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Peculiar Institutions**:** Representations of Nineteenth-Century Black Women's Madness and Confinement in Slavery and Asylums

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Peculiar Institutions: Representations of Nineteenth-Century Black Women's Madness and Confinement in Slavery and Asylums

by

Diana Martha Louis
Doctor of Philosophy

B.A., Cornell University, 2008

Advisors: Mark Sanders, Ph.D. and Benjamin Reiss, Ph.D.

An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in English
2014

Abstract

Peculiar Institutions: Representations of Nineteenth-Century Black Women's Madness and Confinement in Slavery and Asylums
By Diana Martha Louis

This dissertation examines representations of black women's madness and confinement in slavery and asylums in the nineteenth-century. It begins with an examination of black women in slavery, then moves to a discussion of the connections between slavery and asylums and ends with an examination of black women in one post-bellum asylum. It uses theories of intersectionality, madness and confinement to analyze Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (*ILSG*) alongside reconstructed narratives of Viney W., Jane G., Olivia W., Alice M. and Amanda C., black women who were sent to Georgia Lunatic Asylum (GLA) between 1881 and 1894. I argue that Harriet Jacobs' narrative reveals how slavery not only harmed the bodies of black women; it also created mental illness. Through her depictions of the predicament of black enslaved women, Jacobs uncovers how the institution psychologically wounded them. Harriet Jacobs' theorization that slavery was detrimental to black mental health reflects what I call anti-slavery psychiatry. By putting African American anti-slavery psychiatry in conversation with nineteenth-century pro-slavery psychiatric discourses, I establish how slavery and asylums came to be interrelated. Finally, the project examines how the interrelation between slavery and asylums plays out in the life stories of formerly enslaved women who were sent to GLA. An analysis of their experiences shows that during and after slavery medical discourses shaped the category of madness and justified confinement in asylums. Ultimately, this study shows that for black women slavery and the asylum were not only similar but also interdependent. Madness and confinement (in slavery or asylums) are so inextricably linked that to consider one without the other leaves an understanding of either severely lacking. Furthermore, the intersecting discourses of madness, confinement, race and gender shaped black women's unique experiences in both institutions.

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Acknowledgements

This dissertation is truly the product of broad communal support. The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship foundation provided crucial financial support for writing the dissertation. The Social Science Research Council Mellon Mays Graduate Initiatives Grant, James William Richardson Dissertation Completion Fellowship, Emory Race and Difference Initiative and Laney Graduate School all contributed research funding.

Numerous people have contributed to this project by reading partial or complete drafts. For feedback on early iterations of the research and excitement about the project, I would like to thank Sander Gilman, Frances Smith Foster, Pam Hall, Jennifer Thomas, Michael Ralph and the late Rudolf Byrd. Thomas Fabisiak and Sarah Richards provided superb critiques on countless drafts of this dissertation. Michael McGee, Shermaine Jones and Rebecca Kumar generously commented on later versions of the dissertation. The members of my dissertation committee, Benjamin Reiss, Mark Sanders, Mab Segrest and Lawrence Jackson, all provided shrewd criticism, saved me from many errors and nurtured my ideas.

I want to thank members of my academic cohort and good friends at Emory University, Asha French, Chanel Craft Tanner, Derrick Cohens and Tina Colvin. They commented on drafts of the dissertation and contributed significantly to its conceptual framework. I also received a tremendous amount of support from a community of people at Emory including Alexis Wells, Shively Jackson, Alphonso Saville, Jamil Drake, Jessie Dunbar, Guirdex Masse',Rachel Dudley, Whitney Peoples, Meredith Coleman Tobias, Maureen McCarthyJenny Heil and Lovia Mondesir. The English department staff, Melanie Tipnis, Gerri Moreland, Jacque Aly and Len Cassamas provided me with a steady stream of warm smiles, good conversation and genuine concern. Carol Anderson and Diane Diakite were always in my corner; they offered much appreciated guidance.

Without Gloria Jisaraie, Mashadi Matabane, Jomo Wilson and Tamara Mason, I literally would not have been able to finish the dissertation. In the final stages of writing I developed an overuse hand injury. They spent long hours typing while I dictated to them. Beyond helping me to articulate my ideas, they were enthusiastic about my research.

I am grateful for mentorship from Reginald Wilburn, Monica Martinez, Denise Sepulveda and Kelechi Ajunwa, who help me navigate graduate school. I am also indebted to my advisor at Cornell University, Eric Cheyfitz, for his generosity and rigorous intellectual training. My hand physical therapist, Marcia Toye-Vego deserves special mention. Twice a week she cheered me on, worked through ideas with me and helped me stick to a rigorous schedule for completion.

My close friends and family kept me grounded throughout my educational journey. I am grateful for the laughter, love and joy they freely gave to me. This group is comprised of my sisters, Monique Louis, Jessie Louis, Annette Louis and Mary Rosa Louis, and my brothers, Ardis Milton, Lunanilo Mkayula and Gary Dort. My many nieces and nephews reminded me that parks, sports and step routines were much cooler than writing a dissertation. The group also includes my closest friends: Miriam Solis, Abena Sackey, Ivy McCottry, Beau Gaitors, Monique Thomas, Sakeena Everrett, Kristina Weems, Tracey Martin, Kashif Powell, Melinda Jean Louis, Kertia Duga and Erin Ferguson.

I have been upheld by the prayers of my mother, Mary Louis, and my other mothers, Nancy Toussaint, Darlene Evans, Audrey Morgan Faustina Sackey, Madizaino Giblin, Agnes Dugazon, Jean Giarrusso, Deborah Cuevas and Yolanda Clarke. My late father, Daniel Louis, and my other fathers, Kenneth Clarke, David Sackey, Jim Giblin, Ira Katz and Eddie Caston, all encouraged me along the way. Finally, my wonderful husband Gabriel Peoples enriches my life in every way, and for that I am eternally grateful.

Peculiar Institutions**:** Representations of Nineteenth-Century Black Women's Madness and Confinement in Slavery and Asylums

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Introduction
Peculiar Institutions: Representations of Nineteenth-Century Black Women's Madness and Confinement in Slavery and Asylums

This dissertation examines representations of black women's madness and confinement in slavery and asylums in the nineteenth century.[1] It moves across time to explore the markers and constructions of black women's experiences of madness and confinement; it begins with an examination of black women in slavery, then moves to a discussion of the connections between slavery and asylums and ends with an examination of black women in one post-bellum asylum. It uses theories of intersectionality, madness and confinement to analyze Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (*ILSG*) alongside reconstructed narratives of Viney W., Jane G., Olivia W., Alice M. and Amanda C., black women who were sent to Georgia Lunatic Asylum (GLA) between 1881 and 1894.[2] Together these sources provide rich insight into how black women's

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[1] It should be noted that there were asylums during slavery. I provide a discussion of pre-emancipation asylums in Chapter Two and in the Conclusion.

[2] In 1837, the Georgia Legislature allocated commission fund (or delete the 'a' before commission) for the establishment of the hospital. The commission purchased forty acres of land, and in 1842 the first patient entered the "Georgia Asylum for Lunatics, Idiots and Epileptics." The hospital had several name changes: Georgia State Sanitarium (1899), Milledgeville State Hospital (1929), Central State Hospital (1976). Henry Hurd, ed., *The Institutional Care of the Insane in the United States and Canada,* vol. 2 (1916; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1973), 161; For name changes see Mab Segrest, "'Exalted on the Ward: Mary Roberts,' the Georgia State Sanitarium, and the Psychiatric 'Specialty' of Race," *American Quarterly*, 66 no.1 (2014), 71 The hospital is located in Milledgeville, Georgia, which was the capital of Georgia from 1804 to 1868. The hospital and town occupy land originally belonging to the Creek Indians, who ceded it in the Treaty of Fort Wilkinson (1802). For more on the history of Creek removal in Georgia see Kathryn E. Holland Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels: The Creek Indian Trade with Anglo-America, 1685-1815* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993) and Michael D. Green, *The Politics of Indian Removal: Creek Government and Society in Crisis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982). Milledgeville is located just south of Eatonton, the birthplace of Alice Walker. Milledgeville was also home to the acclaimed Southern writer Flannery O'Connor. Prior to 1815, Milledgeville was seen as a simple and rather crude frontier

experiences of madness and confinement were vexed, multilayered and ongoing.

This study considers black women's experiences in slavery and asylums in the context of the changing circumstances of the nineteenth century. The nineteenth century is an ideal historical period to explore such connections because therein we witness the end of one institution (slavery) and the expansion of the other (asylums). The dreams of abolitionists and mental health reformers were, respectively, realized and then shattered. In 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution abolished slavery. The Fourteenth Amendment granted citizenship to African Americans in 1868. Finally, by way of the Fifteenth Amendment, African American men were granted the right to vote in 1870.. Despite these political gains, most African Americans remained in poverty, with limited access to sufficient employment, housing, education and health care.

With regard to asylums, in the 1840s there was a great deal of optimism concerning the curability of mental illness. By the 1850s those ideas were quickly fading. In place of optimism was general pessimism among superintendents and widespread

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town. Widespread were gambling, dueling, and hateful political feuds. By the antebellum period, Milledgeville had become more prosperous and respected. The countryside was propelled forward by the cotton boom, which increased the demand for slave labor. Slaves were transported from the Upper South, and by 1828, the town was comprised of 1,599 inhabitants, 789 of whom were free whites, 27 of whom were free blacks, and 783 of whom were enslaved blacks. Simple clapboard houses of the early 1800s were replaced by elegant dwellings, colossal porticos, cantilevered balconies, embellished pediments, and fanlighted doorways. Milledgeville's governor's mansion, built in 1836, remains one of the most spectacular examples of Greek revival architecture in America. Although many of these structures were designed by acclaimed architects John Marlor (1789-1835) and Daniel Pratt (1799-1873), the buildings were a result of the workmanship of enslaved black carpenters, masons, and laborers. For a history of Milledgeville see James Bonner, *Milledgeville: Georgia's Antebellum Capital*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1978); "A Guidebook for Milledgeville, Georgia," *Bulletin of G.S.C.W., Milledgeville, Georgia* 34 no. 3 (1949).

custodial care of the insane.[3] Most strikingly, new thinking about the hereditary basis of mental illness culminated in eugenics. In the second half of the century, enthusiasm for the moral treatment, which supported the practice of pursuing multiple approaches to restoring health, was replaced by general disease categories and uniformity in treatment methods.[4] These overlapping institutional developments had a distinct impact on black women. Even as medical beliefs about how to treat and care for "the insane" changed over the course of the century, pre-emancipation ideas about race, gender and insanity lingered to shape black women's lives. To gain an understanding of nineteenth-century black women's lives, this dissertation sets out to answer questions about their experiences in slavery and asylums. How did madness and confinement function in slavery? How was slavery connected to asylums? How did madness and confinement function in asylums? How did black women's particular raced and gendered existence impact the quality of their lived experiences inside both institutions?

