# The Politics of the Archive and History's Accountability to the Enslaved

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## I

Somewhere along the thousands of miles of African Atlantic littoral that was the extended site of the transatlantic slave trade, some time in the more than four hundred years that the enterprise built on transacting in captive people endured, an event takes place aboard one of the vessels that served as the system's engine. Enslaved Africans gain decisive control of the vessel in which they are held captive: "The Captain being a'shore, the Slaves rose, kill'd one man and a Boy, and run the Sloop ashore and escaped."[1] The captives thereby take what was supposed to be a routine and mundane occurrence—according to the worldview of their captors—and turn it into an event that demanded documentation beyond the daily recording of shipboard routines. These events took place aboard the *Cape Coast* while the vessel was in the vicinity of Winneba, off the coast of present day Ghana, on September 6, 1721, and were narrated in the "Letter Books" that organized correspondence between the English Royal African Company's London headquarters and its employees in Africa and the Caribbean. In addition to reporting the status of the property the vessel had carried, the missive officials penned to describe the incident also offered an explanation of what had taken place: "It would be a very unaccountable history," the letter reads, "that Thirteen men & four boys Slaves should attempt to rise upon Seven White Men was it not that it seems they were all out of Irons by ye Master's orders."[2]

In the second chapter of *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*, I used this report to open a discussion of the slave ship's regime of racial violence, whereby shackles enabled European crews to dominate enslaved Africans who outnumbered them by a large margin and to naturalize the expectation that seven white men should overpower seventeen enslaved African men and boys. For the purposes of this essay, I am drawn back to this documentary fragment by the opportunity to consider

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the slavery archive as a contested site of knowledge production—one whose representational strategies support the daily practices of the slave ship and authorize an "accountable" history of slave trading that makes good satisfying sense to its intended readers, but which can never fully conceal the counter-history it seeks to disavow.

In the fragment mentioned above, I want to attend specifically to the author's use of counterfactual logic—rendering the otherwise accepted notion that seventeen is a number greater than seven as contrary to fact in the context of the slave ship. It is this rhetorical declaration that reassures readers of the stability and reliability (the "accountability") of the slave ship's normative regime of power. However, by his counterfactual statement the author also admits, if reluctantly, to the precariousness of the slave ship's regime. By positing the slave ship's normative power dynamics of racial violence in *counter*-factual terms, the author acknowledges the possibility of its antithesis—the uncomfortable plausibility of the "unaccountable" world in which seventeen *would* best seven. Even as he asserts confidence in a way of knowing—one we might call an arithmetic of racial violence wherein it is axiomatic that seven is a number greater than seventeen—he concomitantly admits to the instability of the epistemological claim. In other words, the author voices the conditionality that necessarily attends counterfactual logic.[3] As he explicitly states, what is at stake is not just the empirical domain of the slave ship but also its narration and, therefore, the idea of history itself. In this exceptional moment of anxiety, he makes explicit what the slavery archive's more normative rhetorical strategies aim to conceal and disavow: that there was never a moment when history and its accountability was not at stake.

It is this politics of knowledge production that Saidiya Hartman has diagnosed with exquisite care in "Venus in Two Acts," the essay to which this special issue on slavery and the archive responds.[4] One of two girls whose deaths aboard the eighteenth-century British slaver *Recovery* prompted an indictment against the ship's captain, "Venus" is mentioned only tangentially if at all in the several published accounts of the trial that pretended to adjudicate her death.[5] She represents "the hundreds of thousands of other girls who share [the] circumstances" of an existence that has "generated few stories," or more to the point, has generated "stories that [. . .] are not about them, but rather about the violence, excess, mendacity, and reason that seized hold of their lives, transformed them into commodities and corpses, and identified them with names tossed-off as insults and crass jokes."[6]

In this sense, Venus represents millions more: the twelve-and-one-half million counted in quantitative studies of the slave trade; and the "Sixty Million and more" to whom Toni Morrison dedicated the novel *Beloved*, those "who didn't make it from there to here and through."[7] She embodies the immeasurable weight of black lives made barely knowable by the violence of racial slavery, and "which are visible only in the moment of their disappearance."[8] Just as the official record produced an accountable history of events aboard the *Cape Coast* by explaining the exceptional error of a captain who left his captives unshackled (proving that culpability lay with human error and was not due to an erroneous calculus of racial violence), so too did the trial of John Kimber render an accountable history of events aboard the *Recovery*; the trial concluded with the acquittal of the captain and the marking of the death of the girl whose bludgeoned body was suspended from the ship's mast as one that, like the others, affirmed the normalcy and necessity of black death aboard the slave ship.

