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## Enslaved Children in North Carolina

### Kimberly O'Toole

Frederick Douglass once wrote, "Children have their sorrows as well as men and women; and it would be well to remember this in our dealings with them. Slave- children are children, and prove no exceptions to the general rule." Many historians have explored the sorrows that both children and adults faced during enslavement. However, historians who tend to focus solely on the horrendous conditions that children and other enslaved peoples faced have overlooked the importance of children to the larger slave community. The education that slave children received affected their life experiences and shaped their views throughout both their enslaved and emancipated lives. Children were the heart of survival amongst all slaves. The relationships and interactions between the enslaved adults and the enslaved children created the strength that both needed to survive slavery in the Americas during the transatlantic slave trade.

The relationships fostered between the adults and the children within slavery were significant to both of their lives. The parents relied on the children to the same degree as the children relied on the parents to survive their new life conditions in the Americas after the transatlantic crossing. Slavery demanded parents teach children how to be slaves and how to be children simultaneously. However, the greatest responsibility was placed on the child to maintain their innocence as they grew up enslaved. The children's optimism was contagious to the adults who watched or interacted with them. Historians tend to focus on the adults' role in raising the children, but it is equally important to focus on how the children affected the quality of their parents' lives.<sup>[1]</sup>

The energy required by the parents to raise and protect their children was often too much. Their task was greater than the children's task to simply be a child. Booker T. Washington, a former slave, remembered his mother was "too busy to give attention to the training of her children during the day," but was able to find time before or after work to care for them.<sup>[2]</sup> The impact of slavery on the parents was physically more of a burden than the child's contagious preservation of innocence.

African historian and author of *Africa and Africans in the making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, John Thornton wrote, "Europeans did not possess the military power to force Africans to participate in any type of trade in which their leaders did not wish to engage." He went on to state that all African trade with the Atlantic had to be voluntary.<sup>[3]</sup> This is significant because one of the main myths that surrounded the slave trade was that Africans were victims to the trade and had no control. In fact, slaves had been in use since long before the slave trade in African societies and they were in control of the demographic impact. However not all Africans were in control of the trade, only the most prominent or wealthy men in society were. These men in positions of authority within Africa had their hands on the supply line, which controlled the numbers, destinations, and what parts of the community would suffer the most from the trade. Therefore, Africans "were able to protect themselves from the demographic impact and transfer the considerable social dislocations to poorer members of their own societies."<sup>[4]</sup>

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The focus in the American historiography has been on Africans who were kidnapped by white slavers in addition to African slavers. In the bigger picture of the Atlantic Age, white slavers were only significant in the earliest years of the trade. While the majority of documentation regarding slaving in the English language pertains to the earliest period when geography was centered in West Africa and the Slave Coast, the majority of Africans sold came from Central Africa during a later period and were not documented in English sources. Similarly, the accounts by slavers that have been recorded are only available when white, English-speaking slavers compose them. However, African accounts tell us the vast majority of slavers were Africans.<sup>[5]</sup>

As outlined in David Eltis's 2010 atlas, during the slave trade from 1501-1867, roughly 6 million slaves left Africa for the Americas. A total of 3.7% of slaves landed in North America between 1501 and 1867. The other destinations include South America and the Caribbean, which accounted for roughly 95% of all captives. Of the 3.7% that landed in North America, 2% landed in the Carolinas and Georgia region. The remaining 1.7% landed in the Northern United States, Chesapeake, and the Gulf Coast.<sup>[6]</sup> The percentage of the captives breaks down to 211,000 landing in the Carolinas and Georgia with 178,000 landing in the Northern United States, Chesapeake, or the Gulf Coast.<sup>[7]</sup>

From 1751-1775, roughly 76,000 slaves arrived in the Carolinas and Georgia region. These were the peak years for slaves arriving in the Carolinas and Georgia because only 36,000 arrived between 1726 and 1750. Furthermore, 1776-1800 only showed 27,000 slaves arriving in the Carolinas and Georgia regions.<sup>[8]</sup> Therefore, the Carolinas and Georgia regions are crucial to my research of enslaved children in North America because the majority of slaves from Africa landed in this region during the transatlantic slave trade; bringing with them their children. Nearly 50,000 of these captives were children, and these children were crucial to both the compositions of childhood life in the slave trade and also the larger community environment in slavery in the Carolinas.<sup>[9]</sup> From 1501-1728, the Carolinas were one colony. In 1729, the colony split into North and South Carolina. South Carolina had a much larger plantation system than North Carolina, but North Carolina had a much more agriculturally-focused slavery system in place. In 1767, nearly 90 percent of the slaves in North Carolina were field workers, while the remaining 10 percent were butchers, carpenters, tanners, and domestic workers.<sup>[10]</sup>

The journey from Central Africa to the North American mainland generally took 70 days to complete.<sup>[11]</sup> This journey began with the purchase of captives on the coast and the outfitting of a slave ship headed toward the Americas. Once on board the ship, generally, any male less than sixteen years old was categorized as a "boy", while any female captive less than fifteen years was considered a "girl". These ages were given either by the children or by their captors. The quarters for the boys were no larger than five feet by fourteen inches, while the girls quarters were four feet six inches by twelve inches. However, the young, those under the age of sixteen and fifteen respectively, were frequently allowed to walk about the decks to breathe fresh air during the voyage. This was because the ship owners and slaveholders wanted to ensure that their longest lasting pieces of property were healthy and survived the voyage. If the young children were exposed to the same harsh conditions that the adults were faced with continuously throughout the voyage, many more would have died or had serious health problems once they arrived in the Americas. The young children were more susceptible to disease and health issues than the adults due to their immature immune systems.<sup>[12]</sup>

It is important to study the lives of the enslaved children because their influence on their parents and other children in their community shaped the outsider's beliefs surrounding the institution of slavery. The children created leisure activities and games with other enslaved children, as well as the slave-

owners children. The white and black interaction showed that despite their varying situations, children disregarded color at a very young age. However, eventually black children were faced with the inevitable reality that they were unequal to the whites. The activities not only show little discrimination amongst the black and white children, but also confirm their innocence at an early age.