Scholarly Contribution

Addressing these questions required me to draw from three bodies of scholarship

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[3] The treatment method often involved mechanical restraints and harsh punishment. By the 1870s (and up to the 1890s) From the 1870s through the 1890s, custodial care of the insane was the general practice in state-run hospitals. The first generation of hopeful superintendents was replaced by a younger group who lacked an enthusiastic commitment to treating the insane. They also lacked charisma and a standardized approach to administration (each superintendent ran his asylum according to his own preferences and outlook).

[4] See Noralee Frankel, *Break Those Chains at Last: African Americans 1860-1880*, eds. Robin Kelley and Earl Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Jacqueline Jones *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage, 1985); Jim Downs, *Sick from Freedom: African-American Illness and Suffering during the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

including literary, historical and cultural studies on 1) confinement in slavery; 2) confinement in pre- and post-emancipation asylums; and 3) women and madness. Answering the central questions of this project also allowed me to contribute to each of these bodies of scholarship. This section details how the present study contributes to previous scholarship. It also discusses the intervention and major arguments of the project.

Previous studies on black women's confinement by literary critics, historians and cultural theorists such as Jean Fagan Yellin, Deborah Gray White, Hazel Carby, Tara Green, Valerie Smith, Angela Davis, Rafia Zafar, Frances Smith Foster, Kimberly Wallace Sanders, Todd Savitt, Nell Irvin Painter, Dorothy Roberts, Jacqueline Jones, Stephanie Li and Gabrielle Foreman demonstrate that black women experienced slavery differently than their black male counterparts or white women. This distinct experience, the scholars contend, is evident in several aspects of black women's lives, including the following: rape and sexual violence, extreme physical labor, exclusion from white standards of womanhood, exploitation of reproductive capacities and severance of family ties. These studies focus primarily on how slavery impacted the bodies of black women.

Moving this scholarship forward, my examination of Harriet Jacobs' narrative reveals that slavery harmed not only the bodies of black women distinctively; it also created mental illness among them in particular ways. Furthermore, Jacobs' narrative illustrates how bodily and psychological harm are distinct yet interrelated. Through her depictions of the predicament of black enslaved women, Jacobs uncovers how the institution psychologically wounded them. Jacobs makes the case that slavery uniquely affected the minds of black women through descriptions of severed family ties, suicide

attempts, death wishes, sexual and physical abuse and her seven-year concealment in her grandmother's garret. Embracing Barbara Christian's contention that African American writers theorize about various aspects of American culture, society and life in their cultural productions, I argue that Harriet Jacobs' discussions of mental suffering and slavery constitute a valuable conception of the relationship between madness and confinement.[5] I contend that her ideas were relevant to nineteenth-century national discussions about the relationship between slavery and insanity.

Studies on slavery and insanity as well as documentary, cultural and social histories of asylums have been conducted by scholars such as Sander Gilman, Gerald Grob, Norman Dain, David Rothman, Johnathan Metzl, Benjamin Reiss, Mab Segrest and Peter McCandless. These scholars consider how debates about slavery and insanity affected the approach to caring for blacks, both enslaved and free, who were labeled the "colored insane." However, they primarily detail how slaveholders, physicians, census-takers, jailers and federal, state and local legislators believed that slavery safeguarded against insanity among blacks (enslaved and free). They also note how these beliefs resulted in the deplorable and unequal treatment of the colored insane. Complicating this scholarship, I argue that these actors' perspectives reflect what I call pro-slavery psychiatry. Pro-slavery psychiatry arguments arose from two separate, yet cross-fertilizing, spheres of thought. In one sphere, psychiatrists, superintendents and asylum reformers such as Dorothea Dix, Samuel Woodward, Edward Jarvis, John Minson Galt and Theophilus Powell inadvertently reinforced pro-slavery discourses. For example, these actors perpetuated the notion that slavery provided mental health benefits to African

[5] Christian asserts that theorizing appears in narrative forms, stories, riddles and proverbs. Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory," *Cultural Critique* no. 6 (1987): 52.

Americans in their writings about insanity and asylum keeping. In the other sphere, politicians, physicians and slaveholders such as Samuel Cartwright, George Fitzhugh, C.B. Hayden and Secretary of State John C. Calhoun contributed to mainstream psychiatric discourses.[6] These actors made the same claim in their scientific studies and political treatises. The meshing together of the two fields resulted in pro-slavery psychiatric thought, which is identifiable by its two primary assumptions: 1) slavery was beneficial to the mental health of blacks and 2) the maintenance of pre-emancipation race relations was ideal for the mental health of blacks after slavery ended.

Further nuancing studies on slavery and insanity, I add to the discussion the voices of African Americans, Harriet Jacobs in particular. Harriet Jacobs' theorization that slavery was not beneficial, but instead extremely detrimental, to the mental health of blacks reflects what I call anti-slavery psychiatry. African American anti-slavery psychiatry refers to a motif or theoretical current in literature and other cultural productions by African Americans that, in the service of abolition and later the attainment of racial equality, implicitly or explicitly engage the reigning ideas and assumptions of American psychiatry. By putting African American anti-slavery psychiatry in conversation with contemporary pro-slavery psychiatry, I establish how slavery and asylums came to be interrelated.

Finally, this project creates a space for scholarship on black women's experiences of madness and confinement in post-emancipation asylums. Because there are no studies on black women in nineteenth-century asylums, I bring together three bodies of research, including studies on women and madness, post-emancipation asylums and post-slavery

[6] These categories were not mutually exclusive because slaveholders were also often physicians, psychiatrists or politicians.

confinement, to uncover their stories.

Scholars who write on women and madness, including Phyllis Chesler, Elaine Showalter, Mary Wood, Susan Hubert, Jeffrey Geller and Maxine Harris, contend that female asylum narrators held valuable perspectives on their confinement, which often clashed with those of asylum administrators, family members, police officers and politicians. These scholars also claim that there are several key themes in women's madness narratives including, but not limited to, the significance of motherhood and family ties, the discussion of asylum life, and the meaning of in/sanity. While these scholars show how gender shapes white women's experiences of madness and confinement, they exclude the experiences of black women entirely. Nineteenth-century black women's unique experiences also remain unexamined in post-emancipation asylum studies. Post-emancipation asylum studies detail the deplorable conditions and treatment of African Americans who were labeled as the colored insane, but they focus on race without a serious examination of how the intersection of race and gender shaped black women's distinct experiences of confinement.

Scholars of confinement (historians, cultural theorists and literary critics) such as Tara Green, Stephanie Li, Tera Hunter, Deborah Gray White, Noralee Frankel and Leslie Schwalm are sensitive to the intersectionality of race and gender in black women's lives. These scholars document black women's concerns and experiences after slavery with respect to labor, family, education and physical/sexual exploitation. These facets of life, they show, shaped both the material realities of black women and their conceptions of womanhood. These scholars consider black women's experiences of confinement in different spaces such as prisons and Jim Crow society; they also consider the ways

confinement manifests socially, culturally or physically across time, space and place. However, these studies give little attention to how slavery's psychic wounding of black women reverberated across time, and no attention to the asylum as a critical space of confinement for them.

I bring together studies on women and madness, post-emancipation asylums and black women's post-slavery confinement to analyze life stories of the GLA women.[7] An analysis of their experiences of madness and confinement shows that during and after slavery medical discourses shaped the category of madness and justified confinement in asylums. Their narratives also reveal the interwoven social discourses of gender, race and mental illness on which the post-slavery criteria for African American female sanity were based. They uncover the role American psychiatry played in making black women mad, in the senses of both constructing disorder according to prevailing notions of black femininity and inflicting real psychological harm within asylums. Finally, their narratives reveal how black women's experiences in the asylum contrasted with their black male and white (male and female) counterparts. Given their unique raced and gendered

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[7] I understand accounts of these women's lives to be madness narratives. I use Susan Hubert's definition of a madness narrative. She contends that madness narratives include "novels, journals, anonymous accounts, and narratives presented by an interlocutor, as well as traditional autobiographies." Hubert's definition of madness narratives is useful because it allows us to consider the stigmatization of individuals who were labeled insane. *Questions of Power: The Politics of Women's Madness Narratives* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002), 19. I also recognize these women's stories as confinement narratives because the asylum is a form of incarceration. I use Tara Green's definition of a confinement narrative. Green contends that confinement narratives are "set entirely or partially in a place of confinement including plantations, prisons, and segregated societies, and they tell of African Americans' experiences with incarcerations." Tara Green, *From the Plantation to the Prison: African-American Confinement Literature*, (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2008), 4. Because this study reads the historical records as narratives, the present tense will be used to describe events in the texts.

existence, we can conjecture that their views about the parameters of in/sanity, asylum life and motherhood would have been informed by their past experiences of enslavement. As Harriet Jacobs' narrative shows, they would likely have entered the asylum with psychic wounds from slavery. In any case, the conditions of the asylum including sexual and physical abuse, separation from children and families, excessive labor and white hostility echoed the conditions of slavery, and would have created new wounds, and/or exacerbated old ones.

Ultimately, this study shows that for black women both slavery and the asylum were "peculiar institutions."[8] The most peculiar aspect of these institutions is not that they were similar, but rather that they were interdependent. Madness and confinement (whether in slavery or asylums) are so inextricably linked that to consider one without the other leaves an understanding of either severely lacking. Furthermore, the primary materials of this study reveal that the intersecting discourses of madness, confinement, race and gender shaped black women's unique experiences in both institutions.