For Hartman, the slavery archive is a "death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body, an inventory of property, a medical treatise on gonorrhea, a few lines about a whore's life, an asterisk in the grand narrative of history."[9] All of which leaves in its wake a longing for stories the archive disavows: stories that can "redress" and "recuperate" the violence of slavery by bringing the enslaved (back) to life as subjects possessed of fully realized personhood and the biographies such animation implies.[10] We might say, then, that Hartman wants a story in which the enslaved subaltern can be heard to speak. But as Spivak has cautioned, not only can the subaltern not speak, but the pretense that she can is itself a function of our own hubris.[11] Hartman recognizes this as well; she acknowledges at the outset not only that hers is "an impossible goal" but also that had she heeded the urge to craft a story of and for Venus it would have been a romance, a story more about her own longing than one that "respect[s] the limits of what cannot be known."[12]

We might easily mistake Hartman's longing for a call to create the kind of stories only the novelist can craft. The literary artist has a certain freedom to invent at will details that would answer the questions the archive disavows, and, as Morrison has pointed out, the novelist can produce the on-the-ground scale needed to "cut [the story] down to size and see what these human beings were doing."[13] For this reason, "the historical Margaret Garner [was] fascinating, but, to a novelist, confining," she explained, referring to the woman whose failed attempt to escape slavery on an antebellum Kentucky

farm inspired the writing of *Beloved*.[14] Elsewhere, Morrison explained that while historical documents drew her attention to the phenomenon of the metal bit owners commonly used to punish slaves, their details were not sufficient to help her depict the character Paul D's experience of the torture device in the novel: "I realized that describing it would never be helpful; that the reader didn't need to *see* it so much as *feel* what it was like. I realized that it was important to imagine the bit as an active instrument, rather than simply as a curio or an historical fact. And in the same way I wanted to show the reader what slavery *felt* like, rather than how it looked."[15]

Hartman of course knows the important knowledge-producing work that fiction does to further our understanding of slavery. Here she is looking for something other than what the literary artist contributes. What she envisions as the "narratives written as counter-history" are never not engaged with the archive, however fraught that engagement might be.[16] Indeed, for Hartman, the relationship to the archive makes this a kind of writing that raises difficult questions regarding the "ethics of historical representation."[17] "How," she asks, "does one revisit the scene of subjection without replicating the grammar of violence? [. . .] Do the possibilities outweigh the dangers of looking (again)" at the violence of the slave trade?[18] If the slavery archive is a "mortuary," what are we doing when we "open the casket and look into the face of death?"[19] Does this not "subject the dead to new dangers and to a second order of violence?" Or, is it in fact through the medium of "the merchant's words" that we reach the enslaved in order to "generate a different set of descriptions from [the slavery] archive?"[20]

With remarkable precision and poetic insight, Hartman has identified several important methodological challenges we face when we aim to write histories of slavery that do not simply reproduce and reify the archive's "episteme" of silence with regard to the lives of the enslaved.[21] In what follows, I aim first to situate the politics of the slavery archive historiographically; I then reflect on my own engagement with the archive and share my thoughts on what the "lineaments" of deliberately counter-historical narratives of slavery might look like or, put differently, what the production of histories accountable to the enslaved might entail.[22]

## II

For as long as it has been a subject of professional scholarship, American slavery has exposed the methodological limits of the discipline of history.

