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**THE BLACK SLAVES IN THE ANTEBELLUM  
PERIOD**

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Prohlašuji, že jsem práci vypracovala samostatně s použitím uvedené literatury a zdrojů informací.

*V Plzni dne 27. dubna 2012*

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The object of the undergraduate thesis is to cover the period of time before the Civil War, also known as the antebellum period in American studies. It was the time when the slave trade thrived and slavery was legal in many states.

The thesis is separated into six main sections. The first section called The Development of Slavery demonstrates the formation of slavery and its process of expansion to New World. In the second section of the thesis that is called Racial Inequality there are emphasized the differences between male and female conception of slavery, approach the white men to black womanliness and motherhood, variances of black slaves versus Native Americans, and also dissimilarities between black people born in Africa and America. The third section called Family acquaints the readers with the organization within the black family, with the suffering of black women during their pregnancy. The fourth section Medical Care provides some information about the level of medicine during the antebellum period and about knowledge of nature of black women. In the fifth section Everyday Life there is described the hard work of slaves, their way of making their lives easier thanks to mainly secret parties they organized. The final section Resistance is concerned with the methods the black slaves used to take revenge on the white masters for their vicious treatment. Eventually, in the conclusion there is the summarization of the whole thesis including the result of the thesis and of the whole research.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In the nineteenth century Americans referred to slavery as the peculiar institution, but historically it is not peculiar at all. It is a very important feature of human history. Slavery was ubiquitous in the classical world; about a third of the inhabitants of ancient Athens were slaves, approximately the same proportion as in the antebellum American South. Slavery existed in Africa and Asia, in the Muslim world, and in western and eastern Europe. Nor is slavery simply a matter of the past. Although slavery and slave trading are universally prohibited in national and international law, they remain endemic in the world today.

Slavery was the cornerstone of the colonization of the Americas. Of the roughly ten million people who crossed the Atlantic Ocean before 1800, about eight and a half million – around six of every seven people – were enslaved Africans. The trans-Atlantic trade was suppressed in the 1860s, but until this time a total of ten million to twelve million Africans had been carried into New World slavery, while an estimated two million more had died in the passage. The majority of survived Africans were imported into the sugar colonies of the Caribbean and South America, where massive mortality of enslaved workers required a constant infusion of labourers. Overnight they were converted from merchants, or Arabic scholars, or craftsmen, or peasant farmers into American slaves with no civil rights. They ate what they were given, not what they desired. They were dressed in the clothes that were given them, not those they had known in their homeland. African women were removed from an equitable social order which gave them an exact position and function, which secured them – and made them merchandises, unprotected by a traditional morality, without specific places and functions, sexually exploited by the master and even deprived of a full relationship with their children.

Different societies in history developed their own understanding of slavery, as well as their own laws and customs for regulating it. But whatever the local variations, there were certain commonalities that marked slavery as a distinct condition. Slaves everywhere were target to physical and sexual abuse. Slaves were outsiders, not only in the literal sense of coming from outside the societies in which they were held but also in the sense of being excluded from the basic recognition and rights enjoyed by those who were free. What is definite is that they were slaves before they reached America. Since slavery was not incorporated into British common law, it was consequent that the legal system of slavery expanded only after the delivery of African slaves. The lawful framework that was involved

in the beginning of African slaves took time to flourish, progressing first in custom and then in law.

In the United States people from Africa came to be regarded as a distinct race fashioned by nature for hard labour based on an asymmetrical relationship of domination and subordination. As value – forming labour, antebellum slavery was a part of capitalism. Through this mechanism slave labour was subordinated to the fulfilment of the system of industrial investment. Planter financial assets were originated in the establishment of a variable cotton culture, controlled by an elaborate structure of business advancing, where cotton production became the principal goal. Land and slaves converted from a source of social status into a specialized domain of merchandise production. The slave South had a different politics. However, the politics implicated at a tremendous rate in a broader social circulation when industrialism influenced the slave plantation. Nevertheless, the connection was not plainly one of political impacts. Plantations expected a new concentration in expansion and direction as a modification from a family institution to an industrial system.

American colonists justified the enslavement of Africans chiefly in terms of religion and culture; Africans were described as savage. But by the era of American Revolution such rationalizations had been supplanted by an explicit theory of race, in which black people's inferiority was assumed to be innate and ineradicable, a product not of their circumstances or condition but of their physical nature. Nevertheless, under slavery, as under any other social system, those at the fringe of the society were not absolutely commanded by the master class. The enslaved discovered some methods of reducing the worst of the system and sometimes of dominance of the masters. They established their own fellowship out of constituents taken from the African past and the American present, with the purports and memories of Africa giving meaning and direction to the new creation.

However, it cannot be forgotten that the process of dehumanization had its roots in American law. The settlers in America were left to fashion their own *slave codes*<sup>1</sup>. State slave codes limited and prevented the market based method of emancipation and as a result interrupted a general emancipation of slaves. Particularly, slave patrol laws were associated with the expense of controlling slavery and recapturing runaway slaves by conscription other people (not the slaveholders) into slave patrols. Furthermore, state laws made impossible to allow private emancipation of slaves. Associated with laws that precluded immigration, demanded from departure, and curtailed the activity and rights of blacks,

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<sup>1</sup> Laws which gave a definition of the status of slaves and the rights of masters.



the slave codes substantially limited the costs and risks of the slave owner. Slavery is illustrated to have survived in the antebellum period in the South not because of the market, but because of the political power preceded the distinctive decomposition and destruction of slavery experienced elsewhere.

The major purpose of the thesis is to demonstrate the life of enslaved people from different points of view; including the birth of slavery, family life, medical care, and the status of women in the antebellum period. The thesis is most importantly focused on the black slaves in the southern society in the age before the Civil War, beginning with the child birthing, care for them and their family, their hard labour on the plantations or in white households, abuse of black womanliness, and ending with the effort of resistance.

## 1 THE DEVELOPMENT OF SLAVERY

The plantation slavery that thrived in the United States until the Civil War took centuries to develop. Its origins can be traced back to the discovery of cane sugar by European merchants. Europeans, who had previously known no such source of sweetness, adapted this crop that was originally cultivated commercially in the Muslim world. They used it to enrich their cuisine, creating an enormous market for the new sweetener. By the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a new class of planters had acquired Muslim techniques to grow sugar.

Cultivating sugar was highly profitable, but also immensely intensive labour. The planters relied principally on the labour of enslaved Slavic peoples purchased from the area surrounding the Black Sea. The word “*slave*,” derived from “*Slav*,” came to label those forced to grow cane sugar and other crops under the most dismal conditions.

Because of the labour shortage, European planters turned more fully to Africans. When the Portuguese carried the plantation system across the Atlantic to Brazil, they triggered a system that took millions of Africans from their homeland. Africans were separated from their families and compelled to traverse the enormous distance of the continent on foot. Frightened and muddled, African captives were inspected by the slavers on the coast and then crammed into slaves ships designed to pack as many slaves as possible into a tiny space. Slaves were treated awfully – as cargo, not as humans. Millions of them died on the board of the ships, some chose to end their own lives as a result of their lamentable treatment. As the demand for sugar increased, the number of Africans transported to the Americas rose dramatically and Atlantic slavery became identified with blackness. “Slavery, originally an economic system, became a racial system” (Berlin, Brewer and Students of History, 2009, p. 9).