On Sources

Investigating black women's experiences in both institutions is a difficult task. There are a plethora of sources and sites for examining their stories. For example, countless slave narratives depict madness and confinement, including those by female

[8] The phrase "peculiar institution" was used to refer to the institution of slavery. The meaning of "peculiar" in this expression is "one's own," that is, referring to something distinctive to or characteristic of a particular place or people. It was most used to describe a collective trait associated with slavery: "our peculiar institution" or "the South's peculiar institution." Southerners used the term to signify that only they as insiders could understand the institution's complexities and its necessity. The phrase was used during the first half of the nineteenth century, especially in legislative bodies, because the word slavery was seen as improper.

authors such as Mary Price, Hannah Crafts, Mattie Johnson and Harriet Wilson and male authors such as Frederick Douglass, John Brown (of Georgia), Solomon Northup and William Grimes. To a lesser extent, there are sites to examine black women's experiences of madness and confinement in asylums during slavery. Although planters usually sent for local doctors to treat their colored insane small numbers of African Americans were treated in asylums before emancipation.[9]

After emancipation, a variety of sources represent madness and confinement among black women including the Works Progress Administration (WPA) slave narratives, literary texts by writers such as Pauline Hopkins and Elizabeth Keckley, and even texts by white writers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Lydia Child. In regard to post-emancipation asylums, records exist from several hospitals that treated African Americans. For example, Alabama had a separate hospital for the colored insane under the same management as the hospital for white patients.[10] North Carolina and Virginia

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[9] For more on treatments for insanity on plantations see Todd Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery: The Diseases and Health Care of Blacks in Antebellum Virginia* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 247-279; William Postell*, The Health of Slaves on Southern Plantations* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 86-7. For discussion of blacks in colonial asylums see Henry Hurd, ed., *The Institutional Care of the Insane in the United States and Canada,* vol. 1 (1916; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1973), 371-80. The Western State Hospital in Virginia refused to take blacks and was also otherwise generally more selective about the patients it served. For example, it preferred the recent insane over chronic cases and did not usually accept patients coming from jails or almshouses. The Eastern State Hospital in Virginia took free black patients, but it was also seen as a pauper institution. Norman Dain, *Disordered Minds: The First Century of Eastern State Hospital in Williamsburg, Virginia 1766- 1866* (Williamsburg: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1971), 105. A small number of blacks were also housed with poor accommodations at the Worcester Hospital, the prototype of the modern state hospital, in Massachusetts. Gerald Grob, *The State and the Mentally Ill: A History of Worchester State Hospital in Massachusetts, 1830-1920*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 50n.

[10] Hurd, *The Institutional Care*, vol. 2, 377-8. For commentary on the state of black wards/hospitals see McCandless, *Moonlight, Magnolias, and Madness*, 284.

hospitals had separate wards for African Americans starting in 1880 and 1885, respectively.[11] The first all-black mental asylum was the Central State Lunatic Asylum for Colored Insane (currently Central State Hospital) in Petersburg, Virginia, which opened in 1870. Although there have been no studies on the hospital, University of Texas at Austin Professor of Urban Politics King Davis is undertaking a project to digitize the hospital's 800,000 records, which include admission records, treatment records for all patients, annual reports, governing board minutes, photographs, financial documents, state operating policies, correspondence, and staffing data.[12]

The dearth of studies on black women's experiences along with the abundance of sources and sites for examination makes a project of this sort potentially unmanageable. To focus my study, I considered only the most compelling examples of black women's madness and confinement in slavery and asylums. *ILSG* and the archival records about black women at GLA are ideal case studies in that regard. Below I explain why I chose each source and how they work together to provide a fuller understanding of black women's experiences of madness and confinement during and after slavery.

ILSG is an ideal text for examining black women's experiences with madness and confinement in part because it is the most well-developed exploration of black women's experiences in slavery. It captures black women's experiences through a deliberate attempt to depict how race and gender work together to shape their lives. Jean Fagan Yellin, Jacobs' biographer, explains that this aim sets Jacobs' narrative apart from other

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[11] Ibid., 283-4.
[12] Alicia Dietrich, "UT Scholar Tells Forgotten Story of African-American Psychiatric Patients," *Alcalde*, January 17, 2014. http://alcalde.texasexes.org. University of Texas, at Austin School of Social Work, accessed on May 12, 2014, https://www.utexas.edu/ssw/projects/r6708/.

slave narratives. She contends that *ILSG* is the only slave narrative that "takes as its subject the sexual exploitation of female slaves—thus centering on sexual oppression as well as on oppression of race and condition."[13] Not only does Jacobs' narrative provide insight into black women's particular experiences of enslavement, but the narrative also effectively anatomizes black women's experiences of mental suffering.

As a slave narrator, Jacobs charged herself to represent her life, and at the same time, to speak on behalf of many women.[14] She articulates this dual task in the preface to her narrative:

> But I do earnestly desire to arouse the women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two millions [sic] of women at the South, still in bondage, suffering what I suffered, and most of them far worse.[15]

Jacobs' charge to represent the suffering of many black women is reflected in the

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[13] "Text and Contexts of Harriet Jacobs' Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself" in Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. eds. *The Slave's Narrative* (New York: Oxford, 1990), 263.

[14] Historical studies on slavery corroborate Jacobs' arguments about the black female slave experience, which in general was shaped by major issues of family, sexuality, race/gender and perspectives of womanhood. For more on slave narrators' task to both represent themselves as individuals and present the experiences of all slaves see James Olney, "'I Was Born': Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature" in Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. eds. *The Slave's Narrative* (New York: Oxford, 1990), 148-175.

[15] Linda Brent (Harriet Ann Jacobs), *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina, UNC Chapel Hill, accessed April 24th, 2014, http://docsouth.unc.edu/permission/copyright.html, 6. Subsequent references will be made to this edition. I do not use the pen name Linda Brent, which Jacobs used to "disguise her hand." This phrase comes from Jacqueline Goldsby, who provides a close analysis of the significance of Jacobs' choice to conceal her identity. Jacqueline Goldsby, "'I Disguised My Hand': Writing Versions of the Truth in Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents the Life of A Slave Girl* and John Jacobs' 'A True Tale of Slavery'" in *Harriet Jacobs and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: New Critical Essays*, ed. Deborah Garfield and Rafia Zafar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 11-43.

multiple sketches of women's lives in her narrative. Consequently, her narrative provides a wide range of black women's experiences of mental suffering during slavery. She includes the stories of other mothers who were torn from their families and suffered mentally as a result. She also includes sketches of women's lives whose experiences she did not share. For example, she includes a vignette about a young woman who, after witnessing the sexual and physical exploitation of her sisters, committed suicide. This example and others demonstrate how thoroughly she depicts slavery's devastating assault on numerous black women's bodies and minds. Thus, it is myopic to understand Jacobs' narrative as a single-author text. For the purposes of this study, her narrative is examined not for its descriptions of one enslaved woman's experiences; instead, Jacobs' single text is valuable because it represents mental suffering in the lives of many black women. However, it does not assume that Jacobs is a universal voice for black women. Indeed, many of Jacobs' experiences are unique. For example, she was taught to read and she lived with her family away from her master's house for the earliest part of her life. She opens her narrative with a statement that she was unaware of her slave status until the age of six. Be that as it may, in her self-representation she also describes aspects of slave life that were not specific to only her life. For example, she describes the psychological impact of a mother being torn away from her children. This is an experience that she shared with the vast majority of slave mothers. Hence, Jacobs was not a universal voice for black women, but she did detail several aspects of slavery that uniquely but widely impacted black women.

This project is not unique in analyzing Jacobs' narrative because of its representations of various black women's experiences in slavery. In fact, historian Nell

Irvin Painter draws on Jacobs' narrative to explore the psychological costs of enslavement for all enslaved women.[16] Deborah Gray White, preeminent historian of black women in slavery, uses Painter's findings to support her claim that more research needs to be done on black women's psychic wounding during slavery.[17] White makes a powerful call for further exploration of the "psychological dimensions of abuse" done to enslaved women:

> If pursued with the rigor that the subject demands, the violence done to black women might well de-center lynching as the primary site and preeminent expression of white (sexual) anxiety on the black body.[18]

The present study begins the important work of uncovering the psychological dimensions of abuse. While previous scholarship on black women in slavery calls for studies of the psychological costs of enslavement, there have been no such calls for studies on black women in asylums.[19]

Whether their stories have been blindly omitted or willfully excluded, the lack of serious attention to black women's experiences in asylums begs the question: Why study black women in asylums at all?[20] Because their stories show how the conversation on

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[16] *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: Norton and Company, 1999), 9.
[17] White also refers to Jacobs' narrative more than any other literary text in her groundbreaking study of black women in slavery. Ibid., 17, 41, 42, 71, 74, 93-4, 95, 96, 146, 155.
[18] Ibid.,10.
[19] Nell Irvin Painter, "Soul Murder and Slavery: Toward a Fully Loaded Cost Accounting," in *U.S History as Women's History: New Feminist Essays,* eds. Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris and Kathyrn Kish Sklar (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 130; Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 10.
[20] Literary critic Deborah Gray White explains that early literary criticism "blindly" excluded black women's writings from literary anthologies and critical studies, and by

pro-slavery psychiatry extended beyond emancipation and culminated at an intense locus of its development — the state mental institution. Their stories reveal how the continuation of pro-slavery psychiatry made state mental institutions more like plantations than places of healing. And, furthermore, black women's stories disrupt the master narratives about the asylum experiences of (white) female patients and black