And for just as long, a prolific list of radical intellectuals have made a tradition of trying to write the enslaved into history by challenging received understandings of the archive. At its most basic, this has entailed the simple demand to accord interpretive value to the documentary materials of the enslaved. Writing in the early decades of the twentieth century, pioneering black historian Carter G. Woodson challenged the merits of U. B. Phillips's *American Negro Slavery* (which would stand as the authoritative text on American slavery for some four decades) by criticizing Phillips for his privileging of the master's perspective and his multiple failures both "to understand what the Negroes have thought and felt and done" and "to fathom the Negro mind."[23] Likewise, W. E. B. Du Bois concluded his masterful *Black Reconstruction* with a discourse on method that has drawn attention to the politics of the archive. "What was slavery in the United States?" and "Just what did it mean to the owner and the owned?" he asked. "Shall we accept the conventional story of the old slave plantation and its owner's fine, aristocratic life of cultured leisure? Or shall we note slave autobiographies, like those of Charles Ball, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass; the careful observations of Olmsted and the indictment of Hinton Helper?"[24] A quarter century later, Richard Hofstadter castigated the happy slave "legend" that Phillips had popularized and enjoined that the study of slavery required scholars who would "not rule out the testimony of more critical observers, and who will realize that any history of slavery must be written in large part from the standpoint of the slave."[25]

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the dialectic interplay of radical political movements and growing skepticism about the "noble dream" of a universal, objective truth offered the conditions of possibility to respond to Woodson's call.[26] By the 1970s, what came to be called social history had thoroughly revised the master narrative on American slavery. The revisionism by which the enslaved finally came into view ". . . as an actor as well as someone acted upon" initiated a re-thinking of the archive that proceeded along two fronts.[27] First was the broader understanding of what constitutes the archive—the shift that Woodson and others had urged since the early twentieth century. Whereas Phillips had prompted a generation of historians to ignore published ex-slave autobiographies by his privileging of masters' narratives, Kenneth M. Stampp used these same materials to try to "know what slavery meant to the Negro" thus making him "a pioneer among white scholars."[28] And still others like John Blassingame, Lawrence Levine, and George P. Rawick pushed the

boundaries of what counted as legitimate sources for historical research by demonstrating the analytical and interpretive value of folklore, the WPA narratives and other widely available yet often overlooked resources—materials that had been produced by those who had worn slavery's chains but that had been categorized as unreliable and lacking in "authenticity."[29]

Second was the equally transformational shift to dispel the "untested" but nonetheless widely held assumption of archival scarcity—the notion that "the records for exploring" African American history "scarcely exist[ed]."[30] At its most straightforward, such a shift entailed no more than the effort simply to look: in Cornell University's manuscript collections, to cite one example, a young David Brion Davis "discover[ed]" the antislavery papers that launched his exploration of the cultural history of slavery in the modern West; and as a graduate student pursuing research on Africans and African Americans in early South Carolina, Peter H. Wood found that "information concerning Negroes within the colony, once sought, could not only be found but could hardly be avoided."[31]

But what equally shaped an emergent sense of archival abundance was the deployment of quantitative methods imported from the social sciences. Indeed, it was no accident that the new postwar social history often was referred to as "social *scientific*."[32] These newly incorporated methods transformed all manner of records collected by various bureaucratic arms of the state—including manuscript census returns, tax rolls, wills, inventories and the like—into a seemingly endless field of documentary materials. Once aggregated and subjected to statistical analysis, the deep well of measurable data yielded by these documents promised to lay open the lives of the nonelite masses positioned at the "bottom" of the socioeconomic and political hierarchies that shaped modern western societies. As Wood noted of demographic studies pioneered by historians of colonial New England towns, for example, they "had the little-recognized effect of making the study of *all* the people in a given population seem legitimate, logical, even necessary. The obvious but radical bottom line of sound demographic work is that everybody counts—not only the sinners as well as the elect, but women as well as men, children as well as adults, workers as well as those who live by their labor."[33] History "from below," or "from the bottom up," was born. Though first used by French historian and Annales School founder Lucien Febvre as early as the 1930s, credit for popularizing the "from below" formulation goes to E. P. Thompson and the postwar British Marxian tradition he helped shape.[34] The

"bottom up" formulation likewise has prewar origins but acquired vernacular currency in the 1960s, thanks largely to radical left historian Jesse Lemisch.[35] Both phrases reflected the rise to prominence of the new social history and its promise to make the writing of history itself a tool in the movements against systems of class, sex, and racial oppression being waged on both sides of the Atlantic.