Up until age the age of 10 or 12, the interactions between whites and blacks were no different than what is seen on an elementary school playground today. To the children, it was not apparent that there was a significant difference between the two. These activities allowed young people to cope with the difficulties of enslaved life that they faced on a daily basis. The activities would sometimes vary depending on gender. Boys would often jump rope or play with marble-like objects, while girls would play with rings or dolls. Girls would often engage in activities that young girls participate in today. They would pretend to keep house and serve imaginary meals to their friends or caretakers. In addition they would wash dishes and care for babies that lived on the plantation.<sup>[13]</sup> Due to the fact that these children had no money, they had to make their toys out of what they could find.

The children were forced to use the resources that were near to them to create games and toys. Often times they would make rolling hoops and marbles out of clay to recreate the games they saw others playing. The hoops were often made of metal or wood that was found on the plantation. Even without toys, children enjoyed simply running through meadows, talking with one another and swimming in streams.<sup>[14]</sup> Former slave Boyrereau Brinch described his play as, "We plunged into the stream, dove, swam, sported and played in the current."<sup>[15]</sup> Frederick Douglass remembered, "There was a creek to swim in at the bottom of an open flat space, of twenty acres or more, called 'the Long Green'-a very beautiful play-ground for the children."<sup>[16]</sup> Aside from swimming and running through the land, children created games that were competitive or depicted scenes they had previously viewed in the community.

There is one account of children replaying a funeral procession they had seen in the past. One observer recalled that the boys made a wagon of fig branches and sang Negro hymns as they marched two by two. A chicken with a black ribbon around the neck and a white cloth draped over him was on the wagon. At the end of the procession, a white girl preached, "We must all die."<sup>[17]</sup> This shows the recreation of events as a leisure activity and the allowance of white slave-owners to let their children engage in activities with the enslaved children. Also, the children were doing what all children do, imitating the adults in their community. Some owners encouraged their children to play with the enslaved children to teach them to be charitable.<sup>[18]</sup>

The children's task to simply be a child was more crucial to their own future than the parents' responsibility to protect their children from the evils of slavery. The young children struggled to preserve their innocence throughout enslavement, by continuously looking for time to play once their work had been completed. This struggle to keep their innocence was contagious to their parents and fictive kin who overlooked their behaviors.

The conditions and details of the journey from being transported from Africa to America and being sold are important in understanding why adults were faced with harsher conditions compared to children. The adults were not allowed to walk about the decks to breathe fresh air like the children were. Also, the adults were forced to be reborn on the voyage and accept their new status as slaves. As opposed to the children, the adults were not always seen as the most valuable entity to the captain, and were treated accordingly.

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From 1501-1867, the transatlantic slave trade dominated the lives of many Africans. However, the Africans were not the only victims. In the beginning, the Africans were in control of the trade and were enslaving their own people for economic benefit. At this point, the countries involved in the trade were victim to the Africans' control of the supply. This did change in the short time when colonization started to control trade.

In the Americas there was a higher demand for female slaves because of their reproductive benefits and the belief by the Americans that they would be less physically rebellious than male slaves. In African communities that were selling slaves, there was a preference to hold onto enslaved women and sell men. When North Carolina was buying slaves, the prices of women were higher because of African control over the supply. The women held all the agricultural knowledge. Previously, historians believed that the majority of slaveholders purchasing male slaves were because of a preference for strong labor. More recent research, however, shows that the preference for male labor was driven by price concerns. The male slaves came at a much lower price because African suppliers preferred not to sell women. Once in the Americas, the production by both male and female slaves provided a significant proportion of the total output in the construction of the New World economy.<sup>[19]</sup> However, the journey from Africa to the Americas was arguably one of the worse events in the lives of these newly enslaved people.

The extent of the horrendous conditions that enslaved people faced on their journeys across the Atlantic Ocean was explored in David Eltis's atlas. His maps showed that the motivation behind the slave trade was pure greed, not only by other countries, but by African countries too. Patrick Manning, historian and author of *Slavery and African Life*, similarly agrees that the trade was purely for economic benefits, which the enslaved Africans became victims of. Africa was not the only country that was exporting people and America was not the only country importing these enslaved people. The transatlantic trade was a triangle trade network that involved multiple countries around the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>[20]</sup>

Central African ports were the most popular ports among traders during the slave trade, with over 8 million captives moving through them between 1501 and 1900. The majority of these captives went to Brazil or the Caribbean regions, but approximately 1 million ended up in the North American mainland. Many captives were shipped to other regions of Africa and even Southern Europe during the trade. The destinations of these captives were based on the wind and ocean currents during the time of their transportation. Between 1501 and 1867, nearly 6 million slaves left Africa and were distributed throughout the Americas. The destination with the bulk of the slaves was North Carolina with 211,000.<sup>[21]</sup>

Furthermore, the length of the journey also depended on the wind and ocean currents. On average, a trip from Holland in May took until August to arrive in Loango. After a two-month stay in Loango, the ship went on to Buenos Aires and arrived in mid-January. This journey of nearly 7 months was the average during the trade. Onboard the ships, the children were faced with tight quarters, but could rarely move around on the top deck. On the other hand, the adults were kept in confined spaces with no opportunities for fresh air or exercise.<sup>[22]</sup> The children played a crucial role in the survival of many of the adults on this journey because of their optimism that was contagious to onlookers. Their optimism was not always obvious, but the adults could not overlook their obedience and willingness to survive the journey.<sup>[23]</sup>

This journey was essentially a rebirth for all the slaves that were on board the ships. There were different forms of this "rebirth" because some children were captured at such a young age that there

wasn't much of a "rebirth" necessary to survive. On the other hand, some children and adults were captured at a more advanced age, which made it more difficult to adapt to their new lifestyles. This process included a rebirth in that they were once again children in the eyes of their owners. They were treated as children, yet punished as adults. Every time they were sold, or escaped and recaptured in the Americas, they would have to again restart their lives because each plantation and owner had different moral and social beliefs that would affect their lives if they did not accept them.<sup>[24]</sup>

According to Patrick Manning, "For those captured at any age, they were by that act "born" into slavery, and were treated as infants within the confines of their new status." The process of socialization was their next step in life because they had to adapt to their new situation. They had to essentially learn how to speak the new language and learn the social customs, even though they were only to be treated as property in the future. The slave trade to the Americas broke the communication between the slaves and their families in Africa due to the belief by the white slave-owners that a good slave was only possible if they were far enough away from home to lose all remembrance of it.<sup>[25]</sup>

The children born into slavery or captured at a very young age were central to my research. Understanding the process of their socialization and upbringing is crucial in understanding how the presence of the children affected the lives of the adults close to them. Up until the children reached the ages of 10 or 12 for boys and girls respectively, there was only a limited experience of enslavement. The slaveholder had the discretion to decide when it was appropriate for a young child to begin work, but 10 and 12 were the most common.