Upon arrival in the New World, slave traders sold Africans like cattle. In the ports, the enslaved Africans were exposed to a large number of new diseases as a result of the new climate and surroundings; again myriads of them died. After being sold, the lives of African slaves varied. Berlin, Brewer and Students of History stated:

Historians have presented numerous reasons for the diverse treatment of slaves, including the religion of their owners, the nature of the crops they grew and the demographic balance of New World populations. As the number of African slaves increased, Europeans came to see Africans as natural slaves. (p. 9)

The first black people to arrive in North America were not slaves. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century blackness was not necessarily the reason for enslavement and “whiteness did not necessarily mean freedom” (Berlin, Brewer and Students of History, p. 9). Many people, white or black, were held in various forms of bondage, of which chattel slavery was just one of many. Others were sold into servitude as retribution for debt or crime. Among the African people to arrive in America there were many people with a mixed ancestry. They spoke a variety of languages and differed physically from the Africans or Europeans. They worked as skilled labourers and translators, and often possessed Portuguese names. In 1621, a black man identified as “*Antonio a Negro*” was sold to the English at Jamestown. He gained freedom, changed his name to Anthony Johnson, got married, raised a family, purchased land and also owned several slaves himself. It is a good example of the fact that the early 17<sup>th</sup> - century New World was not a slave society, but a society with slaves. Nevertheless, in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century the society started to change into a slave society. The Berlin, Brewer and Students of History argued:

Planters, who controlled the best lands, at first desired to maintain a white servant labor force, but the decline of the English indentured servant trade made this impractical and expensive. They turned to Africa, which, after the end of the British-owned Royal Africa Company’s monopoly over the slave trade, allowed them to import large numbers of slaves directly from the continent. (p. 10)

This resulted in expansion of black population. The growth of African slavery united the white population, which took a view black slaves as possible danger. The old pattern of racial mixing disappeared. In 1705, Virginia consolidated its previously incomplete laws dealing with slavery into a slave code confirming the establishing of a new pattern of race relations. Disrespected and disparaged by white people, black people began to create their own society. They got married among themselves, supporting the bloom of an African American population.

Women were regarded as a weaker gender. American white women were expected to be passive because they were female. But black women had to be docile because they were black and slaves. This made a difference in the sex roles of black and white women, as well as in the expectations that their societies had of them. Many of black women served in the households at some point in their lives, ordinarily during childhood, pregnancies,

and again in old age. Stephanie Camp in her book *Closer to Freedom* claimed that “When women broke rules and moved out of bounds, they risked and received punishments that were more than physically painful and heart-breaking; some were sexually degrading.” However, enslaved women did not comply with planters’ intentions for “spatial and temporal order” by staying docilely in their allotted places. Preferably, like men, they selected escape commonly to the nearest woods or swamps and on occasion to adjacent towns.

After 1833 the announced aim of Great Britain to end and board any slave ship on the high seas and liberate its cargo, and slave importation forbiddance of the Constitution of the United States, which took effect in 1807, had combined to make American participation in the slave trade both illegal and exceedingly dangerous. Nevertheless, some American ship captains had recourse to various stratagems to continue to support the trade.

By the antebellum years, a number of factors had combined to alter the character of slaveholding ideology. Or as Camp writes: “The American Revolution, with its triumph over aristocratic rule and forced dependency, introduced a conflict between the new nation’s ideals and its continuing reality of inequality” (Camp, 2004, p. 17). However, the American Revolution signified unprecedented chaos which created an opportunity for many slaves to achieve freedom by running away and making the pretence of become free men and women. On the other hand, slaves became a significant part of both the British and American military operations, as labourers or soldiers. The claim in the Declaration of Independence (1776) that “all men are created equal” also undermined slavery. In states to the north, slavery was put on the road to destruction.

Although free blacks rejoiced in legal freedom, they were denied many of the civil rights. They were not allowed to vote, sit on juries, testify in court or serve in the Territorial Army. Free blacks were also not allowed to own dogs, weapons or spirits, and they could not sell meat, corn or tobacco without a specific certification from three white neighbours who could affirm that they were decent citizens. Still, the presence of so many free blacks to the north states distinguished them from the slave states to the south.

Throughout the early nineteenth-century South, the control of slave movement continued to be an issue of paramount importance. More than any other single slave activity – such as trading, learning to read, consuming alcohol, acquiring poisoning techniques, or plotting rebellious – slave movement was limited, monitored, and criminalized. (Camp, 2004, p. 15)

Paternalism was another feature that influenced the early nineteenth-century ideals of the society, especially of the harmonious family life. Proprietorial and demanding fathers were placed at the head of the plantation household. With paternalism also came great interest in the black body; nutrition, dress, hygiene, pleasure, family, and intimate relations became all the targets of planter's interfering.

The enslaved people, as the property of their master, were provided against any kind of resistance. As White argued: "The slaves had a pass and they could not leave plantation without it" (p. 38). The troublesome situations that all women and men predicted if they thought about the escape to the North were frightening: dogs, guards, strange surroundings, cold, deficiency of food, the danger of taking captive, and in that event, definite dreaded punishment. The plantation's *push factors*<sup>2</sup>— getting overworked, acts of violence, and sickness – were only some of many arguments why people fled. Slaveholders, who had significant complications capturing fugitives themselves, had to rely on the cooperation of slaves and encouragement of slave guards to capture escapees and bring them back to work. Most fugitives were whipped or sold as a warning for the others.

The overseer delivered a tongue - lashing while he lacerated runaways' backs: "Are you goin' to work? Are you goin' visitin' widout a pass? Are you goin' to run away?" Often such floggings were underscored with other abuses, a combination that was neither rare nor a trifle, even in the very violent Old South. (White, 1999, p. 56)

Fugitives were compelled to work even harder than ever, put on bread-and-water diets, thrashed with canes, fastened at their feet with a ball and chain, chained from the leg to the neck, isolated in outbuildings, and imprisoned.

Historians have had many discussions about life in the quarters, examining the forms and functions of slave families, childhood, and the structures themselves. We know a great deal about slave disobedience, conspiracy, escapes to the North, and other forms of slave resistance. Yet, less is known about the birth and continuing development and modification in slaves' culture of opposition.

Individual slaves' political consciousness was never inborn but always learned; it was acquired in places of work, such as the field, and places of anguish,

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<sup>2</sup> A push factor is when something or somebody makes one leave.

such as under the lash – and it was developed in the home. The secret life of slave cabins offers glimpses of the practices and ideologies that lay behind the development of visible slave resistance. (Camp, 2004, p. 94)

Many things also changed with the coming of the Civil War in 1861. Slavery was more than in the shadow for it was one of the reasons of the war together with growth of the abolition movement, and the election of Abraham Lincoln who was believed to be anti-slavery.

Integrity would have to come later, when the Afro-American people, as people, had won their struggle for freedom. Only then could they ground the relations between women and men in institutions, without which no people could hope to determine its destiny, shape its young, and define its own virtues. Freedom alone did not guarantee success, albeit it accepted awakening of the struggle on new and more solid foundations. Race and class maintained to expose African American women to indignities against which their men could not constantly protect them and from which their white “sisters” continued to benefit. On the other hand, freedom, destroying the master, laid the foundations of destined victories.

## 2 RACIAL INEQUALITY

Race and racial inequality have intensely formed American history from its very beginnings. As far back as at the outset American society was simultaneously established on remorseless methods of authority, discrimination and abuse which included the absolute disapproval of independence for slaves. This is one of the most enormous inconsistencies of American history – how could paragons of parity and independence coexist with slavery?

In general, it seems to be thought of races as “natural” classification demonstrating substantial biological dissimilarities across groups of people whose antecedents descended from various parts of the world. Since racial classifications are commonly dependent on noticeable physical variances between people, the supposed naturalness of race gives the impression of evidence to most people. However, this approach reveals an elemental mistake about the nature of racial classification. Race is a social division, not a biological one.

Racial classifications do not rationally intimate racial injustice; this is how ethnic differentiations are occasionally abided: to be Irish or Swedish or Italian descendant in America is to share a concrete cultural identity, and possibly to abet certain cultural practices as well, but this does not indicate any kinds of oppression. Racial classifications could with regard to the basic be simply a method of observing physical distinctness of miscellaneous types that are associated with biological descendants. Nevertheless, in practical applications racial classifications are nearly regularly linked to form of prejudiced economic and social inequality, authority, and forbiddance, as well as to life stances that select superior and inferior statuses and attributes according to race.