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doing so, it made white middle class women's writings normative. Interestingly, early white feminist literary critic Patricia Meyer Spacks drew upon the work of psychologist Phyllis Chesler to defend her (Spacks) focus on white women's literature in a book on the Anglo-American literary tradition. Phyllis Chesler claims that she cannot represent black women's experiences of madness because she is "unable to construct theories about experiences [she has not] had." Chesler's analysis of women of color is troubling. In her chapter "Third World Women" in the 2005 publication of *Women and Madness*, she indicates that she still (since the 1972 first edition) cannot offer a single theory because of the diversity of racial and cultural backgrounds. Rather than providing a detailed treatment of the multiple factors including gender, race, age and nationality that impact women of color, she asserts that she is interested in "laws of female psychology rather than their exceptions and variations." Her statement reflects her assumption that her treatment of women in the U.S. is comprehensive and that white women are somehow the norm, and others "exceptions." On the contrary, her study focuses on the specific stories and experiences of white American women. When describing the rise of "private madhouses" in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, she does not mention black women at all. When she discusses their presence in mental asylums in the twentieth century, she claims that it is unclear why or how they got there. When Chesler writes about women in asylums in the nineteenth century, she considers the possible reasons for which women found themselves in asylums; for example, she describes battering and drunken husbands who had their wives "psychiatrically imprisoned" as a way to continue the abuse. Chesler rightly points to the ways social and cultural beliefs about femininity and madness shape all women's experiences. She believes that "most women in asylums were not insane," but she does not consider the legacy of slavery — Jim Crow, debt peonage, vagrancy laws, free prison labor, stereotypes of black femininity — also factored into women's confinement. From reading Chesler one might conclude that black women were not sent to asylums in the nineteenth century. But, as this dissertation shows, black women populated the halls of asylums, often in numbers equaling whites; however, their process of confinement (regulated by the previously mentioned factors) was often different from that of their white female counterparts. *"The Changing Same": Black Women's Literature, Criticism, and Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 6; Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination* (New York: Avon, 1972), 5; Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 210. Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness* (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2005), 62, 210.

patients in general.[21]

The master narrative about white female asylum experiences includes recurring symbols and metaphors, one of which is slavery. In their narratives, white women used slavery as a metaphor for their condition in the asylum.[22] Phyllis Chesler legitimizes the comparison between the female insane and the slave. In her chapter on asylums, she writes that, while the analogy and between the slave and the woman is "by no means perfect," it is justifiable because women "were probably the first group of human beings to be enslaved by another group."[23] Furthermore, she contends that "wom[e]n's psychological identity consists in exhibiting the signs and 'symptoms' of slavery."[24] Chesler effectively separates the "woman" and the "slave," making the latter merely a descriptor for understanding the former's condition in the asylum. Nineteenth-century black women's asylum narratives interrupt this binary. In my final chapter, I ask a critical question that forces us to further complicate the dichotomy: What was the asylum like for a female patient who was both "insane" and formerly enslaved? This question highlights the limitations of studies that focus on gender alone, thereby excluding black women's

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[21] It should be noted that studies on white women's experiences in asylums sought to distinguish white women's experiences from those of white men. This study assumes that black female patients' experiences were distinct from white men as well as from white women, and from black men. Nevertheless, I do occasionally discuss how insanity, irrespective of race and gender, shaped asylum patients' lives. At the same time, at the heart of this study is the careful consideration of the intersections of race, gender and mainstream discourses on in/sanity, especially as they map onto the bodies and minds of black women.

[22] Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, 27. Narrators such as Elizabeth Stone and Adriana Brinckle also used images related to slavery, such as chains and shackles, to depict the brutality of their confinement. Chesler, foreword to *Women of the Asylum: Voices From Behind The Walls, 1840-1945*, ed. Jeffrey Geller and Maxine Harris (New York: Doubleday), xiv.

[23] Chesler, *Women and Madness*, 101. Also see footnote eighteen for a discussion on Chesler's exclusion of black women in discussions of madness and asylums.

[24] Ibid.

distinct experiences of confinement and madness.

Scholars' generalizations about the function of gender in the asylum are no less troubling than their conflation of black women's and black men's asylum experiences. In part, scholars conflate black patient experiences because the rhetoric of asylum keepers at the time included such conflations. For example, GLA superintendent T.O. Powell gave a speech before the American Medico-Psychological Association (later the American Psychiatric Association) in Baltimore on May 11, 1897, in which he described the state of the colored insane. He acknowledged that black women experienced the asylum differently than black men based on black women's higher death rates.[25] Although he expressed uncertainty about the source of this disproportion, he does not, in his speech or elsewhere, to my knowledge, offer theories about the black female insane. Furthermore, Powell's (and his colleagues') consistent use of the term colored insane in discourses on insanity submerged black women's unique experiences under the banner of race. Ultimately, bringing black women into the discussion of nineteenth-century asylum patient experiences forces us to rethink the categories of "female insanity" and "colored insanity."

Studying black women's experiences opens up new possibilities for understanding asylums, but still there are various sites for examination. I have chosen to study black women at GLA for several reasons. First, I was introduced to GLA in an Emory University graduate seminar entitled "Georgia and the Mind," which was taught by Mab Segrest. Over the course of the semester, I became increasingly interested in the connections between slavery and asylums as well as in the lives of black women who

[25] Powell notes that blacks died at higher rates than whites, and black women died at higher rates than black men. The leading cause of death was consumption (tuberculosis).

were sent to the asylum. The experiences of black women in post-emancipation asylums were informed in part by pro-slavery psychiatric thought.

Southern asylums are ideal sites for seeing how pro-slavery psychiatry persisted. Peter McCandless writes about southern asylums in general and South Carolina State Asylum in particular. McCandless indicates that southern asylums faced many of the same issues as their northern counterparts, including insufficient funding, inadequate facilities, a lack of qualified attendants, overcrowding and the proliferation of chronic and incurable diseases. However, racial factors distinguished southern asylums from those in the North. McCandless contends that "white dominance" before and after slavery shaped the development and maintenance of, and patient experiences within, the asylum.[26]

Furthermore, despite notable distinctions, when it came to the care of the "colored insane," whether in the North or the South, the policies and practices reflected pro-slavery psychiatric thought. This unilateral perspective on black in/sanity is evident in the way northern asylum superintendents left the question of treatment of the colored insane to southern psychiatrists. They believed southern psychiatrists were best positioned to establish the standards of care for the black insane because of their expertise and experience.[27]

Mab Segrest's research explains why Georgia Lunatic Asylum is exemplary among southern asylums. She contends that this hospital's records are central to understanding the country's history of race and psychiatry: "…[In] the United States

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[26] *Moonlight, Magnolias, and Madness: Insanity in South Carolina from the Colonial Period to the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 6.
[27] Gerald Grob, *The Mad Among Us: A History of the Care of America's Mentally Ill* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 88-9. Gerald Grob, *Mental Institutions in America: Social Policy to 1875* (New York: The Free Press, 1973), 248-56.

'colored insane' meant 'negro' and 'negro'— both general population and committed insane — was overwhelmingly southern. The Southern state with the largest number of both African Americans and African American institutionalized insane was Georgia."[28] Finally, GLA was a keystone hospital due not only to its large numbers of institutionalized black insane, but also because its superintendent, Theophilus Powell, was a highly respected authority on the colored insane.[29] His 1897 presidential speech to the American Medico-Psychological Association included a section on the colored insane that was often cited to support claims that blacks were psychologically unequipped for freedom. Other hospital superintendents in the South and the North also consulted Powell about caring for the colored insane.[30] Thus, GLA is a prime institution for examining the intersection of race, gender and insanity.

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[28] "'Mary Roberts,' the Georgia State Sanitarium, and the Psychiatric 'Specialty' of Race," *American Quarterly*, 66 no.1 (2014), 77.

[29] The hospital's third superintendent, Dr. T.O. Powell was highly respected by his peers. He is an important figure in the history of psychiatry and asylums on the state and national level. He was the superintendent of Milledgeville Hospital from 1879-1907, which does not include the seventeen years he worked as an assistant physician at the hospital prior to his appointment as superintendent. In total, then, his service to the hospital spanned twenty-eight years. In 1887, he was elected president of the Georgia Medical Association, and in 1897 he became the president of the American Medico-Psychological Association (later the American Psychiatric Association). He was also president of the Southern Association of Southern Hospitals and of the Medical Association of Georgia during his appointment. Cranford, *Damnation* 53, 55, 65. Georgia General Assembly, *Joint Committee*, 45-6. In response to charges of misconduct at the hospital, in 1910 Milledgeville trustees remarked that Powell was very forward-thinking in the treatment of patients: "he was the first…to discard all 'penitentiary methods of restraint' and all irritating mechanical devices used in subduing and restraining refractory patients." Georgia General Assembly. *Joint Committee*, 45. Even the superintendent of South Carolina State Asylum, the main figure in McCandless' study, consulted with Powell about how to manage his asylum. *Moonlight, Magnolias, and Madness*, 245, 298.

[30] Cranford, *Moonlight, Magnolias, and Madness*, 245, 298. Gerald Grob, *The Mad Among Us: A History of the Care of America's Mentally Ill* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 88-9. Gerald Grob, *Mental Institutions in America: Social Policy to 1875* (New York: The Free Press, 1973), 248-56.

My choice of Viney W., Jane G., Olivia W., Alice M. and Amanda C. as focal points also began in Mab Segrest's "Georgia and the Mind" graduate seminar. In the course, I conducted a preliminary study on one of the women in this dissertation — Olivia Wood. That research project inspired me to further investigate black women's experiences at GLA. From 2011 until 2013, I combed through more than five hundred patient intake ledgers. I also searched the *The Atlanta Constitution* newspaper archives for mentions of GLA women. Among the hundreds of black women's stories that I came across, the women's stories that I chose contained the most information from which I could reconstruct a madness narrative.[31]

The GLA narratives and *ILSG* work together to reveal the many levels upon which asylums and slavery overlap. In doing so, they illuminate a broader cultural narrative about the ways in which discourses of insanity shaped black women's lives during and after slavery. Beyond providing a window into their experiences, the two sets of texts are mutually interrogative.

The GLA women's narratives interrogate *ILSG*'s focus on white, both male and female, violence against black women's bodies and minds. While *ILSG* is a powerful case study for black women's psychic wounding, it does not capture the full scope of their experiences of madness and confinement. Due to its intended audience, aim, and form, Jacobs' narrative is primarily concerned with oppression at the hands of white men and women in the context of slavery. However, it does not capture the nature of physical and sexual abuse suffered by black women at the hands of black men. Intra-community domestic violence is a recurring theme in the GLA women's narratives. New issues also

[31] Madness narratives usually include depictions of the individual's life before, during and after the asylum.

emerge around constructions of black womanhood. The Mammy, Jezebel and Tragic Mulatto figures were joined by a new figure, the Sapphire. The Sapphire figure was described as unruly towards black men and defiant to whites. This new stereotype of black womanhood intensified the linkages between violence and black female in/sanity.