The stories of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs are two of the most well-documented of enslaved children's lives. Frederick Douglass was enslaved as a young boy from 1818 until he escaped in 1838, changing his name to Frederick Douglass a few years after he escaped and married his wife. On the other hand, Harriet Jacobs was the first female slave to write her own autobiography. Harriet was born in North Carolina in 1813 and lived with her parents who were enslaved. Her mother died when she was young and she was sent to live with her mother's mistress. Eventually, the mistress died and Harriet was given to a relative who was cruel. Douglass and Jacobs stories both provide valuable information as to the early lives of enslaved children.

Frederick Douglass, a former slave, remembered, "it was a long time before I knew myself to be a slave." His interactions with his grandparents, who he was living with at the time, did not lead him to believe he was a slave until he learned the truth surrounding "Old master." Once Douglass discovered the "Old master" his grandparents would refer to was also his master, "the early clouds and shadows began to fall upon my path." According to Douglass, he was "for the most part of the first eight years" of life, a "spirited, joyous, uproarious, and happy boy, upon whom troubles fall only like water on a duck's back."<sup>[26]</sup> Douglass' innocence was destroyed at the age of eight, like many other children at the same age.

Furthermore, Harriet Jacobs recalled she was "born a slave, but never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away." She was "so fondly shielded" that she "never dreamed" she was a "piece of merchandise" and "liable to be demanded of them at any moment." Again, the recognition of enslavement by Jacobs was consequence of "the talk" around her.<sup>[27]</sup>

The children's daily activities began to change once they recognized they were slaves; a typical day for a child at the age of 10 or 12 was no longer simple and full of play. This change is evident in children's lives today when they begin to receive an education at the age of 5. The difference lay in the slaveholder's

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children attending school and the enslaved children working. In rare instances, children would not recognize their enslavement until they began to perform intensive labor because their daily work involved tasks similar to what the slaveholder's children performed. Boys and girls would care for children, serve meals, and attend to poultry prior to manual labor in the field.<sup>[28]</sup>

Parents and fictive kin held sole responsibility for teaching the children how to survive slavery. However, the children were the lone determinant in whether or not the parents' lessons were valuable. If the children were punished after behaving in a way their parents instructed them to, then the parent would feel at fault. Therefore, the children possessed the most valuable role in survival of both the parents and themselves because they needed to put the lessons they were taught into action.

Aside from the children's responsibilities to protect their parents, they also had many chores to complete throughout the day. The work enslaved children performed varied by their owners and the size of plantation. Generally, young girls would be required to do chores that involved laundry, cooking, and cleaning. Young boys often would have the same task until they were old enough to perform physical labor in the fields or learn a trade. Nevertheless, children were never idle during the day while enslaved, in order to ensure survival.

The age at which a child would begin to perform chores for their owner generally began when a girl was 7 and a boy was 6. However, the children would often perform tasks for their owners prior to this age, but those tasks were rarely hard or laborious. The amount of work that was determined by the owner varied. The owners defined their expectations of the children by using the fractional hand system. This system allowed owners to categorize the children by their capacity to perform such chores. The children were either quarter or half-hands. If a person was too old or too young to perform work, they were often labeled as a quarter-hand. Those who were capable of performing beneficial work for the owner were labeled as half-hands.<sup>[29]</sup>

The age at which a child began work was determined by the fractional hand system as well as the personal preference of the owner. Thomas Jefferson would order that, "children till 10 years old serve as nurses, from 10 to 16 the boys make nails, the girls spin at age 16 go into the grounds or learn trades." However, generally the possibility of learning a trade was closed to girls who would be forced to stay inside and cater to the domestic sphere of the plantation. On the other hand, the boys were often set up with an apprentice to learn a trade to be more beneficial to the owner in the long run.<sup>[30]</sup>

There are discrepancies in the age the children were considered "children" and when they were considered "adults." John Edwin Mathews's plantation book outlines the exact work the children on his plantation would do. The duties included cleaning the stalls of the pigs and goats to planting the crops. The tasks performed by the children were usually identical to those performed by the adults at this specific plantation. He wrote, "all hands repairing fences" and "fellows ditching, women listing, one man ploughing." Mathews also listed the ages of children, the births and deaths of children, and the births and deaths of his animals, at the end of each year that he recorded. It is important to note the ages in which he considered slaves children or adults. In 1855, he listed "Abbey-16" under Adults and "Robert-16" under Children. The following year, Abbey and Robert were still under Adults and Children respectively. Then, in 1857, Mathews recorded the youngest age of an Adult to be 14 and the oldest age for Children to be 14, too. Both of the names he listed were different from Abbey and Robert.<sup>[31]</sup> This shows that the age a child was considered to be an adult varied, not only by slave-owner but also by individual slaves.