Talking about gender did not mean devoting effort exclusively on women’s issues. Men’s experiences were deeply gendered, too. Collins (2004) argues that “gender ideology not only creates ideas about femininity but it also shapes conceptions of masculinity” (p. 6). Nevertheless, this thesis is more concentrated on black women. The gendered racism emphasizing the lives of black females in the United States had its beginning when European slavers transported astounding quantity of Africans from their homes in West Africa to colonies in British North America. The backgrounds of the lives of slave women were considerably distinct from those of enslaved men and this inequality was already evident on the boards of ships sailing to American coast. Traders did not locate female slaves in space with shackled males, but they left them separately to be present to the harsh abuse of white slavers. Rape was a commonplace suffering for captured, insubordinate slave women. Merchants frequently labelled slaves once aboard ship and would mercilessly beat slave

women who resisted striping naked for the practice. For example, Baker (2008) in his review asserted that “Slavers sadistically abused slave children just to watch the mothers’ anguish, and if a child died from the cruelty, slavers forced the mother to throw their child overboard or suffer from even more brutality” (p. 65).

Slavery was a combination of authority, humiliation, and subordination, with a particularly stringent legal structure accepting powerful, landowning whites to handle African women as chattel property. It was the coordinated endeavour of colonial legislatures, judicial officers, regional sheriffs, and local constables that brought into existence the justice system of slavery. Still, slavery was appalling for men but it was far more dreadful for women – “superadded to the burden common to all, wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own” (White, 1998, p. 62). The racist and sexist abuse of black women persisted sustained once in the British colonies, and the seriousness of the punishments grew for slave females as the institution developed throughout the colonies.

Just as a matter of interest, courts in the antebellum slavery sentenced to death substantially more slave women than in colonial slavery. They killed their masters mostly as a reaction to brutality of whites. Baker (2008) gives an example of this: “Virginia authorities burned alive Eve for poisoning her master Peter Montague with a glass of milk. Executioners afterward quartered Eve’s burnt body and displayed it publicly” (p. 66). The law repeatedly commanded more brutal punishments for slave women than for their male counterparts; slave women were generally burned to death for their felonies while male slaves were hanged for the same offence.

However, punishments were not the only cases of differences between male and female slavery. The everyday reality of bonded women was that they were at once agricultural labourers and primary they maintained domestic slave population. Planters regarded female slaves as *breeders*, but not *mothers*, on account of the fact that slave women had no legal control over their own children. It was said that “good breeder” had from fifteen to twenty times gravid during her productive years. Unfortunately, white rape of bonded women was widespread in the South.

Sexual dominance over slave women by white owners was determinative to slavery and owners were depended on the regular sexual abuse of slave women as much as they did other forms of brutality. Slave law ignored slave women’s rights to command their own bodies, and as a corollary, slave owners sexually attacked females with lawful immunity; the rape of a slave woman was not a transgression.



Although racism might hurt substantial sections of the racially superior group in American society, racism was (and still is) above all a form of authority that hurt the racially oppressed groups. These detriments have been a core part of American history, and not entirely of distant history. It is hard to exaggerate this fact: it is only in the most recent past that the classical liberal idea of equality before the law has been extended to include racial minorities, and even today in many critical respects such equality remains more promise than reality.

But back to the antebellum period. When European settlers arrived to North America they encountered a native population that had effectual command of the most valuable means of the time and that was the land. From the very beginning, displacement and genocide were the fundamental methods of handling with the inescapable conflicts over these resources, first by the British colonies and later by the U.S. Government. The 19<sup>th</sup> century general public saying “the only good Indian is a dead Indian” incriminated the moral atrocity of this stance. Most frequently the land was directly confiscated by armed forces and the native inhabitants were displaced or killed. On occasion the country was in an official manner left by Native American tribes through contracts in the impact of military defeat. Nevertheless, these contracts were subsequently ignored and violated.

Such banishments were asserted to be justified on the grounds that the native people were savage and did not really possess the country since they were generally wandering without constant settlements and cultivation of specific parts of land. However, even in cases where Native Americans were farmers and had some settlements there was little vacillation in evicting them from the land by violence. The deportation of the Cherokee Nation from the south-eastern United States is the best known case. “By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century this displacement was complete and Native Americans were largely confined to bounded geographical spaces called Indian Reservations” (Wright, 2010, p. 5).

Apart from Indians, there existed another group of people that was oppressed, and that were the black slaves. They could be whipped and tainted and in other ways physically punished with practically no legal restraints. The killing of a slave by a slave master was nearly never chastened. The forced sexual assaults of slaves were also an ordinary routine. Slave owners were free to detach families and to sell the children of slaves.

More importantly, slave owners were traders for whom slaves were a valuable property, and the value of that property required protection. Because of the fact that slavery

was a living necessity, slaves had insufficient positive motivation to work hard. Wright (2010) gives a good example of a slave owner in Arkansas who asserted:

Now, I speak what I know, when I say it is like ‘casting pearls before swine’ to try to *persuade* a negro to work. He must be *made* to work, and should always be given to understand that if he fails to perform his duty he will be punished for it. (p. 6)

The omnipresent authority and dishonesty of slavery was associated with common forms of resistance by slaves. The characteristic methods of resistance appeared in the everyday activities of the slave plantation: poor work, irregular mischiefs, passivity. Runaway slaves were a perpetual problem, and political clash over how to handle slaves who escaped to the North was one of the backgrounds of tension that led to the Civil War.

## **2.1 African versus Indian slavery**

African people were not the only ones to be oppressed in the New World. Indians gave the impression to be entirely different from Englishmen, far more so than any Europeans. They were enslaved, like the blacks, and therefore belonged to the subjugated side of a crucial dividing line. The reason was simple indeed: if deliberated in terms of skin colour, religion, nationality, wildness, cruelty, or geographical position, Indians were more similar to African people than to Englishmen. Given this similarity the basic problem arose. Why the Indian slavery did never become a significant institution in the colonies?

Some apparent circumstances caused essential differences in the minds of the English colonists. The culture of the American Indians probably meant that they were more difficult enslaved than Africans. In comparison, the Indians were to a lesser extent accustomed to settled agriculture, and their own variedness of slavery was apparently less corresponding to the chattel slavery, which Englishmen practiced in America, than was the domestic and political slavery of West African cultures.

In the early years especially, Indians were in a position to mount murderous reprisals upon the English settlers, while the few scattered Negroes were not. When English-Indian relations did not turn upon sheer power they rested on diplomacy. In many instances the colonists took assiduous precautions to prevent abuse of Indians belonging to friendly tribes. (Frazier, 1939, p. 77)

It was an ordinary custom to transport Indian slaves to the West Indies where they could be replaced by slaves who had no fellow countrymen hidden on the borders of English settlements. On the other hand, enslaved blacks represented less of a threat at first. Equally significant was the fact that the blacks had to be dealt with as individuals rather than as nations. Englishmen had to live with their enslaved blacks side by side.

In an appropriate way, their feelings about the blacks were established in the excitement of unremitting, predetermined personal contacts. There was several duress Englishmen to handle Indians as essential part in their society, which the blacks were whether Englishmen liked it or not. Nevertheless, the Indian could be viewed with greater distance and his personality acknowledged and approached more without difficulty and more rationally. Likewise the Englishmen, Indians could protect the quality of nationality, a quality which Englishmen admired in themselves and expected in other people.

## **2.2 Creoles – the first African Americans**

Primarily it is necessary to begin by understanding that only about five per cent of between eleven and twelve million enslaved Africans were transported to North America or to the United States. Circa ninety-five per cent of the people who were transported from Africa were sold to “tropical America,” the Caribbean basin. The overwhelming majority of the antecedents of African Americans seemed to come from a part of Africa bounded by the river Senegal in the North and by Angola in the South. That area involved a great number of various ethnic groups. Ergo, one of the first conditions to identify the African roots of African-American culture is that enslaved Africans sold to North America came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.