ILSG also speaks to significant gaps in the GLA women's narratives. Most notably, their stories are mediated through the language (and perspectives) of doctors, judges, police officers, journalists, census-takers and family members; we do not hear the women's voices directly. In light of these silences, Harriet Jacobs'slave narrative provides a theoretical lens through which we can interpret black women's post-slavery asylum narratives.

Jacobs' theoretical ideas on madness and confinement are useful in several ways. First, as the most well-developed narrative about black women's experiences of mental suffering during slavery, it offers insight into the formerly-enslaved women's perspectives. Also, as the most penetrating account of the female slave experience, her narrative sheds light on how the cultural parameters of acceptable black womanhood that developed under slavery continued to influence post-slavery measures of black female in/sanity. In addition to representations of black femininity, the GLA records contain ideas that reflect the lingering power of pro-slavery psychiatry, a discourse that Jacobs countered. As a representative anti-slavery psychiatry text, *ILSG* elucidates the enduring legacy of pro-slavery psychiatric thought at GLA. It also offers a counter-narrative to pro-slavery thought. In these ways, Jacobs' narrative helps us understand how black women's experiences at GLA differed from those of other patients. In sum, the two sets of sources work nicely together to show how asylums both mirror and incorporate aspects

of slavery.

Clarification of Terms

My examination of the two sets of primary texts requires a nuanced understanding of the terms insanity, madness and confinement. In this section, I lay out how this project uses these familiar terms with respect to black women's particular experiences of madness and confinement in the nineteenth century.

The operative term used during the time for what we now understand as "mental illness" was "insanity." This study of insanity makes room for the painful and undesirable experiences that impacted black women's ability to function during and after slavery. At the same time, "insanity" is a socially constructed term; that is, it is defined and assigned meaning differently based on the social and historical context. The definition of insanity, even within the nineteenth century, was dynamic. Like mental illness today, it changed with respect to a number of factors including technology, diagnostic categories and available treatments. What is more, the meaning of insanity was altered according to the interests and social, cultural and political orientations of the individuals, groups and institutions that used the term. Thus, central to the present study is an interrogation of how Jacobs, superintendents, journalists and census-takers, among others, used the terms and for what purposes.

While the term insanity had particular legal consequences, it was often used interchangeably with madness.[32] The term madness, however, was used much more

[32] Whites who were labeled insane were denied certain rights including the ability to write wills or own property. Benjamin Reiss, *Theaters of Madness: Insane Asylums and*

broadly and colloquially.[33] For example, Jacobs uses madness as a catch-all for psychological suffering and illness. She also uses the term to characterize the slave system as metaphorically "mad." Her use of the term reflects her understanding of the broader social, political, and cultural factors that inform painful experiences of mental sickness.

In this project, the conception of madness is always connected to confinement. The term "confinement" can refer literally to an individual or group's experiences within actual places such as jails, plantations, and homes, as well as more metaphorically to their experiences within social, cultural and political climates and spaces, such as a society that discriminates against one based on race or other markers of social difference. For example, the GLA women were confined by cultural conceptions of black femininity, by postbellum forms of control over black bodies and labor and by physical spaces in which the conditions of confinement in slavery were played out once again through segregated facilities and the regulation of daily life from personal provisions to the maintenance of kinship networks.

Methods

As a literary critic, I perform literary analyses, or close readings, of the language and themes in both the canonical literary text and the archival records. My reading of Harriet Jacobs' narrative is grounded in the literary histories and cultural theories of

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Nineteenth-Century American Culture (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 15.

[33] The term madness also has a much longer history dating back to classical Western civilizations. See Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 131-163.

various scholars.[34] Hazel Carby and Jean Fagan Yellin contextualize the events of the narrative within the specific historical and cultural milieu of the time. Nell Irving Painter and Deborah Gray White corroborate her account with historical records of the lives of other enslaved women. Finally, Frances Smith Foster and Valerie Smith emphasize the literary and theoretical value of Jacobs' account. My combination of all of these methodological approaches yields a rich analysis of madness and confinement in *ILSG*.

Because this dissertation is concerned with black women's experiences, I read the archival materials as rigorously as I read literary texts. However, my reading strategies for the GLA patient ledgers, Superintendent Powell's writings and *The Atlanta Constitution* (1888-1894) newspaper articles are different from those I use to analyze *ILSG*. For example, I read Harriet Jacobs as both a social commentator and a theorist. She is publicly committed to depicting black women's experiences of mental suffering in slavery. On the other hand, the authors of the GLA materials have not charged themselves with representing black women's experiences. Unlike eyewitness accounts of slavery, there are no first-person accounts of asylums written by or about black women in the nineteenth century. Consequently, I am forced to read the available texts critically for implicit commentary on madness and confinement in order to extract and piece together black women's stories. Acknowledging the biases and vantage points of the various white male authors (journalists, doctors and superintendent Powell), I carefully reconstruct narratives about black women's lives.

I read these reconstructed accounts of the GLA women's lives in the asylum as types of madness narratives using Susan Hubert's broad definition of the genre. She

[34] This is not to suggest that these scholars' research is only significant for one reason. All of them blend, to some extent, the various approaches to studying *ILSG*.

contends that madness narratives include "novels, journals, anonymous accounts, and narratives presented by an interlocutor, as well as traditional autobiographies."[35] Hubert's definition of madness narratives is useful because it allows us to consider the stigmatization of individuals who were labeled insane. Yet, unlike most madness narratives, those in this dissertation are derived from several sources, since no stand-alone source exists. Nevertheless, my close attention to issues that emerge in madness narratives provides considerable insight into how black women experienced confinement in asylums.

I also recognize GLA women's stories as examples of confinement narratives because the asylum is a form of incarceration. Here, I use Tara Green's definition of confinement narratives. Green contends that confinement narratives are "set entirely or partially in a place of confinement including plantations, prisons, and segregated societies, and they tell of African Americans' experiences with incarcerations."[36] Reading the materials as both madness and confinement literature allows me to uncover the most salient themes and major issues that emerge in discussions of madness and confinement during the period. Thus, while I use the tools of literary analysis – such as close attention to language – to examine the institutional records, my methodological approach is largely determined by the sources themselves.

The GLA patient ledgers include a wide range of information about the women's conditions upon arrival. The records include demographic information such as

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[35] *Questions of Power: The Politics of Women's Madness Narratives* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002), 19. Asylum narratives are a type of madness narrative, thus the terms are used interchangeably.

[36] Tara Green, *From the Plantation to the Prison: African-American Confinement Literature*, (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2008), 4.

county/state of origin, age, number of children, marital status, occupation, gender and race. The overarching diagnostic categories were "lunatic," "idiot" and "epileptic." The ledgers also document various supposed causes of insanity including: "blow to the head," "change of life," "menstrual derangement [sometimes menstrual suppression or menstrual irregularity]" and "ill treatment by her husband." The records also list the patients' past medical histories, which provided asylum staff with information about the nature and degree of insanity. Past medical history descriptions about women in the asylum include "homicidal or suicidal," "will wander," "gets into a state of nudity," "inclined to be violent," "dangerous with fire," "destructive," "hereditary tendency," "duration of insanity," "eats and sleeps well," "uses snuff" and "has been treated by city physician." Superintendent Powell's writings also provide information that helps us understand the atmosphere in GLA. For example, he contends that instances of insanity among blacks had increased since emancipation because they were unequipped for freedom. He also acknowledges that segregation in the asylum was based more on cultural mores than on scientific rationales. The patient intake ledgers and Powell's writings offer insight into the women's experiences during and after their stay in the asylum (some were discharged as "restored," others died at GLA). Together, the primary sources suggest that the in/sanity of inmates at GLA was determined by the intersecting discourses of insanity, race and gender.

The *Atlanta Constitution* articles provide insight into the women's lives before they entered the asylum. The stories about black women usually appear in the section of the newspaper entitled "In the Open Field: Short Stories of Minor Happenings Gathered from Many Sources, The City Briefly Mirrored." Consequently, their stories were

recorded alongside other minor happenings and events in the lives of everyday people. For example, the stories note mundane occurrences such as the spelling bee winner, new fruit imports from Cuba and petty crimes. The juxtaposition of black women's stories to these everyday happenings suggests that the women were ordinary, and further, that their experiences were commonplace. The framing of these reported incidents as commonplace reflects the ubiquity of ideas about black female insanity in the post-emancipation South.

While these primary sources go a long way toward uncovering black women's experiences of madness and confinement, they still do not address the submersion of the women's voices. Not only does this study use Harriet Jacobs as a theoretical lens for reading the silences in the records, but it also draws upon white women's writing about madness for thematic content. White women's narratives feature a range of perspectives on any given topic. However, even with the wide range of perspectives, white women's narratives fail to capture many of the concerns of black women. Motherhood, for instance, was a common theme among all women, but it had a distinct meaning for formerly-enslaved women, who defined freedom in terms of their familial connections. As Noralee Frankel puts it, freedom meant "being allowed to live with their families without the threat of any of them being sold,"[37] a meaning it did not have for white women.

My historical analysis does not depend on ascertaining whether or not an event actually occurred. It shows, rather, how language produces real effects. In this way, this

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[37] Noralee Frankel, *Break Those Chains at Last: African Americans 1860-1880*, eds. Robin Kelley and Earl Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 42-3. See also Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy my Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 35, 40, 43.

study privileges truths that are not empirically verifiable. For example, when analyzing unsettling recollections of sexual and physical violence, my analysis will hone in on the truths towards which the accounts gesture. Whether or not any one account was factually true (as we know some were), collectively they tell a truth about black women's experiences in confinement. And while historical accuracy is vital, this study is chiefly concerned with how writers re-construct and re-present discourses about madness and confinement. In other words, the chief concern is not how accurately the writers reflect history, but rather how they use language to re-present and re-construct history of both "public" and "private" states. Crucially, I examine how the language of race, gender and madness has concrete effects in the lives of nineteenth-century black women. .

Organization of Chapters

Collectively, my chapters convey the different ways that madness and confinement interact in the nineteenth century. In the first chapter, the emphasis is on the institution of slavery. The second chapter focuses on how discourses about insanity work to link slavery to asylums. The final chapter considers how these linkages play out in the latter part of the century. Together, they argue that madness and confinement were salient and ongoing issues in the lives of black women in nineteenth-century America.