Generally, up until the age of 10 children were required to prepare and preserve food within the household, while the older children worked outside. If there were children younger than themselves, they were tasked with caring for them while they maintained the living quarters. Furthermore, these children were in charge of the laundry and to repair clothes that were torn or ripped. The work the children did gradually shifted into more laborious and time intensive work.<sup>[32]</sup>

Despite the common housework or fieldwork performed by girls and boys respectively, many slaves recalled performing chores that were beyond those spheres. Charles Davenport, former slave, recalled, "all de little darkies helped bring in wood."<sup>[33]</sup> He was tasked with keeping the yards clean and the entire plantation in pristine shape. Other jobs often required the children to put up mosquito bars and carry water to the house. Former slave Jacob Branch, in regard to actual work the children did, said, "Us chillen start to work soon's us could toddle. First us gather firewood. Iffen its freezin' or hot us have to go to toughen us up."<sup>[34]</sup>

One boy, Henry Bibb, was tasked with more of a domestic lifestyle than other boys of his time. He remembered cleaning the floors and polishing the furniture in his master's home. He wrote, "She was too lazy to scratch her own head." Bibb was tasked with scratching his owner's head and fanning her while she slept in her own bed. This was unusual for a boy to do and he was relieved from this duty once he was old enough to perform work in the fields.<sup>[35]</sup>

Once the children reached the age of 16, generally, the boys would begin fieldwork or an apprenticeship while the girls would continue with the household work. The boys learned special techniques and how to safely operate tools and equipment. Boys learned skills that would benefit their owner in the long run or even themselves once they were free. Sometimes, the boys were able to learn these skills with their parents or fictive kin if their owner allowed it. This not only built relationships, but also increased opportunities for success together once they were free. One boy remembered, "I learnt how to beat out de iron an' make wagin' tires, an' make plows."<sup>[36]</sup>

However, sometimes the boys and girls would work together after their individual chores were finished. The task of meal preparation was a common combined task for all the children. Between the boys and girls, water needed to be carried in, the wood needed to be chopped and a fire had to be built. They needed to peel and wash the vegetables and pluck and scale the fish or poultry that the cook intended to serve to his guests. Once the meal was prepared, the children were tasked with serving and cleaning up the leftovers from the dinner party the master was hosting.<sup>[37]</sup>

Aside from being simple servants, children would often help their parents with their own tasks. Oftentimes women were tasked with making candles or clothes for their master's family and children. The slave children would assist their parents or fictive kin in collecting the bayberries or wood chips to make the candles. This relationship is important because the children would often be too tired to perform any more work, but they knew their parents relied on them to avoid punishment, so they helped.<sup>[38]</sup>

Many children participated in leisurely activities and play after their work was done when their parents were not present. The amount of play they participated in declined once the child reached the age of 10. The amount of play varied; some did not play at all, others continued until they were adults. Often times a slave, "was too tired when we come in to play any games."<sup>[39]</sup> Those who did continue to partake in leisurely and play activities would attend to personal needs or rest prior to play. Play, even today, is a



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socializing agent that connects children to one another to form relationships and to develop leadership skills.

The owners were not the only adults who encouraged their children to interact; the enslaved parents did too. Enslaved parents believed their children could play with one another to develop relationships that would strengthen their motivation to survive slavery. The majority of children would share experiences together as opposed to compete with one another in such activities. The relationships that the children developed with their siblings and peers helped them survive slavery.<sup>[40]</sup>

Love and concern for one's own child's welfare is common fact amongst parents everywhere, and enslaved parents' concern for their children was unwavering too. The institution of slavery in the Americas demanded parents and fictive kin teach the girls and boys how to simultaneously be children and slaves.<sup>[41]</sup> For masters and slaveholders, instead of holding a sentimental value to the mother the American institution shifted the value of the children to being purely financial objects.<sup>[42]</sup> Owners were motivated by the desire to protect their own investment. Parents were simply motivated by parenthood.

Slave-owners rarely helped the mothers protect their children unless the slave-owners realized the children were objects of financial security because of the money they themselves had already invested. However, some slaveholders acknowledged marital relationships and recorded the births within a slave family just as they did for their own families. The slaveholders argued that the cohesive unit aspect of the family for their slaves helped to prevent restiveness and created happiness within the family.<sup>[43]</sup> It is important to note that when a child was born to a couple who had different owners, the child would become the property of the mother's owner and not the father's. Slave-owners recognized the importance of the mother and child relationship.<sup>[44]</sup> If the child were to be given to the father, it would show that the placement of the child was unimportant to both the mother and father. Children were kept with their mothers not just because it was believed that they need their mothers to survive, but that the mothers needed their children to survive.

Unfortunately, this placed the heaviest burden upon mothers who lacked the resources and information necessary to have a safe delivery and a healthy pregnancy. At times, the women were unaware of the needs of their bodies during pregnancy and had to learn from other women within the community how to take care of the child in the womb. Rarely, slaveholders would buy materials for the pregnant woman to learn a minuscule amount of information regarding pregnancy. The women had no control over their bodies once they were enslaved and they would have to go back to work immediately after giving birth. Also, women worked up until the birth of the child, which jeopardized his or her survival and long-term health.<sup>[45]</sup>

Eventually, in the nineteenth century, two significant changes occurred socially with the birth of children. These changes included doctors providing safer deliveries and fathers being present for emotional support. However, these changes were generally only to the benefit of the white women. There was more importance paid to the white women during the birthing process and a midwife could easily do the job of a doctor for a slave woman. Furthermore, the father was usually not around for the birth of their children if they were enslaved because they would be living on a different plantation or possibly in an entirely different state. <sup>[46]</sup>

The majority of slave-owners understood that the children being born were financial assets that needed to be taken care of. The slave-owner's take on the birthing process being a financial asset is shown in the

statement by former slave-owner Tryphena Fox. Fox wrote, "the little negro children must be taken care of." Fox continued with her opinion of the care of children where she wrote, "It will be to my interest to see that the children are well taken care of and clothed and fed," in a letter to a dear friend.<sup>[47]</sup> The vast majority of slave-owners did not ensure the children be taken care of to benefit the mother's emotion stability, but rather to ensure they benefitted from the output of work the children would be sure to accomplish in the future. These children would be able to provide life-long service to the slaveholder if they were well cared for. Once the slaveholder understood this, the mother was given more assistance for a safe and healthy pregnancy and delivery of her child.