About 25 percent came from ethnic groups such as the Bakongo, the Tio, and the Mbundu, groups from the Congo-Angola region. About 23 percent came from the Yoruba, the Fon, the Nupe, and the Ibo, ethnic groups from an area from the Benin River to Cape Lopez, now contemporary Nigeria, Toga, and Gabon. About 16 percent came from the Alkans, who inhabited the Gold Coast, now contemporary Ghana. The Wolof, the Fulbe, and the Serer, Senegambian captives, made up about 13 percent. Another six percent of captives came from Sierra Leone, four percent from the Blight

of Benin, and less than two percent from Mozambique and Madagascar. (Perry, 2005)

All of these people brought with them their own ideas about life, and their own cultures. Many of them spoke dissimilar languages, worshiped different gods, and had various methods of socializing their offspring. Although it was not possible to refute the fact that there were many cultural differences, there appeared some principles that were common for all the people. Nearly all Africans believed in a Supreme Being, or Supreme God, and several inferior gods; most of them came also from matriarchal societies that practiced polygamy.

In North America, the African slaves had begun to reproduce themselves by the 1730s. Formerly, the blacks had to be incessantly replenished by the slave trade, because most of them either deceased without offspring or they deceased before achieving of physical maturity. Throughout the early eighteenth century an African-American community called Creole blacks was born. Hence, the cultural influence of native Africans in America was very weak, because from the eighteenth century the African population became a Creole population, whose relations and bonds to Africa became less strong.

In creating their culture it was logical that the Creole population assembled the culture on the knowledge they knew of their fathers and mothers. Nevertheless, in this process of creolization and adaptation to a new environment certain cultural principles, such as religious ideas, worldviews, family structure, ways of socializing children, and ways of cooking food remained in existence. All the methods were derived from African cultural strength manifested in funeral ceremonies, burial rites, the naming of children, beliefs in amulets, and charms. And finally as well as Perry (2005) argues “Black dance movements, the spirituals, the blues, and eventually jazz are probably products of creolization and adaptation to a new environment.”

### 3 FAMILY

#### 3.1 The character of black family

The relationship between black men and women were not coincident with the situation nowadays, although some exceptions existed. It was commonly thought that African men had a huge sexual appetite, and therefore the lack of deeper love relationship was not something peculiar.

To the prospective buyer's question, "Have you a wife?" he answered, "Yes, massa, I lef' young wife in Richmond, but I got a new wife here in de lot. I wish you buy her, massa, if you gwing to buy me." (Frazier, 1939, p. 26)

Nevertheless, these feelings transformed soon into tenderness and sympathy toward the opposite sex who shared the bondage and enabled to escape from loneliness and isolation.

Although the era was patriarchal, in the enslaved society women played the dominant role. The black woman as mother or wife was the mistress of her cabin. Cabins were centres of their life. They encompassed the public space of labour reproduction and private spaces of community formation and family life. The primary reason why the women prevailed can be demonstrated by the fact that the enslaved people lived in gender-segregated quarters and the male slaves were forced to migrate according to requirements of their masters. Black families were compelled then to rely on kinship for support. Regardless of these difficulties, enslaved families indicated extraordinary flexibility and worked hard to sustain a strong family unit. Nonetheless, the celebration of motherhood does not naturally de-emphasize fatherhood in the black community.

In a research supported by a Joint Statistical Agreement and submitted by John L. Hudgins is said that "African American families can be divided into three basic forms: nuclear, extended, and augmented." Substantially, these adaptations can be viewed as responses to social and economic changes in a pluralistic society.

The extended families were consisted of four generations of relatives, and were headed by a dominant person to whom the other members look for leadership in holding the family together. What may seem to be a nuclear family could in actuality be a subgroup of an extended family base; a man and a woman living together with their children.

Finally, augmented families were those that had unrelated individuals living with them as “play” relatives, e.g., “play mother” or “play brother.”

According to definition, motherhood is the state of being mother. To be more particular “motherhood suggests a unique relationship between the mother and child, on which is seen as the basic requirement for child development” (Littlefield, 2007, p. 54). Mothers nurture their children, provide them love, affection, and form primary development. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, motherhood in American society was seen as a necessary point of maintenance the lineage of a particular family. Motherhood for white women was found to be the moral role for them. Women were expected to take their rightful place in the home and embrace their rank.

It follows that motherhood and caring for the home was seen as the right place of a real woman, whereas black women gave birth to their children only to property of their slaveholders. Womanhood and the experience of motherhood for black women were totally related to the social system and could not be perceived in the same way as motherhood for white women.

It must be also said that the character of a black mother has its origin in the tradition of “a black mammy – a romantic figure in whom maternal love as a vicarious sentiment has become embodied” (Frazier, 1939, p. 42). However, mammies seemed to be very important members of white households. They attended her mistress during pregnancy and took under her care the infant as soon as it was born. Very frequently they suckled the children instead of their real mothers. And if the children were girls, mammies were never separated from them until they were grown. However, in comparison to the devotion of their own children, black women never developed such a deep and lasting sentiment for their biological offspring.

Black women were expected to fulfil many roles in their lives; they were mothers, nannies, labourers working on the fields, breeders, servants, wives and concubines. Reproduction was also an inseparable part of life for a slave woman. On one hand, they nurtured their children and functioned as wife and mother. On the other hand, they were faced the reality that their children could be sold or defiled. The worst was the fact that black women were not in the position to be able to protect their offspring from slavery.

For black women the consequences of the even sex ratio were also severe. Once slaveholders realized that the reproductive function of the female slave

could be yield a profit, the manipulation of procreative sexual relations became an integral part of the sexual exploitation of female slaves. (White, 1999, p. 68)

Southern slave owners paid attention to the birth of slave children in the early nineteenth century. By the 1820s, planters gained large number of new areas for growing fibre for sale with Europe and needed more labourers. But in 1808, the international slave trade was terminated, and the only practical way of increasing number of slave labourers was through human reproduction.

### **3.2 Birthing a slave child**

As it was already mentioned above, the slaveholders had absolute power above their slaves, and they frequently abused their privilege by taking sexual advantage of black women. However, the position of white women was not optimal, too. They were supposed to conduct well but they were subordinate to white male authority and facing sexual competition from black women for their husbands' favours, they were most probably more brutal in their treatment of slaves than white men.

It should be noted that childbirth was very hazardous for all the women in this period. The situation, in which the women were, was stressed by the inadequate medical care knowledge and unhygienic surroundings. It is necessary to take into consideration the fact that there existed social distinctions based on race and class which caused the firm separation of black and white women. At that, pregnancy by black women was immune to cruel punishments. If they complained about hard work conditions they risked flogging. Actually they remained foremost valuable labourers and were seldom given preferential treatment. Pregnant women were supposed to work on the fields to the last weeks of their pregnancy and were expected to return to work no later than three weeks after delivery. In *plantocratic*<sup>3</sup> writings, there was written that African women, being closer to nature than the white women, gave birth to their children more painlessly than white women and could be returned to hard labour in a short time after birth.

Although, the enslaved women brought their children into the world allegedly with no serious problems, they "were not out of the woods." The infant mortality was very high; the forcible separation from women's infants was one of many causes. On the other hand, Eugene Genovese in her book *Roll, Jordan, Roll* has argued that:

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<sup>3</sup> According to Free Dictionary plantocracy is a ruling class formed of plantation owners.

... in the Southern USA slave women could “arrange” for infants to die after birth as, with infant deaths so common from natural causes, the deed could not be detected. Such unexplained infant deaths may have resulted from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome linked to mother’s labour in the fields rather than conscious attempts to deprive the system of slave infants. (pp. 94-95)

In spite of the terrible living conditions of enslaved people there functioned minimal health care for them. The concern of slaveholders about slave women’s ability to deliver children was so huge that they were really into owning as many fertile women as possible, and sometimes they provide them some medical treatment. Purely and simply, it was business.