Chapter One, "The Bitterness of Mental Suffering: Psychological Costs of Black Women's Enslavement in Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl*," focuses on Jacobs' experiences of madness in places of confinement such as the attic, house, and plantation in the South. My central argument is that, for Jacobs, confinement in slavery can create mental illness. The chapter shows how Jacobs makes a case that slavery

negatively affects the mind through vivid descriptions of severed family ties, suicide attempts, sexual and physical abuse and her seven-year concealment in her grandmother's garret. It gives special attention to the way race and gender work together to impact black women in particular ways.

Chapter Two, "Natural and Habitual Orders: Slavery, Asylums and Psychiatric Discourses," interrogates how Harriet Jacobs' theories about mental suffering in slavery engaged broader discourses in which pro-slavery debates intersected with psychiatric thought. The chapter is primarily concerned with how national debates about insanity connected slavery and asylums. I argue that ideas about the "colored insane" justified asylum keepers' approaches to treating blacks who were labeled insane in asylums. Their ideas also legitimized slavery. The chapter demonstrates how Jacobs' representations of mental suffering in the North are an example of what I have termed African American anti-slavery psychiatry.[38] The existence of African American anti-slavery psychiatry reveals that, contrary to the available scholarship, the history of madness and race was not monopolized, and perhaps not even dominated, by the voices of whites. Moreover, adding African American voices to the conversation on the history of psychiatry brings to the fore new perspectives on the major issues concerning African American mental health during the era.

In Chapter Two, we see how asylums drew on the legacy of slavery through asylum keepers' and slavers' beliefs about the colored insane. Chapter Three, "All the

[38] African American anti-slavery psychiatry, which later becomes African American anti-racist psychiatry, refers to a motif or theoretical current in literature and cultural productions by African Americans that, in the service of abolition and later the attainment of racial equality, implicitly or explicitly engages the reigning ideas and assumptions of American psychiatry.

Colored Insane Were Men, All Insane Women Were White, but Some of Them Were Brave: Slavery, Asylums and Mad Black Women in the Post-Slavery South," reveals how the same pro-slavery psychiatric discourses drew on the legacy of asylums. I examine archival materials including patient intake ledgers, *The Atlanta Constitution* newspaper articles and the writings of GLA superintendent Theophilus Powell, which provide a window into the experiences of Viney W., Jane G., Olivia W., Alice M. and Amanda C., black women who were sent to Georgia Lunatic Asylum (GLA) between 1881 and 1894. An examination of the experiences of these black women at GLA complicates existing scholarship on women and madness, confinement after slavery (literary, cultural and historical) and post-emancipation asylums. I argue that the post-slavery criteria for African American female sanity were based on the interwoven social discourses of gender, race and mental illness. The narratives uncover how American psychiatry made black women mad in the senses of both constructing disorder according to prevailing notions of black femininity and inflicting real psychological harm within asylums.

The conclusion summarizes the major findings of the dissertation. It also provides thoughts on how the project can be expanded. Finally, it considers how the project is relevant to current events and issues. It concludes that understanding nineteenth-century black women's experiences of madness and confinement both humanizes them and adds to our larger understanding of the human experience as experienced and interpreted by the mind.

Chapter 1
The Bitterness of Mental Suffering: Psychological Costs of Black Women's Enslavement in Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl*

During her bondage she does not appear to have suffered any great amount of physical hardship. But the bitterness of ***mental suffering*** *[emphasis mine] and enforced degradation which she was compelled to endure from her master's vices and the hatred of her mistress—and which she was utterly helpless to prevent—is fearful to contemplate*.[39]

—Anonymous

The reflections of an anonymous nineteenth-century reader of Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (*ILSG*) provide a window into the world of American slavery. More particularly, they point to the impact of physical, social, political and cultural forms of confinement on an enslaved person's mental well-being. The comments highlight the ways in which Jacobs' recounting of her bondage exposes the gendered nature of the institution through revealing the sexual politics of the female slave experience. The corpus of literary criticism on *ILSG* has explicitly linked sexual politics to Jacobs' experiences of confinement. [40] However, the association the nineteenth-century reviewer makes between Jacobs' confinement, the sexual politics of the female slave experience and mental suffering has yet to be considered. The tripartite association is the central concern of this chapter: by addressing this concern, it nuances a broader scholarly conversation. Previous studies on slavery and slave narratives have

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[39] Reprinted in Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. eds. *The Slave's Narrative* (New York: Oxford, 1990), 33.

[40] See Yellin, "Text and Contexts" in *The Slave's Narrative*; Valerie Smith, introduction to *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: Oxford, 1990); Frances Smith Foster, *Written by Herself: Literary Production by African American Women, 1746-1892* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1993); Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

well established that black women's experiences of slavery were distinct from those of their black male and white female counterparts. Missing from the scholarship is an adequate account of the psychological costs of enslavement for black women.

Jacobs' narrative can fill this gap because it provides the best demonstration that slavery and mental suffering are raced and gendered.[41] With regard to the former, she makes the point outright in her narrative: "Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own."[42] Through her depictions of the predicament of black enslaved women, Jacobs also uncovers how the institution psychologically wounded them. In other words, slavery did not solely harm the bodies of African American women; it also created mental illness among them, and in particular ways. Jacobs makes the case that slavery uniquely affected the minds of black women through creative uses of literary genre as well as descriptions of severed family ties, suicide attempts, death wishes, sexual and physical abuse and her seven-year concealment in her grandmother's garret.[43] While the next chapter establishes Jacobs'

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[41] In terms of the raced/gendered nature of female slavery, Jean Fagan Yellin, Jacobs' biographer, makes this argument: "*Incidents* is the only slave narrative that takes as its subject the sexual exploitation of female slaves — thus centering on sexual oppression as well as on oppression of race and condition." "Text and Contexts of Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*" in *The Slave's Narrative*, 263.
[42] Linda Brent, (Harriet Ann Jacobs) *ILSG in the Life of a Slave Girl. Written by Herself*
[42]Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina, UNC Chapel Hill, accessed April 24th, 2014, http://docsouth.unc.edu/permission/copyright.html, 119. Subsequent references will be made to this edition.
[43] Jacobs appropriates various genres, including the bildungsroman, sentimental fiction, narrative poetry and slave narrative to depict mental suffering in her narrative. Frances Smith Foster notes that Jacobs modifies literary techniques familiar to her audience and invents news ones to accommodate her story and move the reader to action. *Written by Herself*, 97. Annette Niemtzow argues that Jacobs draws upon sentimental fiction because it lends itself to discussions about her vulnerability to sexual assault. "The

slave narrative as an anti-slavery psychiatry text, this chapter unpacks Jacobs' portrayal of the specifically raced and gendered nature of madness and slavery.

Tortured in Her Separate Hell

To set the stage for how Jacobs represents mental suffering in the narrative, let us begin with her striking comparison of slavery to asylums. Harriet Jacobs samples Lord Byron's poem "The Lament of Tasso" to show how her experiences in slavery create mental suffering on an individual level. In the next chapter, I will return to the Byron connection, which also helped Jacobs to characterize the institution of slavery as a mad social order. Here the sampling supports her argument that the American slave system assaults the mind to such a degree that confinement therein is akin to living in a mental asylum. Adding to dominant understandings of slavery as gruesome, repulsive and brutal to the body, she defines slavery as mad, owing to its defining characteristics and impact on African Americans. In composition it is irrational, disordered, and utterly absurd. Experientially, it creates psychological illness though confinement and sheer terror.

The circumstances around the production of the Byron poem are significant for understanding how the poem aids Jacobs in making arguments about madness and slavery. Lord Byron was suspected of being mentally ill and was described by Lady

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Problematic of Self in Autobiography: The Example of the Slave Narrative" in *The Art of the Slave Narrative: Original Essays in Criticism and Theory*, ed. John Sekora and Darwin T. Turner (Macomb: Western Illinois University Press, 1982), 105-6. Valerie Smith notes that Jacobs uses popular fiction strategically to advance her arguments about the cruelty of slavery. For example, Jacobs declares that her story does not end in love and marriage because slavery precludes enslaved women from pursuing such lifestyles. Valerie Smith, introduction to *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, by Harriet Jacobs ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), xxxxiii.

Caroline Lamb as "mad, bad, and dangerous to know."[44] Byron is said to have been inspired to write the poem after visiting the cell of Torquato Tasso, a prominent sixteenth-century Italian poet. Tasso was confined to the Asylum of St. Anna's in Ferrara, Italy, from 1579 to 1586. That Jacobs, to write about slavery, samples a poem written by an allegedly mentally-ill poet, writing about a poet who had been confined to a mental asylum, is more than just evidence of literary sophistication. The Byron poem provided fertile ground for Jacobs' characterization of the institution of slavery as not only wrongful, but also as antithetical to reason, logic, and good sense.

Jacobs' sampling of Byron is significant in both its analogical implications as well as its limitations. In other words, we must consider the ways in which she engages the genre of poetry as well as how she breaks with it to emphasize the particularity of the correlation between confinement and mental suffering for enslaved women in mid-nineteenth-century America. The Byron poem was fertile ground for Jacobs because it captures the essence of Tasso's lived experiences of mental torment within confinement:

> Where laughter is not mirth; nor thought the mind;
>
> Nor words a language; nor e'en men mankind.
>
> Where cries reply to curses, shrieks to blows,
>
> And each is tortured in his separate hell.[45]

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[44] In an article of the same title, Terry Castle explains that Lady Caroline Lamb's characterization is based on "[Byron's] compulsive love affairs with women and boys; his drinking and excess; the scandalous liaison with his half sister, Augusta (who may have borne him a child in 1814); the bizarre athletic feats; his exile in Italy and exotic death in 1824 at the age of thirty-six while trying to foment a revolution in Greece -- without detecting the faint whiff of brimstone." Terry Castle, "Mad, Bad, and Dangerous to Know: A Biography that Sees Lord Byron as a Victim of Circumstances," *New York Times*, April 13, 1997. http://www.nytimes.com.

[45] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 58.

The second half of the above passage helps Jacobs articulate her experiences within a system that is as mad as it is maddening. She depicts slavery as a torturous form of confinement that entraps each individual, hellish existence. Jacobs' argument that slavery is maddening in this way appears in her chapter "The Trials of Girlhood." She represents slavery as an institution in which violence or "curses" beget "cries," or emotional distress, and "shrieks," expressions of mental torment.