Unfortunately, despite the concern most slave-owners showed in the well-being of the children, the majority of mothers were faced with the protection and overall health of their children. The women had limited time to care for their children once they were born because they needed to get back to work. Often times, mothers would pray that their child died immediately after birth or prior to giving birth to protect them from the evils of slavery. Some factors that contributed to high infant mortality rates included poor prenatal care, innutritious diets, and extreme physical labor by the mother.<sup>[48]</sup> There is only so much one can do after the damage has been done to the mother and the fetus during pregnancy.

Sadly, some enslaved women felt a sense of relief when death freed their child from enslavement. Furthermore, often times parents thought the only way to protect their unborn child from slavery was to die themselves. Harriet Jacobs recalled at the birth of her first child, "I had often prayed for death; but now I did not want to die, unless my child could die too."<sup>[49]</sup> It was not a rarity for women to feel guilty when they birthed a child into slavery. The children would soon be faced with the same evil institution that the mother was in.<sup>[50]</sup> This belief showed the dependency of mothers on the well-being of their children. Once the child was born, it was the child's responsibility to preserve their innocence and make sure their parents did not suffer from the guilt associated with birthing a child into slavery.

Regardless of these health concerns, many children were still born into slavery. At this point, the mother did all she could to ensure survival for her children. When the mothers were forced to go back to work, the small infants would accompany them upon their backs. Rarely, slaveholders would care for the newborn while the mother went back to work. If this was not an option, the mothers would place the children on pallets near fences or placed in hammocks or swings in the shade.<sup>[51]</sup> The problem of childcare arose when the children were old enough to walk and required an even closer watch than before. The children required constant supervision and interaction by either the slaveholder or the mother who was forced to work.

On large plantations, nurseries were often set up to care for the children while the mothers went back to work. A rare occurrence demonstrated that an elderly woman, referred to as "Aunt Dinah," "told stories, demonstrated how to make animals from potatoes, orange thorns, a few feathers" to the children in the nursery. That nursery was ran similar to a kindergarten classroom today because the teachers would instruct the children in how to be an effective, practical, living being. This included the instruction of how to set the table and bake mud pies.<sup>[52]</sup> The most effective lesson taught to young children was the development of relationships.

The children became attached to caregivers and created fictive kin relationships that assisted them with the major lifestyle transitions that they were sure to face while enslaved. These transitions or changes included the deaths of loved ones, relocations of related slaves, and often times the sale of family members. Many children had "aunts" and "uncles," which show the children kept with the learning of

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traditional African knowledge by respecting their elders.<sup>[53]</sup> Positive relationships with other children and family members provided children the strength to survive slavery. The protection that parents gave their children whenever possible also shows the commitment of parents to their children's well-being.<sup>[54]</sup>

Specific accounts of parents risking their lives for their children include mothers stealing food from their owners and traveling long distances at night to deliver their rations. Often times the visits would be late at night and sporadic. This was the case for Frederick Douglass. Douglass' mother, who was on another plantation, would walk close to 12 miles at night whenever she had leisure time to visit Frederick. Douglass claimed his caregiver, "Aunt Katy," had "meant to starve the life out of me." He was given no bread due to an offense he could not remember at the time. Douglass's mother walked in right before he was to be scolded again by "Aunt Katy." After his mother "read Aunt Katy a lecture which she never forgot," she handed him food and took off back to her plantation. According to Douglass, this was the moment he learned that he was not only a child, "but somebody's child."<sup>[55]</sup> This interaction between mother and mistress showed that the protection of one's child was of the utmost importance to the mother, because she risked her own life to protect her child's. However, the child's strength is contagious to the mother, who travels illegally to care for her displaced child.

Another account by Harriet Jacobs showed the unwavering strength by the children and the mothers to survive slavery. Harriet's grandmother would bake crackers at night and sell them, with permission from her master, to afford clothes for herself and her children. Each year she was able to save a little to eventually pay for the freedom of her family. Furthermore, Harriet knew that her life was at risk when she attempted to flee north with her two children, but she believed it was the only way to secure her children's freedom. Again, this showed that the lives of the children were the motivational factor for the parent's survival within the institution. Lastly, Harriet Jacobs' story describes how parents would teach their children how to read and write for when they became free, if the parents themselves knew how.<sup>[56]</sup>

The lessons taught by parents, maids and fictive kin to the enslaved children were often survival techniques as opposed to writing or mathematics. Adults had the burden of teaching children survival skills in case their owner separated them in the future. The main objective of the parent's lessons was for the children to show deference to the whites, but maintain their own self-respect at the same time. This objective was difficult to reach because of the minuscule amounts of leisure time available for both adults and children to devote to teaching. However, the difficulty behind these goals was also made easier when parents would work together.<sup>[57]</sup>

A common piece of advice among enslaved parents was to "Rais your children up rite." In this situation, "up rite" referred to mental toughness as well as physical strength. The children were less likely to revolt or cause any problems if they were educated the right way. Furthermore, a smart child was an industrious child. Smart referred to the capacity of the child to do hard work while maintaining their dignity. Also, smart children were able to escape punishments when they finished their chores on time and well done. If children were able to keep their self-esteem and avoid punishments, then their parents successfully raised their children up right.<sup>[58]</sup>

Another important lesson taught to slave children was how to be obedient while masking their own feelings. The idea of obedience included respect to their elders as well as their owners. If a child was obedient to their owner, then they could avoid harsh punishments. However, the child must also obey their parents at the same time. This became difficult when the owner and parent asked for separate

behaviors from the child. An example of this struggle was when the owner and parent referred to a child as a different name. Regardless of the adult the child chose to obey, one adult would punish her. Sarah a former slave, referred to as Annie by her owner, said that the struggle to choose "made me hate both of them." It was difficult for Sarah to know when it was appropriate to disobey her own mother in order to avoid punishment by her owner.<sup>[59]</sup>

For the most part, enslaved parents worked together to protect their children from the evils of their owners. Parents felt that they knew what slavery was about, so it was their duty to protect their children to the furthest extent possible. A popular axiom regarding this lesson was that "Children are to be seen and not heard." Many parents taught this to their children for their own safety because if a child spoke out at the wrong time, they would often be punished. On the other hand, if a child were to simply be seen in the process of completing their chores, it was more likely they would either be praised or at least not scolded for their actions. The behaviors of children affected all the adults on the plantation, so parents worked together to teach all the children.<sup>[60]</sup>

The children's actions affected all the adults on the plantation, because the children were a direct reflection of how well their parents were raising them. If the child were to misbehave and be flogged for it, the parent and other close adults would feel guilty for not teaching them how to behave or avoid punishment properly. As stated in the "Rules for Government of Plantation," rule 20 states that, "If a small negro runs away the meat of the family must be taken away or withholden until return."<sup>[61]</sup> On the other hand, if the child behaved appropriately, it was a testimony to all the parents for being able to teach the child the proper ways to behave while enslaved.