Historian August Meier and sociologist Elliott Rudwick characterized the new social scientific approach as nothing less than a "methodological revolution in quantitative techniques that opened up hitherto inaccessible sources for the study of the inarticulate."[36] Regarding the study of American slavery, however, what is lost in uncritical celebration of the new approach is attention to how it also helped to sediment a theory of historical knowledge production that figured the archive as merely a repository of free-floating empirical facts to be lifted off the page by the researcher. In its narrowest iteration, such an approach morphed directly into the sense that, once they had been combed of their measurable data, archival materials were effectively denuded of relevant content and there was nothing more to be learned from them. The idea of archival abundance generally, and the growing faith in quantification more specifically, led to an implicit, and in some cases quite explicit, sense that historical knowledge production entailed nothing more or less than discovery of self-evident facts that, once revealed by the historian's detective-like work to clear away the proverbial dust of the archives, could simply "speak for themselves."[37]

I remember hearing the "let the documents speak" mantra as a graduate student preparing to visit the British National Archives to research a study of the transatlantic slave trade that I hoped would center the experience of the enslaved. I also remember being warned that I faced a daunting challenge to find material of sufficient quantity and qualitative detail to succeed. Yet when I immersed myself in the letters, accounts, ledgers, and reports that comprised the documentary record of England's Royal African Company, I found that the enslaved were a constant presence. It was when I approached the task of writing—of organizing what I had found and developing an analysis of my subject—that I felt something of the same disappointment and frustration Hartman has characterized as archival "silence."[38] I found that, despite having an abundance of archival material about the enslaved, I did not have the answers I wanted about the *experiences* of the enslaved—details that would reveal something of the interiority of their lives.

Much like Hartman, I of course had worried from the outset that this was already an epistemologically "impossible goal."[39] I was prepared not to find much in the way of direct archival record of what captive Africans said, felt, and thought while aboard the slave ship, or even much of what they did in that setting. But my hope and expectation had still been that I could breach the barrier of mediation by asking different questions and seeking different answers than those that had brought numerous predecessors to this same archive, thus reflecting a relationship that the editors of this volume have aptly called "a paradoxical one" that "both exposes the site of the possibility of history and its failure."[40] After all, the archive the slave traders produced is also a crucial artifact that, by its very materiality, manages to constitute the only evidence we have that some untold millions of enslaved Africans ever existed. How else do we ask the question we already know we cannot answer—"Who is Venus?"—except to hope that by the intimacy of our direct encounter with the archive we will produce some kernel of new knowledge?[41]

Yet I had no doubt that my engagement with this archive, one that had been mined so thoroughly already by others, had taught me new details about the lives of African captives in the transatlantic slave trade, details that I had not already learned from the scholarship of those historians who had preceded me. Gradually, I came to understand that putting words to what I thought I had learned required analytical attention to the archive's structure as much as to its content. Though I did not have a precise language for it at the time, I was coming to understand the archive itself as embodying part of the process of colonial violence.[42] I was effectively teaching myself how to attend to "archiving as a process rather than to archives as things," a shift that, as Ann Laura Stoler has usefully put it, reminds us to understand our task as something more than "an extractive enterprise" and to regard archives as sites "not [. . .] of knowledge retrieval but of knowledge production."[43] When approached this way, the archive opens a window onto "the conditions of possibility that shaped what could be written . . . what stories [could and] could not be told, and what [could and] could not be said."[44] Archiving, then, expresses a particular way of knowing that gives structure and meaning to its enunciations according to one or another "evidential paradigm[s]," as Carlo Ginzburg has termed the inner logics that guide such knowledge-producing practices. [45] In this sense, archives are a domain of power, what Stoler terms "cross-sections of contested knowledge" that function not only

as "transparencies on which power relations [are] inscribed" but also as "technologies of rule in themselves."[46]