Doctors endeavoured to achieve normalcy in menstruating of the women in belief that the regular menstrual cycle enhanced the chance that the women would become pregnant. The reason was simple; they got financial reward to do so. “Doctors also took measures that they hoped would stave off impending miscarriage and prevent or cure complications of childbirth that threatened the health of mother and child” (Schwartz, 2006, p. 2). However, some of the healing techniques of southern physicians were daring; including bleeding, drugging the patient, purging, vomiting, and ever cutting. It was believed that when a woman ceased to menstruate, the menstrual blood occurred in another outlet other than the vagina; to heal it, it was necessary to detect the blood and cut the part in order to cure the condition.

Contrary to the physicians, black women preferred their own healing traditions which highlighted the power of herbs and roots. They trusted their wiser women who were responsible for preparations which invoked spiritual cures. Pregnant women believed these women in knowledge of the body through pregnancy, childbirth and aftercare. From time to time, even when white doctors were present, for example in childbirth, black women secretly practised simultaneously their own forms of healing.

Encounters between white physicians and black mothers in the South during the decades leading up to the Civil War monitored new ways in which slavery and medicine were changing. Childbearing came to be seen increasingly as a medical problem, and doctors were more conversant with the question of reproductive health.



#### 4 MEDICAL CARE

Medical care was provided by a variety of people by a variety of means. There was a want of physicians and the distance that often divided doctors from the plantations resulted in the fact that both white and black had to rely on their own skills by treating illnesses, and handling medical emergencies.

In order to understand the urgency of medical care, it is substantial to first contemplate the conditions that existed at that time. Antebellum South was affected by amount of the illnesses that others in the United States did not experience. Medical conditions such as tuberculosis, diphtheria, whooping cough, yellow fever, malaria, worms, *yaws*<sup>4</sup>, and cholera were a bare minimum of impairments that influenced those living in the Old South. What is more, morbidity tempo for the enslaved was especially high on rice and sugar plantations for the sake of climate that was conducive to illnesses and the difficult working conditions of slaves. Furthermore, women's reproductive health also suffered due to deficiency of awareness of proper nutrition, prenatal care, and sanitary facilities.

Before 1845, the Old South had only five medical colleges, and medical students spent there only one or two years, and attended only a few lecture courses to complete their medical training. Albeit some southern medical practitioners received their education in the North or in Europe, the amount of patients in the South remained greater than the amount of physicians accessible to cure them. For that reason, medical treatments and care were different for blacks and whites.

Assumptions of dissimilarities in the physiology and medical needs of men and women and whites and blacks were also analysed during the antebellum period. For example, it was believed that the capacity of black people's brains was a ninth or a tenth less than in other races of men, while black people's hearing, sight, and sense of smell were better like animals. In addition, some physicians associated theories and diseases concretely with slaves, such as "*Drapetomania*"<sup>5</sup> and "*Cachexia Africana*"<sup>6</sup>. A theory about Drapetomania was documented by Dr Samuel Cartwright in the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Running away from plantation owners became a disease because of particular social and political conditions of a racist society in which whites predominated and supervised the enslaved blacks in an economic system of slavery. It could be only developed in existence of the bondage of one group of people by another. The dominant group circumscribed

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<sup>4</sup> An infection of the skin, bones, and joints.

<sup>5</sup> A theory that mental disease caused slaves to run away from their owners

<sup>6</sup> Dirty eating

the activities of the subordinate group as being so far beyond the pale that they must have been sick and in need of treatment. In effort to control the presumed manner of slaves eating dirt, physicians and plantation owners accomplished methods such as using mild purgative, threats, punishments, iron masks or gags, cutting off the heads of those dying from the practice, and other cruel reactions.

The most common method of treating an illness in the Old South was “depletion,” which involved draining the body of what was believed to be harmful substances deemed responsible for illness. Methods of depletion included “bleeding, sweating, blistering, purging, or vomiting.” Determining just how much depletion the body could withstand was key to this cure. The physician’s treatment plan often included calomel, or mercurous chloride, which served as a drug to cleanse and purge the body. (Sullivan, 2010, pp. 18-19)

But medical support was not the only feature of providing health care in the South. Providing sufficient food, clothing, and shelter to white families and slaves was also important in maintaining health on the plantation. Particularly, damp and earthen floors, lack of windows and poor ventilation unquestionably contributed to the poor health of slaves. However, in those situations when a serious illness arose, patients were sometimes moved from the slave quarters to the “sick house” for medical care.

Plantations were havens for diseases, and slaves were indeed plagued by sickness. Slaves suffered and often died from pneumonia, diarrhoea, cholera, and smallpox. The slave diet was rich in calories but lacked dangerously protein and other nutrients. *Lean meats*<sup>7</sup>, poultry, eggs, milk, and grain products other than corn – foodstuffs required to the human immune system to produce antibodies to fight infections – were only occasionally seen on most slaves’ plates. Moreover, most slaves did not obtain nearly enough fruit and vegetables. Blindness, sore eyes, skin irritations, rickets, toothaches, *pellagra*<sup>8</sup>, *beriberi*<sup>9</sup>,

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<sup>7</sup> “According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), lean meat is any serving of meat (3 ounces – about the size of a deck of cards) with less than 10 grams total fat, 4.5 grams saturated fat and 95 milligrams cholesterol” (Kyle, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> It is a disorder brought on by a deficiency of the nutrient called niacin or nicotinic acid, one of the B-complex vitamins. The typical symptoms include redness and swelling of the mouth and tongue, diarrhoea, skin rash, and abnormal mental functioning, including memory loss. (“*Pellagra*”, 2012)

<sup>9</sup> It causes loss of muscle coordination, difficulty walking, rapid heartbeat, etc. (“*Beriberi*”, 2012)

and scurvy were among the many suffering that resulted from vitamin deficiencies caused by the monotonous daily servings of rice, fat-back, corn meal, and salt pork.

Still, African Americans also played a significant role in provision of health care. African medical folklore being inheritable through the generations was converted into a combination of ritual and ceremony, plus a belief that plants, herbs, and roots served medical purposes. Noticeably, slaves did not always follow the instructions of the slaveholder's physician – as a matter of choice at times they followed their own medical regime to care for themselves and others within the slave community.

The degree of knowledge needed to prepare the medicine has often been underestimating. First, it was essential to find the plants and then to be able to classify the desirable plant's characteristics. Second, it was crucial to know when to collect the plant and which sections were useful, as well as which plants were adequate of healing particular diseases. Third, it was helpful to be familiar with drying procedures. Finally, the awareness of how to prepare the plant for consumption in the form of tea, poultice, salve or other was advantageous. Comprehension of the steps implicated in preparing botanical medicines helps us to appreciate the knottiness of the specialized knowledge that was shared within the slave community and remembered through oral tradition.

Plantations were home to several various types of slave healers and the border between these healers was not very salient. The most widespread slave healers in the antebellum plantations were the black nurses, determined by the slaveholder to staff plantation hospitals, the root or herb doctors, and the *conjurers*<sup>10</sup>. Midwives were also commonly found on every large plantation and besides to administer obstetrical matters, they were frequently needed in other fields. Nevertheless, an illness that did not comply with natural medicines must have been caused by a person employing hoodoo, or conjure. Such illnesses could only be treated by a conjurer who had at his disposition not only mysterious means of healing but also a knowledge of root cures.

As seen above, superstition also affected perspectives on medical care within slave communities. For example, it was believed that a knife or axe placed in the proper location within the home would divest of pain or would protect the person against some unwelcomed spirits. Superstition was also claimed to influence clarification for children with disabilities.

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<sup>10</sup> Although the terms root doctor and conjurer were and are sometimes used synonymously, in this thesis root doctor is used to refer to a strict herbalist. “The work of conjurers was also referred to as hoodoo. It was also sometimes called voodoo, although voodoo usually refers to an organized cult in New Orleans, associated with slaves or free black from the French West Indies” (Raboteau, 1978, pp. 75-80).