A popular metaphor for the behaviors the children practiced while enslaved was with the use of a mask. Henry Bibb, former slave, wrote in regards to his double identity, "the only weapon of self-defense that I could use successfully was that of deception." This showed that Bibb, like many other children, was forced to essentially be two-faced while growing up. There was a specific "mind" they were to use to please their owner, and another one to use to please their parents. This switch provided many difficulties for the children because their owners and parents taught them separate lessons. Parents trusted their children to differentiate properly between these minds because it was the decisive factor in whether or not they would be punished or praised. If the children did not differentiate accurately, then their parents felt the wrath of watching their own child punished too.<sup>[62]</sup>

Slave children also learned important lessons from folk tales. These fairy tales enabled children to continue to believe in their dreams that one day they will be freed from this evil. Life lessons were learned from these tales as well. The most popular of these tales were those of trickster animals who deceived the predator. The weaker prey would do anything necessary to survive and defeat the predator, which was a comparison to the enslaved children. The idea of trickery was popular within these tales because the children needed to trick their owners into the belief that they were powerless and obedient people. Essentially, the children had to convince their owners that they would not revolt and had accepted their place in their society as a piece of property. Once the owners believed the children were powerless, the true victory was in the hands of the children.<sup>[63]</sup> This showed the switch between minds that was discussed in the preceding paragraph.

Moreover, the folktales and fairytales recited to the children played a significant role in their relationships with other children or adults. The animals discussed in the tales often referred to one another as "brother." This is important because the idea of a "brother" that is not actually a blood-related brother fosters camaraderie amongst children. The animals in the stories stuck together and

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achieved survival because of it; enslaved children did the same. This outlook on relationships while enslaved coupled with obedience and respect to elders allowed children to survive the institution.

As opposed to the lessons parents believed would guarantee survival amongst their children, owners often times held different beliefs. In conjunction with the parents' thoughts, Everard Green Baker, a former slave-owner, wrote that, "The young should be taught to be respectful and obedient to the older ones." However, his thoughts differed when he wrote that the adults should also be "kind" and respectful to the "younger ones." This showed that the parents believed that the young should respect the old, but Baker went on to show that it was also important for the old to respect the young. This was important to the parent-child relationship because respect was not simply one-sided. Children needed to be respected in order to respect their parents.[64]

Furthermore, owners believed the slaves needed to "stand their ground" at the same time. According to slave-owners, the children needed to feel that they were important and intelligent or they would not put out the maximum amount of work possible. This did not mean that the children must actually be educated; the feeling of importance was enough. Also, the slaves needed to understand "their place in society," which was a result of the way they were treated by their owners and the lessons their parents taught them.[65] The slave-owners felt it was their responsibility to teach the children to have self-confidence, but not too much to the point that they threaten the slave-owner's authority.

Similarly, some owners were fearful of their slaves acquiring too much knowledge. If a slave was too well educated, like their own children, then they were more likely to revolt or cause problems within the plantation. If problems arose, it meant the owner lacked power to control his slaves. Conversely, some owners felt their slaves needed to be educated, but only with the Bible. Lessons from the slave-owners taught slaves the Bible instructs them to obey their elders and treat people with humanity. However, the slave-owners left out the lessons that discussed equality or anything that involving the evils of slavery.[66]

In slave children's education, the slave-owner attempted to avoid the traditional reading and writing components. Also, there was little to no mention of the institution of slavery. The entire topic was generally avoided when educating the slave children. Frederick Douglass remembered his mistress teaching him the ABCs. Once his owner, Mr. Auld, found out, he was intensely angered. In his words, according to Douglass, he screamed, "If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell." He went on to say that, "a nigger should know nothing but to obey his master-to do as he is told to do." Mr. Auld was angered because he believed that if a slave was educated then he would be unfit to be a slave anymore. Once a slave knows a few words, then they will focus on learning all the words, which could make them smarter than the owner. Simply, Mr. Auld, like many other owners, was afraid their power would diminish if the slaves were educated in any way.[67]

In many ways slavery in the Carolinas was part of the larger history of British Colonial involvement in the Atlantic Slave Trade. The slaveholders in both the Carolinas and the British West Indies taught an overarching lesson: to treat people with humanity. This lesson was taught to their own children as well as the enslaved children they owned. In the British West Indies, instead of using the Bible, slave-owners used a children's book entitled *Clarissa Dormer, or, The Advantages of Good Instruction*. Furthermore, the book was also used for the slave-owner's children, in order to understand how they needed to treat their future slaves.[68]

*Clarissa Dormer* was printed in England for J. Harris, the successor to E. Newberry with an emphasis on the way slaves should be treated in the British West Indies colonies. In 1808 the book was printed for the sole reason of teaching the children of the advantage that humanity and decency would have on their slave-owning lives. In the book, the author describes a situation in which slaves were not treated with humanity or decency and they ended up revolting against the owners.<sup>[69]</sup>

By making this lesson into a children's book, it is obvious that the writer felt this was the most important lesson to be learned by the children of this time. Whether it was for the children whose parents owned slaves or for the children who lived in the same area and witnessed slavery every day, this book was of importance. For children, absorption of their surroundings is a natural tendency while growing up and will shape their thoughts and ideas behind certain issues for the remainder of their lives.

Documents from the British West Indies show how everywhere slavery was in contact with settler communities, the education of all children was affected. The common lessons taught to children in the Carolinas and the British West Indies were the same. Therefore, regardless of location or destination of slaves, owners agreed on something; the important lessons that children need to be taught.