Psychological torment, Jacobs makes clear, begins early in the lives of enslaved women. With this chapter, she plants her narrative squarely within the bildungsroman genre, only to reveal how her own coming-of-age story is perverted by her existence within a psychologically assaultive institution.[46] She declares: "But I now entered on my fifteenth year—a sad epoch in the life of a slave girl. My master began to whisper foul words in my ear."[47] Jacobs not only writes of the moral offensiveness that she is forced to endure, but she also conveys the sheer terror she experiences: "Sometimes he had stormy, terrific ways, that made his victims tremble."[48] She uses a semicolon to adjoin the phrase "sometimes he assumed a gentleness that he thought must surely subdue," which suggests that the threat of violence is exacerbated by the unpredictability of its occurrence. Jacobs informs the reader that such unpredictability produces severe paranoia for a slave girl:

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[46] Valerie Smith notes that the standard bildungsroman plot does not capture the development of female slaves. Standard plots feature the triumph of individual will and solitary journeys rather than "the self in relation," which was the case with Jacobs. "'Loopholes of Retreat': Architecture and Ideology in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* " in *Reading Black, Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology* ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Meridian, 1991), 216-7. Jacobs' freedom depends on her ability to maintain her family ties. Stephanie Li makes this argument in *Something Akin To Freedom: The Choice of Bondage in Narratives by African American Women* (New York: State University Press, 2010).
[47] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 44.
[48] Ibid., 52.

"Soon she will learn to tremble when she hears her master's footfall."[49] In her reading of this passage, Jean Fagan Yellin mentions the psychological aspects of Jacobs' descriptions. She writes that this moment in the text "reads like a psychologist's study of the coercive personality."[50] However, Yellin leaves unexamined the impact of Dr. Flint's "coercive personality" on Jacobs' psychological state.[51] Jacobs' experience of fear in and of itself is not a sign of madness, but the sorrow that results from constant feelings of fear indicates how slavery is predicated on ongoing emotional terrorism. Emotional terrorism here reflects Dr. Flint's use of violence and intimidation to pursue his personal aims. His personal pursuits cause Jacobs extreme mental suffering. Because it captures this maddening effect of confinement in institutions (whether slavery or asylums), Jacobs' sampling of the Byron poem links confinement in slavery to confinement in asylums.

But what is perhaps most significant about Jacobs' sampling is what she does not sample. The remainder of Byron's "Lament" stanza features the speaker's decision to abstain from vindictiveness against his oppressors, lines which Jacobs does not include. The omitted lines read:

> Would I not pay them back these pangs again,
> And teach them inward Sorrow stifled groan?
> The struggle to be calm, and cold distress,
> Which undermines our Stoical success?
> No! – still too proud to be vindictive – I
> Have pardon'd princes' insults, and would die.

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[49] Ibid., 53.
[50] Jean Fagan Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs: A Life* (Cambridge: Civitas Books, 2004), 23.
[51] Ibid.

> Yes, Sister of my Sovereign! For thy sake
> I weed all bitterness from out my breast,
> It hath no business where *thou* art a guest:
> Thy brother hates – but I cannot detest;
> Thou pitiest not – but I cannot forsake.[52]

These lines reveal why "The Lament of Tasso" was only useful for Jacobs to the extent that it could help her illuminate the egregious nature of American slavery and the experiences of the confined. In other words, she chooses to sample the description of the conditions of the asylum, but not the speaker's *response* to the experience. Because Jacobs is writing a slave narrative, a genre for which the central goal is abolition, there is neither place for such expressions, nor the narrative space for an exposition of the irony that would make them suitable for a slave narrative. Thus, in accordance with the aim of her narrative, in subsequent passages, Jacobs' stance is as clear as it is stringent. Coupled with her summarization of the system — "the degradation, the wrongs, the vices, that grow out of slavery, are more than I can describe"— is a statement that directly opposes the Byron speaker. She proclaims: "My soul revolted against the mean tyranny."[53] Jacobs' project is rooted in her ability to depict the plight of the enslaved and explicate *responses* to psychological assault. Her proclamation suggests that, unlike for the Byronic persona, the appropriate response for the slave is resistance.

The Mad Blackwoman in the Attic

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[52] George Gordon Byron, "The Lament of Tasso," The Lament of Tasso (1817), Archive.org, accessed June 13, 2014, http://archive.org/details/lamentoftasso22byro.
[53] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 52.

Just as representations of madness and institutions of confinement in British Romantic poetry had limited usefulness for Jacobs' project, contemporary depictions of madness in (white) women's literature were relevant but insufficient for capturing the particularities of enslaved women's experiences. In many ways, Harriet Jacobs does belong to the group of nineteenth-century women writers that Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar discuss in their acclaimed study *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*.[54] However, she does not battle depictions of enslaved women as either "angelic" or "monstrous." Instead, Jacobs' narrative reflects her understanding that these categories are not available to enslaved black women, who were denied access to white women's standards for womanhood, or "the cult of true womanhood."[55] The "cult of true womanhood" is a nineteenth-century ideological construction that posits that "true" women possess three essential qualities: virtue, piety and chastity. These traits were associated with white women because black women served as the antithesis of "proper" womanhood. Hazel Carby identifies Jacobs' critique of white standards of womanhood as one of the most valuable aspects of the narrative:

> *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* is the most sophisticated, sustained narrative dissection of the conventions of true womanhood by a black author before emancipation… Jacobs used the material circumstances of

[54] They focus on Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, George Eliot, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti and Emily Dickinson. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

[55] See Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," in *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Columbus: University of Ohio Press, 1976), 21-41.

> her life to critique the conventional standards of female behavior and to question their relevance and applicability to the experience of black women.[56]

Jacobs had a different set of concerns, which were related to those of white womanhood but centered on the raced and gendered realities of confinement for enslaved black women.

Unlike white women or black bondsmen, the spectrum of mythical figures against which the black female slave was judged ranged from the desexualized and loyal "Mammy" at one end to the hypersexualized and suspicious "Jezebel" at the other.[57] Jacobs, in particular, also faced an additional myth, that of the helpless and tragic "mulatto."[58] Jacobs counters these stereotypes by presenting herself as a committed mother and a woman who values the tenets of true womanhood. At the same time, she

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[56] Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, 47.

[57] For a detailed discussion of the proliferation and cultural function of the Jezebel and Mammy figures see Deborah Gray White's chapter "Jezebel and Mammy: The Mythology of Female Slavery" in *Ar'n't I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 27-61. See also Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: First Vintage, 1983), 5-7; Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, 40-61. For discussions of black women and gendered/raced characters that begin in slavery but extend into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, see Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17 no. 2 (1987): 65–81; Patricia Hill Collins, "Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images" in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 69-96; Melissa Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011). For a discussion of the European origins of American conceptions of black womanhood see Beverly Guy-Sheftall, "The Body Politic: Black Female Sexuality and the Nineteenth-Century Euro-American Imagination" in *Skin Deep Spirit Strong*: *The Black Female Body in American Culture* ed. Kimberly Wallace-Sanders (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2002), 13-35. For discussion of the proliferation of myths of black women in scholarly sources (rather than fiction or popular culture) see Patricia Morton, *Disfigured Images: The Historical Assault on Afro-American Women* (Westport: Greenwood, 1991).

[58] Yellin,"Texts and Contexts," 274.

deviates from notions of virtue and chastity by having an illicit relationship with a neighboring planter, justifying her actions through the declaration that slave women should not be judged according to the same standards as white women:

> But, O, ye happy women, whose purity has been sheltered from childhood, who have been free to choose the object of your affection, whose homes are protected by law, do not judge the poor desolate slave girl too severely… I feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others. [59]

Here Jacobs affirms that virtue and purity are desirable, but then reminds the reader that slavery shapes and limits black women's options and choices through law and custom.

Along with qualifying black women's particular experiences of patriarchy and racism, Jacobs uses metaphors of confinement differently both from white nineteenth-century women and from white women who wrote about madness. Scholars explicitly distinguish Jacobs' metaphors from those of her contemporaries. In her chapter "The Blackwoman in the Attic," Rafia Zafar notes that "in slavery, black women's bondage was…literal: their confinement, actual not metaphorical." [60] Taking this point a step further, Jean Fagan Yellin does not see Jacobs' garret experience as reflective of the nineteenth-century trope of the "mad woman in the attic": "Unlike this fiction [from popular nineteenth-century literature], however, Jacobs' narrative focuses on the woman

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[59] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 83, 86.
[60] Rafia Zafar, *We Wear the Mask: African Americans Write Literature*, 1760-1870, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 142.

in the attic; and she is completely sane."[61] Furthermore, in Yellin's estimation the garret represents a specific set of priorities for Jacobs: "The goals of Harriet Jacobs' woman in hiding are not destruction and self-destruction, but freedom and home."[62] Certainly freedom and home are dominant themes in the garret scene, which we know was a literal experience of confinement. However, Jacobs shows that sacrifice and suffering, including mental suffering, are consequences of achieving those goals. To be sure, Jacobs' aims are different from writers such as Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Jane Austen and Mary Shelley, but as I will show in a later section entitled "To Say Nothing of My Soul," she is no less sophisticated than Gilbert and Gubar's heroines in representing madness. In at least one way — the thematic use of madness to critique gender inequalities — Jacobs does join them. The question, then, is not *whether* madness appears in *ILSG*, but *how*, and for what purposes?