For instance, it was believed that a woman delivered a child that had the attributes and reactions of a fox because the mother, while pregnant, saw her master's fox daily.

As the awareness of science and medicine continued to expand throughout the antebellum period, more medical schools were founded, and more physicians were trained to help meet the demands of health care. However, increasing the amount of doctors, as well as establishing new medical colleges was a slow process.

## 5 EVERYDAY LIFE

Throughout the era in which northern society was subjected to a transformation of a household into home and ideologically attributing it to the female sphere, southern society was supplementing the centrality of plantation and farm households.

Not until the era of the American Revolution did the North denounce slavery in particular and *bonded labour*<sup>11</sup> in general, although both had long been declining in importance. The modifications in resources and labour relations, especially slavery that arose during the Revolutionary era established a social, economic, political, and cultural gulf between North and South that deepened with time.

Nevertheless, not all southern households were plantations or even farms including slaves, and not all slaveholding southern households followed the same economic strategies, but the slave system and the household reinforced each other to discourage capitalist development. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, an American historian and feminist known for her writing about women in the antebellum South, argues in her book *Within the Plantation Household*:

The Old South, in short, remained dependent on a capitalist world market, the principles of which were not embodied in its dominant labor system. Unlike northern farms, which can be understood as agricultural versions of petty commodity production, southern plantations depended on slavery, which was radically distinct from the capitalist wage relation. (p. 56)

### 5.1 Labour

Slaves were assigned their work according to the task system. A task was a special amount of work enforced to each slave to finish daily. Many slaves worked in the fields breeding crops such as cotton, sugar cane, corn, beans and potatoes. Other did housework, caring for the owner's children, see mummies, or fulfilled tasks such as carpentry or blacksmithing. When being ready of their tasks, slaves were then given permission to use the rest of the day preparing meals or attending to personal needs. If work was not completed as assigned, slaves would receive punishment or if work was unacceptable to the owner, they would be killed or transported to another plantation without forewarning. For slaves

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<sup>11</sup> "Also known as *debt bondage* is probably the least known form of slavery today, and yet it is the most widely used method of enslaving people. A person becomes a bonded labourer when his or her labour is demanded as a means of repayment for a loan. Bonded labourers are routinely threatened with and subjected to physical and sexual violence" (available online on Anti-Slavery International website).

with families, this could mean unexpected separation with little chance of returning or reuniting.

The slaves' working day started at sunrise and continued into the night. The majority of slaves spent twelve to fifteen hours a day cultivating, planting, hoeing, or picking in the fields. Although the circumstances differed, this arduous labour was usually done in large crews, controlled by white overseers.

Field work changed with the crop. Sugar fields, like cotton fields, were cultivated in crews. However rice planting, which demanded skilled labour, was determined by individuals with specific tasks to perform. The debilitating field work of the summer and autumn differentiated from the slow-paced winter and spring assignments of chopping wood, slaying hogs, and clearing land.

In addition, approximately one quarter of all slaves did not work the land. A few female slaves worked at directions of their mistresses, doing such tasks as washing clothes, cleaning, cooking, and personal service. This work could be so burdensome and secluding that a great amount of women preferred to work in the fields with their families: "Ten per cent of all slaves worked in industries like lumbering, road construction, or mining, often because their masters hired them out to perform such work. In southern cities a few slaves worked as skilled artisans, such as blacksmiths" (Fennell, 2007, p. 6).

Some slaves also worked in the kitchens and smoke houses, which the mistresses rarely visited, to make three meals a day, apart from Sunday, and to hang and smoke countless pounds of pork. While the masters and mistresses were eating, slaves waited around the table. Slaves work also included washing and ironing; carrying the enormous steaming pots for the conservation of fruits; lifting the barrels in which cucumbers soaked in brine; sweeping floors and dusting furniture; collecting eggs from the poultry. "Slaves spun and wove and sewed household linens and "negro clothes." Slaves did whatever their mistresses needed or wanted done, and rarely, if ever, did those mistresses acknowledge their efforts as work, much less as skill or craft" (Genovese, 1988, p. 138).

After a day's work, slaves came back to their quarters, where their next shift began. There were meals to prepare, clothes to wash and mend, and children to put to bed. In the quarters slaves welded the family and community that helped them endure under slavery together.

To some degree, slaves were able to settle issues to the members of the community in the quarters. Generally, their dividing of daily grind was made according to gender. Nonetheless, this sexual division of labour contrasted with the masters' endeavours to make male and female slaves do the same work. Fennell (2007) also argued that "to the extent that work in the quarters or in one's own garden was done according to slaves' own rules, it provided them with a measure of control over their lives" (p. 7).

Slaves also reminded African traditions in their marriage rituals, language, songs, and games. They expressed their hopes, and fears, in beautiful spirituals, creating a rich African-American musical tradition. However, it was more and more difficult to maintain their culture. Not only were the slaves forced to work for cruel masters in a strange land but masters frequently changed their names, their last personal possession. Africans imparted names with great meaning, and naming generally was subsequent to a ceremony at birth or *coming of age*<sup>12</sup>. Professor Quintard Taylor of the University of Washington describes in his work *The African American Experience* elaborately the process of changing black names. Africans were compelled to adopt English names and required that they be used in daily contact between whites and blacks. Some enslaved people maintained day names, used in many African communities to indicate the day of birth, e.g. *Cuffy* (male name for Friday), *Jacko*, *Quacko* (male name for Wednesday), and *Juba* (female name for Monday). Some of the black people requested their master to permit them to possess Anglicized version of their African names. Three names were particularly frequent; namely it was *Jack*, an English version of *Quacko*, *Jemmy*, probably an Anglicized version of *Quame* (male name for Saturday), and a common name for African girls *Phyllis* (often spelled *Fillis*).

## 5.2 Slave cabin

Slave cabins were usually constructed by slaves, although there were many exceptions. Sometimes, the cabins were built by hired labourers, who, in any case, might be called in for such specialized work as building chimneys and making door frames. Building materials varied according to region, but the typical slave cabin was set off the ground and would have chimney, a door, and a fireplace, but presumably no windows. But all possession was in proper place to the master, and to the extent that the slaves were involved in their production, they did so under the master's control. Genovese (1988) emphasized that the "master even oversaw the cleaning of slave cabins" (p. 95).

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<sup>12</sup> "A term used to describe the transition between childhood and adulthood. For some cultures, coming of age is determined at a certain age when a child is no longer a minor" (O'Donnell, 2012).

The size and quality of cabins differed by date, region, and, above all, the size and wealth of the plantation. Depending on the alternation, slave cabins essentially consisted of a single room of about sixteen by eighteen feet, or two rooms of the same dimensions that were divided by a hallway or “*dogtrot*,”<sup>13</sup> and that occupied separate families, who might share a central fireplace. In exceptional situations, planters provided their slaves with dormitories rather than personal cabins, but families commonly had their own cabins.

On little farms, mainly those on the borderland at the beginning of the century, slaves might have no housing of their own and as a substitute sleep in the kitchen or sheds, however during the late antebellum period, plantation slaves were likely to enjoy at least a primitive shelter of their own for sleep. Instead of windows to allow the light and air enter the cabins they had holes, which in winter could be covered to keep out the cold. In spite of that, the cold leaked through the slits between the logs.

As a general rule, the tendency throughout the antebellum period was toward better – constructed cabins with real floors, occasionally timber siding for the walls, and more windows. The most comfortable of the cabins, with flowers in front and adjacent gardens, far surpassed the housing of Irish peasants, Russian serfs, or most British industrial workers of the same period, whereas the least comfortable still might compare favorably with the housing of the poorest whites, whose dwellings in truth resembled sheds for animals. (Genovese, 1988, p. 150)

Nevertheless, the greater number of slave cabins fell somewhere between these two extremities, although all remained extremely rudimentary. And, their position and polluted conditions made them breeding grounds for disease.