Many children did not fully understand their status as a slave, which changed their outlook on abolition and emancipation. Some children were too young to comprehend their legal status or knew no different than to be a slave. The children needed to possess the maturity required to understand their new place in society and their opportunities to make changes to it. There are cases documented by slave-owners of resistance by their slaves at the time of abolition, but it is unclear as to whether these slaves knew they were free or were just breaking the rules because they had the desire to.<sup>[70]</sup> Nonetheless, the children who did recognize their new "free" status played a major role in shaping the new former-slave communities that were being created.

1865 marked the end of the Civil War and the abolition of slavery. These changes would dramatically affect the lives of the nearly 4 million children and adults who were enslaved, even if they did not recognize it. Many enslaved children, including former slave Hattie Rogers, believed that, "Slavery was an awful thing, and that Abraham Lincoln was a good man because he set us free." Blacks were now in complete control of their own bodies and well-being. According to the law, these people were able to seek educational opportunities and participate in whichever leisure activities pleased them. However, each freed black person greeted this new freedom in their own, and often quite contrasting, way. The social system that the slaves and owners had become accustomed to was changing beneath their feet and was soon to cause a disruption among all of society.<sup>[71]</sup>

The white slave owners had their own opinions of emancipation, and those opinions were rarely optimistic. Kate Foster, daughter of a former slave owner, wrote of the slaves that were leaving their plantation, "It seems that if the rest who are here if they had any feeling they would feel sorry for Mrs. D and remain faithful." She believed that emancipation stripped the former slaves of all decency they could have possibly had. Foster also stated that, "Grandma does not seem to care at all" because by letting the slaves go they will be able to "reap the benefit of it too." She went on to say that she did "hope some of them will be faithful" because she would "lose entire faith in the whole race" if they did not remain faithful. The idea of white supremacy over the blacks was still evident even after emancipation.<sup>[72]</sup>

Most individuals who had just learned of their freedom celebrated in ceremonial pastimes similar to what they would have done in Africa. These pastimes included religious ceremonies and prayers. They

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were excited to be able to attend church at their own leisure. When they did attend church, they were still faced with strong opposition from their white counterparts. Kate Foster, in the discussion of a newly freed black man coming into their church, wrote, "I should not be surprised if some of our enemies had sent him in the church as an insult to us."<sup>[73]</sup> In addition, Hattie Rogers wrote in her narrative, "There was no churches on the plantation, but we went to the white folks' church and sat on the back seats."<sup>[74]</sup> The whites were still opposed to the equal integration of their former slaves into their community, especially the church.

In addition, the whites viewed the entire world as an unfortunate and unhappy place now that the blacks were free. This was evident in Fosters statement in regards to the death of a child, "For a child to be taken from this world is a happiness." She went on to write, "We cannot mourn that they have gone but for ourselves who are left behind to feel their absence." This belief that birthing a child into this world is essentially the worst possible option is similar to when parents would feel relieved that their child did not have to be enslaved and face those horrible conditions by being born.<sup>[75]</sup>

However, the most important task for many newly freed slaves was to find their family members who had been displaced. Furthermore, many former slaves lacked the basic necessities to survive, so Congress created the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands in March of 1865. This Bureau worked to assist the transition to independence for children and adults alike.<sup>[76]</sup> In addition, the bureau was able to provide shelter, food, and medicine to those individuals in need. The lack of basic needs was not the only thing holding former slaves back from achieving happiness; family separations were an enormous aspect.

Former slaves began their searches for their displaced family members as soon as they heard of their emancipation.<sup>[77]</sup> Most families were left on their own to find their family members because there was no federal or state help available. One of the most common sources to find family members was the Christian Recorder, a weekly publication that slave-owners used during slavery to buy and sell slaves. Now, the former slaves employed the publication to find their own family members that might still be up for sale.<sup>[78]</sup> Despite these difficulties, many slaves managed to find happiness in their newly independent lives.

Aside from the search for displaced family members, the newly freed individuals faced another problem with the application of the new laws. The labor laws that were enacted to supposedly assist the blacks in their transition were often used against them. When both black and white workers would violate a law, the punishments would be different. Generally, the whites would receive a fine or a lawsuit, while the blacks would be treated as a slave who disobeyed their owner. This discrimination would be a long lasting problem for Africans in America.<sup>[79]</sup>

In addition to unfair enforcement of laws, some owners decided to restrain freed children in the community as a way to keep their parents submissive to their authority. The children were kept by their owners and continued to work for them, while the parents were free in the community. This shows that the owners understood that the parents were more reliant on their children than vice versa. By keeping the children under their control, the owners thought the parents would willingly return to their enslaved lives to save their children. However, the parents created new ways to overcome this issue and reunite their families. Parents generally used the Freedmen's Bureau to assist them in finding their children, especially if their former owner was illegally holding them. The need to be reunited was more important to parents than to the children.<sup>[80]</sup>

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Despite the many attempts to reunite families, parents were not always successful. Many children ended up living in an orphanage or with fictive kin. Once they were old enough to support themselves, they began to start their own lives with their new freedoms.

It was popular amongst newly freed blacks to participate in a marriage ceremony to legitimize their enslaved marriage that their owners would often acknowledge, but not legalize. While enslaved, one could only dream of the perfect wedding day. Now, this was possible. A young boy recalled, "After the Cibil War, soon's they got a little piece of money they got a preacher and had a real weddin'." Bongy Jackson goes on to say, "We sure had a fine time."<sup>[81]</sup> There were instances where the families adapted smoothly into their new roles and brought back their social customs from Africa. Religious and social customs were starting to come back into their lives, and they made it no secret to the rest of society. On the other hand, former slaves were now able to end marriages with people they did not wish to marry in the first place.