If the Royal African Company's official account of events aboard the *Cape Coast* on September 6, 1721, aimed to inscribe one such "evidential paradigm," it also offered an unusually explicit invitation to observe the epistemological instability that attends all such representational practices. On reflection, I have come to understand the method I developed as I wrote *Saltwater Slavery* as taking its cues from such openings and aiming to tell the history that is accountable to the enslaved—the counter-history the archive tells only reluctantly. Its narration entails theorizing what we might call the counter-fact, by which I mean the fact the archive is seeking to ignore, marginalize and disavow—the detail it does not want to animate and make narratable. These are the facts that are dismissed and discounted by rhetorical strategies like the Royal African Company official's counterfactual logic described above; displaced to the perimeter space outside the lines of the ledger; or subordinated as addenda to the main text of the report.

Indeed, in the specific context of the Royal African Company archive, it became useful to understand much of its corpus of words as expressing an epistemological anxiety that gave the lie to the truths "mercantile writing" was meant to yield.[47] Developing a skeptical and critical understanding of the archive's "mode of representation that seemed to be transparent," I began to understand the numbers the archive centered and foregrounded in its ledgers and accounts as its strain toward the illusion of disinterested transparency, and I began to recognize its words as manifestation of its failure fully to attain this goal.[48] The inevitable necessity to indulge the rhetorical flourish of supplementary words placed on the margin, outside the ledger's lines, and framed as addenda to the formal report, all betrayed the artifice of the story the archive wanted to tell. If the ledger's numbers represented what the archive centered and foregrounded as its relevant "facts," the marginal and supplementary verbiage contained its "counter-facts"—the details that stood in tension, pulled in opposing directions, anticipated the derailment of intended outcomes.[49]

The need for words to explicate, qualify, and contextualize the numbers they accompanied reflected the degree to which numerical representation always fell short of the task of manufacturing comforting and harmonious stories out of the violence of transacting in human property. Numbers alone were not sufficient; the practices of slave trading were simply too messy and contested for neat containment in the simplified and only apparently

disinterested mode of quantification. The numbers never added up as intended in the neat and simple double entry form of the ledger. Put another way, slave trading always burst beyond the containment of the ledger and thus revealed its numbers for the fictions that they were—false representations meant to make a stark political contest over the commodification of a human life appear as a natural and foregone conclusion.

It thus became instructive to read a slave ship's ledger as a literary text that told a story rather than as a numerical container from which to extract data points for quantitative analysis. By this means, I was able to narrate the twenty-two transactions that put gold and one hundred captive Africans aboard a seventeenth-century slave ship.[50] Likewise, emplotting each instance of death aboard a slave ship as a singular biographical event helped me develop an analysis of shipboard mortality that gave interpretive weight to the captives' experience of "a journey in which some-*one* died fifty-one times."[51] The results are narratives that are meaningfully *counter*historical tales, precisely in the sense that they reorder the archive's epistemological grammar. By (re)figuring the subaltern not as the archive's object but rather as its historical subject—in the Hegelian sense of having "the kind of consciousness capable of imagining the need to represent reality as a history"—the narratives that emerge from such an approach do the recuperative work of restoring to the enslaved the capacity for biography that is otherwise foreclosed to them in the normative registers of modern liberalism.[52]

## III

If history's contribution to knowledge production is to offer universal and "truth-claiming" stories about the past, a number of theorists have brought critical attention to the false premises on which the modern enterprise rests.[53] Postcolonial theorists in particular have foregrounded the ways mainstream historical writing both assumes the bourgeois white male as the citizen-subject whose consciousness of the past it narrates, and naturalizes the ideologies and structures of power that have produced him and the global order of sovereign nation-states he inhabits.[54] In this sense, the silences we encounter in the slavery archive reflect the necessary failure of the attempt to represent subalterns in that idiom. History is always ideologically invested, and its power rests in large part on its methods of crafting only seemingly disinterested stories about the past. We might say, then, that what is at issue in the writing of histories of modern racial slavery is not the archive per se,

but rather the critical philosophical assumptions that shape and structure our understandings of history.