Cabin furnishing, invariably rudimentary, followed the same trend. By the 1850s, throughout the South, slaves normally had a rough bed made of straw – covered boards and a blanket, whereas some had only corn – shuck mattresses, which were laid on the ground. Archaeological evidence contends that cooking and eating equipment were also minimal, conceivably a single cast-iron pot per cabin, in which meat, vegetables, and grains were combined.

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<sup>13</sup> “The space created between the two buildings. This breezeway of sorts would, in winter, allow the dogs to get in, out of the rain and snow, or in the summertime, let them find some shade.” (Smoot, 2005)



### 5.3 Amusement

Amusement created a great part of slaves' lives. It was also one of the reasons of slaves' flights. In deep forests, afar from slaveholders' eyes, they threw secret parties, where they danced, played music, enjoyed the company of others, and drank spirits. In *Closer to Freedom* Stephanie Camp (2004) indicates that "Musicians played fiddles, tambourines, banjos, and "two sets of [cow] bones" for dancers" (p. 60). Enslaved partygoers took pleasure in displaying their physical skill, mastering their bodies through competition with others, and expressing the creativity.

Male players also made their own instruments, such as the well - known "*quill*"<sup>14</sup> invented in places where sugar was grown. Musicians extemporized melody, making instruments from reeds and handsaws and created percussion instruments with the help of spoons, bones, pans, and buckets to play "*Turkey in the Straw*"<sup>15</sup> and other popular tunes. When no musicians were present, and even when they were, outlawed participants of the party made music with their voices, singing and dancing to lyrics certain to entertain. There is a little extract of the text:

As I was a-gwine down the road,  
With a tired team and a heavy load,  
I crack'd my whip and the leader sprung,  
I says day-day to the wagon tongue.  
*Turkey in the straw, turkey in the hay,*  
*Roll'em up and twist'em up a high tuckahaw*  
*And twist'em up a tune called Turkey in the Straw.*  
Went out to milk, and I didn't know how,  
I milked the goat instead of the cow.  
A monkey sittin' on a pile of straw,  
A-winkin' at his mother-in-law.  
*Turkey in the straw, turkey in the hay,*  
*Roll'em up and twist'em up a high tuckahaw*  
*And twist'em up a tune called Turkey in the Straw.*

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<sup>14</sup> "Five to ten cane stems were cut to different lengths, a hole was drilled in the top of each, and all were bound together to make a homemade harmonica" (Camp, 2004, p. 74).

<sup>15</sup> One of the earliest American folk tunes. The melody was first published with the words of a song known as *Old Zip Coon*.

As Stephanie Camp states in her book *Closer to Freedom*, to the melodies produced by fiddles, voices, banjos, and flute, they danced fairly (without man and woman squeezed up close to one another), performing such dances as “*pigeon wing*,<sup>16</sup>” “*gwine to de east, an’ gwine to de west*,<sup>17</sup>” “*callin’ de figgers*,<sup>18</sup>” “*wringin’ and twistin’*,”<sup>19</sup> and “*hack – back*.<sup>20</sup>”

While women and men danced together, they also had various ideas about other amusing activities to some extent. More than men, women luxuriated in fancy dress, within the bounds of possibility, and men, more than women, took delight in drinking the spirits. Slaves were mostly dressed in clothing of the poorest quality. In summer enslaved people wore *tow*<sup>21</sup>. Many women’s dresses were straight and formless, cut directly on the body to avoid wasting fabric. Hence, many women grew and processed the cotton, cultivated and picked the roots and berries for the dye, wove the cloth, and sewed textiles into garments. Tree barks, bamboo, and poison ivy were used to make dyes of yellow, red, brown, and black. Women, who were victims of sexual exploitation, dangerous and potentially heart-breaking reproductive labour, and physically exacting labour, worked hard to bring some pleasure into their everyday lives.

Once they had the fabric, enslaved women went to great effort to make themselves something more than the cheap, straight-cut dresses they were allowed. When possible, women cut their dresses generously so they could sweep their skirts dramatically and elegantly. (Camp, 2004, p. 82)

But there were some restraints in slaves’ distraction. Late in the night the fiddler unexpectedly interrupted his playing and listened carefully. Everyone became quiet. A terrified scream appeared when their watch shouted, “Patrol.” Albeit the slaves risked everything for their chance to be present at such parties, they tried to do the best to enjoy them without restraint. Hence the most important part of preparing a night meeting was circumventing slave guards (patrols).

In order to do their best to keep their own movements secret, bond people cautiously observed patrol activities. Sometimes it happened that the slaves learned of a patrol’s plan to be in their area. Therefore, as Camp (2004) claims, they used a code “dey bugs

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<sup>16</sup> Flapping the arms like a bird and wiggling the legs.

<sup>17</sup> Leaning in to kiss one’s dance partner on each cheek.

<sup>18</sup> Following the fiddler’s challenging calls.

<sup>19</sup> The early version of the twist.

<sup>20</sup> In which couples stood facing each other and trotted back and forth.

<sup>21</sup> A material made from rough unprocessed flax or uncoloured white or grey cotton.

in the wheat,” meaning the scheduled party had been revealed (p.72). At the time when morning approached, those who had frolicked all the night warned one another of the approach of day and the danger of contravention of that temporal boundary (which located them appropriately at work): “*Run nigger run, pattyrollers ketch you / Run nigger run, it’s breakin’ days.*”<sup>22</sup>

#### **5.4 Black funeral**

Slaves proceeded with African models of mourning and celebrating, although they did not establish these models within the formation of Anglican religion, nor the masters gave them sufficiency of time to extend these irregular customs into a native Afro-American religion. Whites occasionally observed these peculiar practices.

Thomas Bacon, for instance, preached to blacks on Maryland's Eastern Shore in the 1740s at services they directed at their funerals to such small congregations as their marriages have brought together." Two early nineteenth-century observers connected similar services they saw to the slaves' remote African past. Henry Knight, who traveled to Virginia in 1816, explained that masters permitted slaves a holiday to mourn the death of a fellow slave. (Frazier, 1939, p. 143)

The day of the funeral, approximately a month after the corpse was interred, was a convivial day for the bereaved blacks. They sang and danced and drank the dead to his new home, which some believed to be in old Guinea, the home of their grandparents and great-grandparents. Nevertheless, there were also blended many remains of the savage customs of Africa. They cried, yelled and howled around the grave, and wallowed in the dirt, expressed the most frantic grief, sometimes the noise they made might be heard as far as one or two miles. The slaves' music and dance, although frequently separated from their religion, indicated a substantially different African character.

In 1774 Nicholas Cresswell, a British visitor, described slave celebrations in Charles County, Maryland. On Sundays, he wrote, the blacks generally meet together and amuse themselves with Dancing to the Banjo. “This musical instrument is made of a Gourd something in the imitation of a Guitar,

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<sup>22</sup> One of the most famous black songs.

with only four strings.” Their poetry, Cresswell reported, is like the music - rude and uncultivated. Their Dancing is most violent exercise, but so irregular and grotesque. I am not able to describe it. Cresswell's reaction to the dancing suggests that it contained African rhythms unknown in European dance. (Frazier, 1939, p. 143)

## 6 RESISTANCE

Slave resistance originated in British North America approximately directly as the first slaves reached the shores of the continent in the early seventeenth century. The reason was that slaves naturally resisted their enslavement because slavery was basically unnatural for them. Methods were various, but the characteristic familiar sign in all activities of resistance was an effort to gain some measure of freedom against an institution that considered people mainly to be their property.

The most forceful, and conceivably best fabled, methods of resistance were organized, armed rebellion. Between 1691 and 1865, at minimum nine slave revolts caused what would ultimately be developed into the United States. One of the most conspicuous was Nat Turner's rebellion in 1831. "In the bloodiest American revolt, Nat Turner and several hundred comrades killed sixty whites. Over hundred enslaved were killed, either in the combat or as retribution for the uprising" (Sweet, 2012).