In addition to the new freedoms these formerly enslaved individuals gained, there were also responsibilities that came with emancipation. Family members were held accountable for the socialization and health of the children. This is not much different than how adults were placed with the task of socializing and keeping their children in good health while enslaved. However, family members now had sole responsibility of the children. The children's actions within the community were reflected upon their parents now instead of their owners.<sup>[82]</sup>

Unfortunately, the issue of work and earning an income was another significant problem for newly freed people. Their former owners were still in control of the majority of the land within the community and the allocation of all the labor force that was available to them. For this reason, many newly freed people desperately tried to avoid any relations with their former owners because of the often horrendous conditions they had faced. Despite their many attempts to avoid confrontation with their previous owners, parents were forced to lose their children back to their former owner to survive.<sup>[83]</sup>

Parents would allow their children to become apprentices to former owners and work their land or their trade. The parents would sign a contract that enabled the former owner to use their child for laborious tasks for an agreed upon amount of time. This contract was similar to the pure enslavement of a child because they were forced to work and earn little to no wages since they were considered an apprentice. As soon as parents began to hear of the horrible conditions their children were once again faced with, they sought help from the Bureau to end these contracts. Essentially, the children dealt with any situation they were faced with in order to keep the hopes and spirits of their parents intact. Unfortunately, this often meant returning to a version of enslavement when their parents were unable to financially support them.<sup>[84]</sup>

Nonetheless, many of the former slaves managed to survive the brutalities of slavery and emancipation. Former slave Dilly Yelladay recalled, "Well, I los' my home." He had moved to Raleigh after emancipation and, "got ole an' couldn't keep up de payments an' dey come down ere an' took my home." This situation was not unusual for many former slaves because of the little help that was given to them once emancipated.<sup>[85]</sup>

Therefore, children first believed abolition meant freedom and the opportunity to support and find their families. This was a rare occurrence for many former enslaved children because of the lack of financial security that was available to them or their families. In many cases, parents had to sign contracts that allowed former owners to own their children in order for some sort of income. If parents were able to



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find jobs for themselves and their children who were old enough, then the parents were still faced with the task of parenthood like parents in the world today. It was important that the children continue to not act out in the community, because their parents would be to blame for any problems that their children caused. However, the main responsibility was placed back on the children, just like while enslaved, to act accordingly to reflect well on their parents.

The interactions between the enslaved children and their parents or fictive kin, the work they were expected to do, and the leisure and play activities they participated in all molded these individuals into the person they would become after abolition and emancipation. Some decided to help the Works Progress Administration in their collection of testimonies and memoirs of the ex-slaves. Others were bitter and did not choose to voice their own lives until the day they passed. It is no secret that childhood experiences shape the lives that one leads. The enslaved children faced a challenge to not only grow up, but to survive and make the most out of their situation while emotionally supporting their parents and caretakers.

In the beginning, the children were the easiest to capture, train and fit on board ships to America from Africa. Children were unaware of the struggles they were yet to face. This allowed captors to abduct and transport children in a smoother manner. The children were less likely to revolt or reject the captors compared to the adults that were being captured. The entire process of socialization aboard the ship was the time captors were able to mold the children into the person they intended them to be once in America.<sup>[86]</sup>

A child, who was essentially reborn on the voyage to America, would be easier to train in the eyes of the owner. With young children, there are no old habits that need to be broken for them to adjust to slave life. On the other hand, adults were accustomed to their own lifestyles and had to be broken of their previous lifestyle to conform easily. Slave-owners also mentioned in journals and diaries that there was less confrontation or chance of revolt with the children because the only thing they knew was how to behave properly as a slave.<sup>[87]</sup> The adults were capable of comparing their enslaved lives to their lives of relative freedom in Africa. This allowed the adults to realize their rights were destroyed and caused them to revolt or disobey their owners.<sup>[88]</sup>

At first, the children were generally unaware of their slave status. Frederick Douglass, a former slave, remembered, "it was a long time before I knew myself to be a slave." It was only once he learned the definition of "Old master" when his troubles began to arrive. Many enslaved children had a similar upbringing as Frederick Douglass in that their lives seemed to be nearly the same as the white children in the community up until a certain age. That age did differ amongst slave owners, but generally the realization occurred when the white children would go to school and the black children would begin to work.

Unfortunately, the education of enslaved black children was incomparable to the education the whites received. Dilly Yelladay remembered that he "Couldn't go to school 'cept when it wus too wet to work." Additionally, Celia Robinson recalled, "I cannot read an' write. I have never been ter school but one month in my life. When I wus a little girl I had plenty ter eat, wear, an' a good time."<sup>[89]</sup> The white children received formal education while the black children either learned from their parents in their free time or simply did not learn at all. If the children were punished after behaving in a way their parents instructed them to, then the parent would feel at fault. Therefore, the children possessed the most valuable role in survival of both the parents and themselves because they needed to put the lessons they were taught into action.

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The work enslaved children performed varied by owner and size of plantation. Generally, young girls would be required to do chores that many free females during that time participated in. On the other hand, young boys often would have the same task until they were old enough to perform physical labor in the fields or learn a trade. Dilly Yelladay wrote, "Work, work, work, thirty acres in cotton an' cawn, cawn plowed till de 15<sup>th</sup> of August, plow, plow, plow hard ground, bad ground. Nine girls an' one boy workin' form sun to sun." Nevertheless, children were never idle during the day while enslaved in order to ensure survival.<sup>[90]</sup>

If the children did survive slavery by 1865, they were deemed emancipated by the law. This emancipation presented many challenges to their lives that were unforeseen by all. The search for displaced family members and the constant struggle for equality economically and socially were in the near future for all former slaves. Underlying every obstacle the former or enslaved black people faced were children supporting them emotionally and physically. The role the children played in their parents' lives ensured survival, and the relationships they created manifested an unwavering love that allowed them to survive the institution.

In conclusion, the lives of enslaved children were not small versions of experiences of enslaved adults. The enslaved children made slave communities stronger by attempting to preserve the innocence and youthfulness of everyone within the community. Also, the enslaved children had social lives that were beyond their relationships with their mothers, which often included siblings, other adults on the plantation, or their owner's children. For many children, the changes to their lives were not immediate after abolition due to the lack of opportunities available to them. Finally, enslaved children had a uniquely important role when it came to creating new viable African-American communities after emancipation.

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