excluded from the narrative

possibilities of teleology, both in terms of the significance of a foreshadowing past and the eventual result of a future resolution? That is to say, what are the long-term affective and material burdens of having to inhabit the punctum? John Thompson may be able to claim the imprimatur of sentimental motherhood for his own mother, but he cannot rewrite the sale of his sister or his own suffering at the hands of his enslaver's son. Luciano argues that the sacred time of maternal love is by definition temporary and gives way to future transformation, a kind of green room to the stage of adult life. For Thompson and other enslaved children, there is no future; there is only the monotony of laboring time.

In using the phrase “no future” above and in this section's subheading, I am of course invoking Lee Edelman's much-discussed 2004 book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Edelman's main contention—“the Child” embodies a heteronormative future that denies the pleasures of the now in service of what has yet to be—has been influential in queer theory ever since it was published. Grounding his argument in psychoanalytic theory, Edelman argues, “The social order exists to preserve for this universalized subject, this phantasmatic Child, a notional freedom more highly valued than the actuality of freedom itself, which might, after all, put at risk the Child to whom such freedom falls due” (11). What goes without saying in Edelman's text is that “the Child” who is used as the alibi for a conservative homophobia (a homophobia that represents gay men in particular as pleasure-seeking narcissists) is presumptively white.

Indeed, in the context of these narratives of enslaved childhood, to read Edelman's identification of the “universalized subject” of “the Child” with a “notional freedom” that will “fall due” as long as well-behaved adults behave (and deny) themselves is to understand with renewed clarity how deeply the discourse around US childhood depends on structures of racialized whiteness. Futurity was far from the birthright of Harriet Jacobs or William Anderson or Elizabeth Keckley. Rather, inhabiting a present that had a meaningful relation to a concrete (if, or perhaps because, unpredictable) future is an intrinsic part of the process of getting free, *actually* free. The narrators of these texts carved a future for themselves out of rock so adamant that it is almost impossible to imagine quite *how* they did it.

Beyond the lived experiences of these narrators, though, I would argue that they lay claim to the futurity that defines actual freedom through the act of putting their stories into print. These representations of childhood come to us in texts written by those same people

who lived through their early years enslaved. In the final analysis, they did have a future, which is the present of writing for them, and the present of reading for us, a future present that represents a past beyond which they could not see when they were living within it. And isn't that moment of reading its own kind of sacred time, a time of intimacy, a time that exists in its own temporal frame? I end with Harriet Jacobs (1987: 139), who, writing in the present tense of freedom, wishes for a future home "for my children's sake far more than for my own" while she thinks of "tender memories of my good old grandmother," knitting together past, present, and future, unsure of what's to come but knowing that her children's childhood will follow a different trajectory from her own.

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### Notes

- 1 This raises the larger question of what constitutes "a child." While throughout the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century twenty-one was the age of majority for white men for the purpose of voting, claims to the mantle of childhood were until the late nineteenth century largely dependent on class, gender, and racial categorization. As I argue in *Inventing Modern Adolescence* (2009), working-class white children were identified as children largely in response to the movement against child labor, which aligned them with the preexisting category of middle-class children (that is, defined by play, nonproductivity, distance from the economic realm). Childhood was also defined during this era by dependence on others, especially adults, as well as a "socially, sexually, and psychically innocent" relation to the adult world (Higonnet 1998: 24). By all these measures, then, enslaved children both were the epitome of "child"—excluded from the adult world of politics and economic power, dependent on the white adults who enslaved them—and firmly outside that classification (defined by work rather than play, producers of economic value).
- 2 For a detailed discussion of the demands for increased cotton production in particular and its effects on the bodies of enslaved people, see Baptist 2014: chap. 3.
- 3 Alan D. Baddeley has written extensively about human memory, the relationships between long-term and short-term memory, and the functions of "autobiographical memory." See, for example, Baddeley 1990.



- 4 James Olney discusses in detail the transhistorical relationship among experience, memory, and life writing in *Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing* (1998).
- 5 For a detailed, although partly contested, account of how advances in cotton processing, including the invention of the cotton gin, power spinners, and power looms, created a plantation system designed to extract the most labor out of enslaved people, see Baptist 2014.
- 6 Numerous narratives by formerly enslaved people discuss the trauma of New Year's Day sales. See, for example, Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (2002), and a variety of interviewees from the FWP Slave Narrative Project (1936–38), including Lizzie Baker (1941), Silas Jackson (1941), and Julia Williams (1941).
- 7 The first definition for *incident* at dictionary.com is “an individual event or occurrence” Dictionary.com, s.v. “incident,” [www.dictionary.com/browse/incident?s=t](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/incident?s=t) (accessed March 15, 2018).
- 8 *Puncture* derives directly from the ancient Latin verb *pungere*, meaning to prick or pierce. *Punctuation* comes from the medieval Latin, which transformed the literal pricking of the skin into a textual piercing of a document with various marks. The punctum calls on both of these meanings at the same time. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. “puncture,” [www.oed.com/view/Entry/154641?rskey=Ario4S&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/154641?rskey=Ario4S&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid) (accessed March 12, 2018).
- 9 Barthes's use of *accident* is, I would argue, in contrast to Keckley's or Jacobs's use of *incident*. An accident is unpredictable. It just happens, without planning, without foresight. An incident, on the other hand, is not necessarily by chance, not least because in its adjectival form *incident* implies a cause and effect (for example, Keckley experiences a whipping incident to her knocking the baby out of its crib).
- 10 For a detailed analysis of two cases of infanticide by enslaved women, see King 2007.

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