Again and again, slaves fought against great odds to over throw their masters. Slave rebellions, big and small, occurred regularly beginning in the seventeenth century. The most successful slave uprising occurred in Saint Dominique, where slave overthrew French colonial rule and established their own nation, Haiti, the first independent black state in the Americas. In 1831, Nat Turner led dozens of Virginia slaves in a religiously inspired rebellion against whites. (Fennell, 2007, p. 9)

After the rebellion, masters took necessary steps to maintain slavery. Southern states published new laws limiting slaves' possibility to move about on their own. Teaching a slave to read or write was considered to be a crime. To note being endangered, planters no longer permitted public criticism of slavery. Southern supervisors, who had once spoken of slavery as a "necessary evil" now began to characterize and protect it as an ideal social system, a "positive good."

For thirty years following Nat Turner's death, slaves did not rebel in a mass revolt, however they did resist in other ways. The slave song "*You May Think I'm Working But I'm Not*" described the most common method of fighting. Faking illness was another way to abate one's load. Slaves also practiced mischief. They broke tools, killed cattle, and started fires. Some slaves also poisoned their masters.

Possibly the standard methods of resistance were those that happened in the work environment. Besides other things, slavery was primarily about involuntary labour, and the enslaved endeavoured every day to circumscribe the terms of their work. “Over the years, customary rights emerged in most fields of production” (Sweet, 2012). These customs influenced directly work routines, dispensing of rations, general rules of behaviour, et cetera. If slave masters augmented and aggravated slaves’ labour, provided meagre rations, or punished too severely, slaves registered their displeasure by slowing work, feigning illness, breaking tools, or sabotaging production. These common techniques of resistance distressed slave masters, however there was little they could do to cease them without risking more extensive breaks in production. This way, slaves frequently came to an agreement about the fundamental description of their daily stereotypes. On the other hand, masters also profited from these agreements, as satisfied slaves worked harder, and intensified their performance.

Bondservants were proficient in inventing strategies and justifications to achieve their own targets. One of a very curious story in Camp’s book *Closer to Freedom* comes into my mind in this connection. Alcey was a black cook in a white household in Virginia. After her mistress died, she decided no longer to work in the kitchen. When her request to be transferred to the field was ignored, she found another way to make her desire known. She frequently disregarded orders and rules, and purloined or destroyed the greater part of the provisions given to her for the table. When that was unsuccessful she decided to give the impression of being exhausted of the kitchen. “Instead of getting chickens for dinner from the coop, as usual, she unearthed from some corner an old hen that had been sitting for six weeks and served her up as a fricassee” (p. 77). Finally, Alcey achieved her goal and was sent to the field.

While some whites did not find such conduct to be something that would threaten them at all, slaves understood it to be an effective form of resistance. It is also necessary to mention that bondwomen were more direct in their resistance. Some murdered their masters, some were solving their problems with arson, and still others defied to be not whipped. On the grounds of this fact, overseers and masters learned which black women and men they could whip, and which would not be whipped. The following case narrated by a former slave Anne Clark (1930) was one of those where the master was the winner:

My poppa was strong. He never had a lick in his life. He helped the marster but one day the marster says, “Si, you got to have a whoppin’,” and my poppa

says, “I never had a whoppin’, and you cain’t whop me.” An’ the marster says, “But I kin kill you,” an’ he shot my poppa down. My mama tuk him in the cabin and put him on a pallet. He died.

Bondwomen used tactics of pretending and acts of violence much more than bondmen did. As White (1999) argued “A less overt form of resistance involved the use of poison and this suited women because they officiated as cooks and nurses on the plantation” (p. 79). Nevertheless, it should also be remembered that such disobedience was not really an applicable alternative for bondmen, either. A bullet in the head, a prison cell, a heartless whipping, and sale was allegedly the predetermined course of any slave, male or female, who indicated aggressive behaviour, even in self-defence.

Apart from everyday methods of resistance, slaves occasionally decided for more direct and outright requirements to achieve freedom, and that was flight. Nevertheless, it was not an easy task. Sweet (2012) in his essay asserted that, if the runaways were captured, they were confronted with harsh suffering such as giving a whipping, branding, and severing of the Achilles tendon. Those who were lucky to avoid disclosure found new home in Canada and the free states of the American North.

By the nineteenth century, the North was a specifically fascinating area for assimilated American-born slaves. System of connections of free blacks and encouraging whites repeatedly assisted in transporting slaves to freedom via as it was called Underground Railroad, a series of protected residences that were located from the American South to free territories in the North.

## 7 CONCLUSION

Nineteenth-century slavery was dependent on transport, trade, exchanging information, investment, and the state formation. On the other hand, involuntary labour was inconsistent with criteria of particular independence, variable labour markets, personal freedom, and democracy.

Both defenders and opponents of slavery struggled with these contradictions. About supporters of slavery it was said that they regarded the institution of slavery as a pivotal part of Western headway and other times they depicted slavery as an absolutely indispensable counterbalance to devastating power of innovation. John Caldwell Calhoun, a congressman, secretary of war, vice president, senator, and a secretary of state, was a confirmed supporter of slavery. He was the first person to proclaim slavery a “positive good.” Reiterating the Greek philosopher Aristotle, Calhoun argued that in all societies one class lives partially of the labour of another, and that the Southern masters are concerned with their labourers more than employers in the North or in Europe do. In other words, black people should have been thankful to Europeans that they saved them from ignorance and made them civilized. Nevertheless, in my opinion, North and Europe should have been also grateful for the South.

Nevertheless, opponents of slavery described the institution as the logical conclusion of avaricious economic expansion and as a barrier to the increase of propitious organizations of free labour. Theodore Dwight Weld, an abolitionist and author of the most influential publication of the antislavery movement – *American Slavery As It Is*, assailed the morality of slavery and the nature of slaveholders. The elemental distinctness slavery made was naturally in the lives of African Americans; unimaginable amount of them experienced immense torture, attended hazardous individual and collective acts of perseverance and resistance to protect themselves and their families.

The major of this thesis was to demonstrate the everyday life of enslaved people including their labour, families, gender distinctions and also resistance. During my research I have come to a following conclusion: Through my intensive research of sources about the antebellum period I have learnt what resolute requirements the institution made on slaves, and on the other hand, what requirements the slaves made on the institution. I have learnt that race relations were not at any time so unequivocal as to be strictly an issue of white over black, but that in the adaptation of culture, in the interaction of blacks and whites, there were grey areas and relationships more fittingly described in terms of blacks



over whites. I began to appreciate that against the cruel treatment and lack of compassion and humanity, or possibly because of it, a specific African-American culture based on close kinship relationships developed and prospered, and that it was this culture that maintained black people through many complications in the antebellum period and even after it.

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## 9 SUMMARY IN CZECH

Předmětem bakalářské práce je představit období před Občanskou válkou v Americe, kdy otroctví bylo v mnoha státech považováno za legální. Práce je rozdělena do šesti kapitol, z nichž každá je věnována jiné specifické oblasti života otroků. První kapitola popisuje vznik otroctví a jeho rozšíření do Nového světa. Ve druhé kapitole jsou zdůrazněny rozdíly mezi pojetím mužského a ženského otroctví, postoj bílých otrokářů k otázce ženskosti a mateřství černých otrokyň. Kapitola se dále věnuje komparaci černých otroků a domorodých obyvatel Ameriky a zároveň porovnává otroky násilně přivezené z Afriky s těmi, kteří se v Americe pak narodili. Následující kapitola seznamuje čtenáře s vnitřním uspořádáním černošské komunity. Další kapitola poskytuje informace o úrovni lékařství a znalostech přírodní medicíny v období před Občanskou válkou. V páté kapitole je popsána především tvrdá práce otroků, prostředí, ve kterém žili a způsoby, jakými si snažili zpestřit své každodenní útrapy. Poslední kapitola rozebírá metody, kterými se černoši snažili projevit odpor vůči svým bílým otrokářům. Na závěr práce jsou pak shrnuty a hodnoceny jednotlivé dosažené poznatky.