Against the backdrop of a discursive landscape that tends to hold history and literature in opposition, each as the foil against which the other can be defined, Hartman's call for counter-histories of slavery that sit "at the intersection of the fictive and the historical" suggests a way to mine the productive space that resides in between the false dichotomies of truth vs. fiction and fact vs. fantasy.[55] For Hartman, counter-history offers a way to "exceed or negotiate the constitutive limits of the archive" by its "'oppos[ition] . . . not only to dominant narratives, but also to prevailing modes of historical thought and methods of research.'"[56] The approach she develops reflects Hartman's preference to "engage a set of dilemmas about representation, violence, and social death, not by using the form of a metahistorical discourse, but by performing the limits of writing history through the act of narration."[57] What she calls "critical fabulation" is "written with and against the archive" and thus strives to "imagine what cannot be verified," while also refusing to "exceed the limits of the sayable dictated by the archive."[58] It is an experimentation with narrative form that deliberately "confus[es] narrator and speakers" in order to "engulf authorized speech in the clash of voices."[59]

This kind of exploration of alternative narrative forms is something historians also could pursue. Indeed, as early American historians Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton have suggested, it is worth remembering that the monograph form is not a given literary genre but rather one whose "invention" was required to accommodate the "emergence of scientific historiography at the turn of the twentieth century" and its need for a "literary form . . . that was capable of conveying the new historical knowledge with more self-conscious rigor than previous historians had shown."[60] We might usefully heed their call to "recognize[e] the enduring relationship between form and content and, through literary craft, seek authorial voices and rhetorical strategies consistent with the points we wish to make."[61]

The metahistorical discourse that Hartman rejected in favor of experimentation with narrative form can be of enormous value in the writing of counter-histories. If the slavery archive aims to admit only those stories that naturalize white male dominion over African majorities, it also always unwittingly "yield[s] . . . critique" of its epistemological claims.[62] The colonial archive's silences and disavowals are themselves an active epistemological gesture that leaves in its wake a trace of its own processes and maneuvers.

Our task, then, is to tell the stories that bring the ghostly outline of that tracing fully into view. I understand what is possible as counter-history by way of metahistorical analysis to be politically necessary, not because it can ever fully recuperate the subaltern, but rather because by its critique it reveals the otherwise naturalized and taken-for-granted structures of power that produce subaltern figures as such.

For many historians, the notion of reading the archive "against the grain" has become an especially popular approach to writing histories of subalterns whose archival imprint registers silence. However, its common usage often sees it detached from the larger metahistorical critique for which its author, Walter Benjamin, coined the phrase. As part of his proposal for a historical materialist counter to historicism, Benjamin called for a stance of "cautious detachment" from the tropes of normative history.[63] "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism," he wrote of the "cultural treasures" that are the signposts of normative history.[64] It was to interpret and write the past in deliberate opposition to the telos of historicism that he advised the historical materialist to "regard it as his task to brush history against the grain."[65] But when we detach the "against the grain" metaphor from its metahistorical context, we reduce it to a methodological jargon that has no referent. Without clear understanding of what the "grain" signifies, the phrase becomes nothing more than a prescriptive call to treat the documentary fragment as though it stands apart from and outside, rather than structurally embedded within, the politics of knowledge production. The genealogical method that Foucault has outlined as a critique of history's production of teleological accounts can also be a useful tool for counter-historical analysis. Foucault's call to draw attention to "the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things which continue to exist and have value for us," and his assertion that the story that thus emerges "has value as a critique" gestures to the knowledge-producing work stories that are unaccountable to normative history's citizen-subject can do.[66]

The counter-history, the history that is accountable to the enslaved, cannot fulfill our yearning for romance, our desire to hear the subaltern speak, or our search for the subaltern as heroic actor whose agency triumphs over the forces of oppression. Instead, such counter-history reveals that what registers as agency in the liberal philosophical paradigm is always already foreclosed to the subaltern in all but rare and exceptional circumstances, such as the example of

the *Cape Coast*. What comes into view instead are the inner workings of power and violence. But in contrast to Hartman, I understand this as work that does not re-violate the enslaved but rather disrupts the archive's naturalization of the violence it narrates. I understand counter-history as establishing the epistemological conditions of possibility for a history of violence that can conclude that Venus was murdered, and that so, too, were the "Sixty Million and more" whose deaths liberal historical accounts of modern racial slavery cannot but naturalize.[67] It is a history of slavery that demands of us a reckoning with the as-yet-unresolved question of history's accountability to the enslaved. In this sense, it is a history of the present whose irresolution is made all the more manifest by the eerie resonance between a 1669 Virginia statute sanctioning the "Casual Killing of Slaves" and what we might call, after Du Bois, the twenty-first-century problem of whether black life matters enough to regard the deaths of unarmed African Americans at the hand of police and vigilante citizens as murder.[68]

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## Notes

1. Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (2007), 33.

2. Ibid.

3. See Nelson Goodman, *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*, 4th ed. (1983).

4. Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12 no. 2 (2008): 1–14.

5. *The Trial of Captain John Kimber, for the Supposed Murder of an African Girl* (1792); *The Trial of Captain John Kimber, for the Murder of Two Female Negro Slaves, on board the Recovery, African Slave Ship* (1792); *The Whole of the Proceedings and Trial of Captain John Kimber, for the Wilful Murder of a Negro Girl* (1792).

6. Hartman, "Venus," 2.

7. For the most widely accepted estimate of the number of enslaved Africans transported in the transatlantic slave trade, see *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, www.slavevoyages.org. For Morrison quotation, see Elizabeth Kastor, "Toni Morrison's Beloved Country: The Writer and Her Haunting Tale of Slavery," October 5, 1987, *Washington Post*, October 5, 1987, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/

lifestyle/1987/10/05/toni-morrisons-beloved-country-the-writer-her-haunting-tale-of-slavery/9553c355–9b50–4572-afea-d532b68387ab/.

8. Hartman, "Venus," 12.

9. Ibid., 2.

10. Ibid., 3.

11. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (1988), 271–313.

12. Hartman, "Venus," 3, 4.

13. Morrison in Kastor, "Toni Morrison's Beloved Country," 2.

14. Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, Reprint ed. (2004), xvii.

15. Morrison, "The Art of Fiction No. 134," *Paris Review*, 128 (1993): 11 (emphasis Morrison's).

16. Hartman, "Venus," 4.

17. Ibid., 5.

18. Ibid., 4.

19. Ibid., 4, 5.

20. Ibid., 5, 7.

21. Ibid., 3.

22. Ibid.

23. Carter G. Woodson, review of *American Negro Slavery* in *Journal of Negro History* 4, no. 1 (1918): 103.

24. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (1935; repr.,1969), 715.

25. Richard Hofstadter, "U. B. Phillips and the Plantation Legend," *Journal of Negro History* 29, no. 2 (1944): 124.

26. Charles A. Beard, "That Noble Dream," *American Historical Review* 41, no. 1 (1935): 74–87; Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (1988).

27. Peter H. Wood, "'I Did the Best I Could for My Day': The Study of Early Black History During the Second Reconstruction, 1960 to 1976," *William and Mary Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1978): 193, citing historian Benjamin Quarles in the preface to the 1968 reprint edition of Lorenzo Greene's *The Negro in Colonial New England*.

28. Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (1956), vii; August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession, 1915–1980* (1986), 175.

29. U. B. Phillips, quoted in John W. Blassingame, "Introduction," in *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (1977), xvii. See Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (1972); Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (1977); George P. Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community* (1972); Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* (1972).

30. Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (1974), xv.

31. Meier and Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession*, 163; Wood, *Black Majority*, xvii.

32. Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 178 (emphasis mine), 179–80, 380, 384–85 on debate about the scientific dimension of the new social history.

33. Wood, "'I Did the Best I Could for My Day'," 190 (emphasis Wood's).

34. Describing the work of recently deceased and fellow Annales school historian Albert Mathiez, Febrve refers to Mathiez as having been interested in history of the masses rather than elites ("*histoire de masses et non de vedettes*") and history viewed from the bottom rather than from the top ("*histoire vue d'en bas et non d'en haut*"). Lucien Febvre, "Albert Mathiez: un tempérament, une éducation," *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* 4, no. 18 (1932): 576; E. P. Thompson, "History from Below," *The Times Literary Supplement,* April, 7, 1966.

35. Jesse Lemisch, "The American Revolution Seen from the Bottom Up," in *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History*, ed. Barton J. Bernstein (1968): 3–45. Peter Novick cited usage of the phrase by Frederick Jackson Turner in private correspondence in the 1920s; Caroline F. Ware and Constance McLaughlin Green appear to have been the first to use the phrase in print in 1940. See Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 442n; Caroline F. Ware, "Introductory Note," in *The Cultural Approach to History*, ed. Caroline F. Ware for the American Historical Association (1940), 273; Constance McLaughlin Green, "The Value of Local History," in Ibid., 275.

36. Meier and Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession*, 178.

37. Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 179, 441; Stampp, "Introduction," in, *Reckoning with Slavery: A Critical Study in the Quantitative History of American Negro Slavery*, ed., Paul A. David, Herbert G. Gutman, Richard Sutch, Peter Temin, and Gavin Wright (1976), 1–2.

38. Hartman, "Venus," 3.

39. Ibid.

40. Marisa Fuentes and Brian Connolly, Introduction to this special issue.

41. Hartman, "Venus," 2.

42. Ann Laura Stoler, "Archival Dis-Ease: Thinking Through Colonial Ontologies," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 7, no. 2 (2010): 215–216; Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015), 3.

43. Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science*, 2 (2002): 87, 90.

44. Ibid., 91. See also Stoler, "The Pulse of the Archive," in *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (2010), 20; Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (1972), 129.

45. Carlo Ginzburg, "Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm," in *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method*, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi (1989): 96–125.

46. Stoler, "Colonial Archives," 87.

47. Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (1998), xviii, 12, and 17 on mercantile writing and its "constitutive fictions" (12).

48. Ibid., 13.

49. See Stoler's similar attention to colonial archives whose "writerly practices . . . chronicle failed projects, delusional imaginings, [and] equivocal explanations," in "The Pulse of the Archive," 21.

50. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*, 65–67.

51. Ibid., 152 (emphasis in original).

52. Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (1987), 14. See also Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015), 3, on the project of "unsettling" the "genealogy of modern liberalism."

53. Quotation from Nancy Partner, "Hayden White: The Form of the Content," *History and Theory* 37, no. 2 (1998): 166. See especially Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (1968); Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (1972); Idem, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology (Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984, Vol. 2*, ed. James Faubion (1998): 369–91; Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973); Idem, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (1987); and Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995).

54. See especially Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000); and Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents*.

55. Hartman, "Venus," 12.

56. Ibid., 11, 12–13, quoting Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, "Counterhistory and the Anecdote," in *Practicing New Historicism* (2000): 52.

57. Hartman, "Lose Your Mother," 13.

58. Ibid., 11, 12.

59. Ibid.

60. Fred Anderson and Andrew R. L. Cayton, "The Problem of Fragmentation and the Prospects for Synthesis in Early American Social History," *William and Mary Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (1993), 304.

61. Ibid., 305.

62. Lisa Lowe, "History Hesitant," *Social Text 125* 33, no. 4 (2015): 87.

63. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 256.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid., 257.

66. Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 374.

67. On violence as an analytical category, see the Histories of Violence Collective. http://www.hovcollective.org/.

68. Daina Ramey Berry and Jennifer L. Morgan, "#Blacklivesmatter Till They Don't: Slavery's Lasting Legacy," *History News Network*, December 8, 2014, http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/157816.