Jennifer Thomas offers a theory of how madness can be read in literature that more fully accounts for how Jacobs represents madness in *ILSG* and her motives. Jacobs' account of madness and mental illness corresponds to what Jennifer Thomas defines as a "landscape of madness." Thomas reads twentieth-century black women's writings, particularly the work of Bessie Head and Erna Brodber, for their presentation of "landscapes of madness," which she defines as "the picture or scene that emerges as the authors develop micro and macro perspectives of madness."[63] Thomas' concept of

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[61] Jean Fagan Yellin, introduction to *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written By Herself by Harriet Jacobs* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), xliii.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Jennifer Thomas, "Literary Landscapes of Disturbed Minds: Madness, Narrative, and Healing in Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* and Erna Brodber's *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*" (PhD diss., Emory University, 2007), 3.

literary landscapes puts the terms "madness" and "mental illness" in dialogue to encourage the reader to "consider how factors such as gender, sexuality, and politics inform the clinical concerns of mental illness, such as the pain and specific kind of delirium one experiences."[64] She elaborates that madness "refers to a broad notion of psychological disturbance that may occur individually, communally, and/or globally."[65] This conceptualization of madness forces us to understand the individual in relation to the society in which s/he lives:

> [I]nsanity experiences as related to politics, history, race, gender, spirituality, and culture. Hence, madness is not a personal mental health problem. Such a perspective acknowledges the various circumstances and factors that impact the form and content of psychological breakdown.[66]

Jacobs presents a similar landscape of madness in the context of nineteenth-century American society, as she pushes the reader to understand the multiple and complex ways categories of social difference come to influence and shape mental well-being. Jacobs is careful to relate experiences of mental suffering to the social, cultural, and political organizations in a slave-holding national context through her depictions of slavery as "mad." To construct a literary landscape of madness, Jacobs uses metaphor, vivid language and rhetorical devices. An examination of these aspects of the narrative reveals Jacobs' understanding that the impact of confinement on mental health, particularly as it manifests in the forms of paranoia, anxiety, sorrow, and anguish, must be understood in the context of a "mad" social ordering.

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[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.

Jacobs' use of madness as a metaphor for slavery also reveals that life in the North does not offer escape from the psychological consequences of confinement. Thus, Jacobs not only provides a case study for how mental suffering occurred during slavery, but also provides a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between madness and confinement. In doing so, she counters the dominant voices and ideas in pro-slavery debates that understood mental health as inherently "raced."

Beyond the Body

In Jacobs' landscape of madness, the mental well-being of enslaved women is tied to harm done to their bodies. In order to understand the nature of that connection, it would be useful to consider the scope and character of the latter form of suffering in slavery. Scholarly discussions of the raced, gendered and classed experiences of enslaved women focus primarily on the body, and for good reason. Slave traders examined black bodies during trade for signs of their ill/good health, breeding capabilities and potential for rebellion.[67] The body had special significance in abolitionist discourses. Beaten and bruised bodies served as "proof" of the horrors of slavery.[68] As Kimberly Wallace-

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[67] Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 135-161. For a discussion of how disability among slaves impacted their profitability and labor expectations see Dea Boster, *African American Slavery and Disability: Bodies, Property, and Power in the Antebellum South*, 1800-1860 (New York: Routledge, 2013), 55-92. Boster mentions mental disability in her discussion of how planters were concerned with slave "soundness," which arbitrarily could refer to mental and/or physical health, but by and large the book focuses on physical disability.

[68] Dwight McBride, *Impossible Witness: Truth, Abolitionism, and Slave Testimony* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 1-15. Saidiya Hartman questions the voyeuristic element of depictions of brutalized and violated black flesh that pro-slavery apologists and abolitionists used in their campaigns for or against slavery. *Scenes of*

Sanders indicates, black women's bodies carry a distinct historical narrative: "Black women's bodies have historically symbolized a site where the vast (and largely problematic) complexities of gender and race are represented."[69]

One such complexity is the fact that the value of a black female slave rested not only in her usage for physical labor, but also in her ability to produce and rear children — the foundation upon which the perpetuation of the slave system rested. Jacobs emphatically points out plantation owners' interest in black women's reproductive capacities: "Women are considered of no value, unless they continually increase their owner's stock. They are put on a par with animals."[70] Here she captures the fact that enslaved black women were simultaneously dehumanized and commoditized.[71] Dorothy

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Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1-10, 17-23.

[69] Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, introduction to *Skin Deep, Spirit Strong*, 3.

[70] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 76. For this reason, Southern plantation medical interests were connected to the economic value of slaves. For a discussion of the practice of medicine on Southern plantations see Steven Stowe, *Doctoring the South: Southern Physicians and Everyday Medicine in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 49-51, 54-5, 80-1, 107, 138-9, 172-4; William Postell*, The Health of Slaves on Southern Plantations* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 22, 50-73. Enslaved African Americans were aware of this profit-motive, so they often viewed medical care as an extension of white control. They developed their own doctoring practices as a means of resistance and healing. Sharla Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), ix-x, 18, 27.

[71] For an in-depth study of how enslaved women's reproductive capacities figured importantly into nineteenth-century medicine see Marie Jenkins Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave: Motherhood and Medicine in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006). Although it is beyond the scope of this project, medical experimentation was another way in which enslaved black women's bodies were commodified. For discussions of the medical exploitation of black women see Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave*, 227-256; Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Vintage, 1997); Harriet Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Harlem Moon, 2006). These works both point

Roberts further explains how masters' control of black women's reproductive labor and physical labor worked together to exploit the black women on plantations:

> [B]ecause female slaves served as both producers and reproducers, their masters tried to maximize both capacities as much as possible, with labor considerations often taking precedence. Even then, the grueling demands of field work constrained slave women's experience of pregnancy and child-rearing.[72]

By linking the demands of physical labor to pregnancy and child-rearing, a combination of experiences unique to black women, Roberts alludes to the medical implications of the lack of control female slaves had over their bodies. First, disease, sickness and malnutrition abounded on slave plantations. Black women experienced pregnancy in the midst of multiple health risks.[73]

Black women's exposure to health risks was often exacerbated by physical abuse during pregnancy. One vicious form of punishment involved a woman laying her belly in a dug-out hole (to protect the investment) while being flogged. Other times women were beaten until "blood and milk flowed mingled from their breast." [74] Unsanitary birthing

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to the emotional, physical and psychological toll of medical experimentation and explain the general suspicion that African Americans have toward white medical establishments.

[72] Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 25.

[73] Kenneth M. Stampp, The *Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 279-321. Several diseases ravished Southern plantations including pneumonia, diarrhea, cholera, smallpox, scarlet fever, influenza, colds, whooping cough, tetanus (lock jaw), typhoid, tuberculosis (called Negro Consumption before the Civil War), asthma, rheumatism, dental carries and sore eyes, mouth, feet and fingers. To a lesser extent African Americans were affected by malaria, yellow fever, and syphilis. Postell, *The Health of Slaves*, 74-89.

[74] Quoted in Jacqueline Jones *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage, 1985), 19-20.

environments and poor prenatal and postnatal care caused severe problems as well.[75] Deborah Gray White details the various complications black women experienced during pregnancy and childbirth:

> Convulsions, retention of placenta, ectopic pregnancy, breech presentation, premature labor, and uterine rigidity. Birthing was complicated further by the unsanitary practices of mid-wives and physicians who delivered a series of children in the course of a day without washing their hands, thereby triggering outbreaks of puerperal (child bed) fever. These infections of the reproductive organs were often fatal.[76]

Enslaved women also suffered from other illnesses related to childbirth, such as complications with menstrual cycles, flows, pain and discomfort. Todd Savitt's study of Virginia slaves shows that these ailments were the most common reasons enslaved women missed work.[77] Jacobs' juxtaposition of descriptions of "half-starved wretches

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[75] Black infants died at higher rates than white infants because of the demands on mothers' physical labor, poor nutrition, and the abuse mothers endured during pregnancy. Slave children in America also had lower birth rates than those in European and Caribbean slave populations. Richard Steckel, "A Peculiar Population: The Nutrition, Health, and Morality of American Slaves from Childhood to Maturity," *Journal of Economic History* 46 (September 1986): 721-41. The infant mortality rate among slave women was twice that of white women in the mid-nineteenth century. This high infant mortality rate caused a great deal of emotional turmoil to slave mothers. Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 35. Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 36-7. Blacks in general had higher mortality rates than whites. In 1850 the average age at time of death was 21.4 for blacks and 25.5 for whites. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution*, 318. With few exceptions, enslaved black women in Southern states had a slightly lower death rate than their male counterparts (a difference of two years). Although women's day-to-day existence was less healthy, men engaged in more dangerous work. White, *Ar'n't I a Woman*, 84.

[76] White, *Ar'n't I a Woman*, 83-4. Also see Postell, *The Health of Slaves*, 111-127.

[77] Todd Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery: The Diseases and Health Care of Blacks in Antebellum Virginia* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 111-128. We now

toiling from dawn till dark on plantations" with "mothers shrieking for their children" insists on the interconnections between labor, motherhood and sickness in slavery.[78] Most slave mothers had no reprieve from labor demands up to the fifth month of pregnancy. For the better part of their lives, slave women were either "engaging in or recovering from toil," which affected all aspects of their lives including their health.[79] The toll was undoubtedly both physical and psychological.

Equally tormenting to their bodies as physical illnesses, black women faced the unceasing threat of legally sanctioned sexual assault and violence. According to Valerie Smith, "the slave woman's sexual vulnerability" is "the critical fact that differentiated her experience from that of her male counter-parts." [80] Angela Davis also makes this argument by distinguishing men and women's shared experiences of slavery from those that impacted women only:

> Where work was concerned, strength and productivity under the threat of the whip outweighed considerations of sex…But women suffered in different ways as well, for they were victims of sexual abuse and other barbarous mistreatment that could only be inflicted on women.[81]

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know that these ailments are often accompanied by psychological or emotional implications for women's well-being. More research needs to be done to make similar arguments with respect to the non-physical markers of discomfort associated with menstrual cycles, especially under such extreme working conditions.

[78] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 114.

[79] Richard Steckel, "Women, Work, and Health Under Plantation Slavery in the United States" in *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas* eds. Darlene Clark Hine, John McCluskey Jr., and David Barry Gasper (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 46-7, 55.

[80] Valerie Smith, introduction to *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, by Harriet Jacobs ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), xxx.

[81] Davis, *Women, Race, and Class*, 6. It should be noted that Jacobs does include a description of sexualized violence against Luke, a "much-abused" male slave whose

An examination of the sexual politics of the female slave experience also evidences an intimate link between the bodily and psychological harm of enslavement. Rooted in the idea that black women were sexually loose temptresses and jezebels, the rape of slave women was not legally recognized as a criminal act.[82] Through her explanation of Dr. Flint's threats, Jacobs points to how this lack of legal protection engenders sexual abuse:

> He told me I was his property; that I must be subject to his will in all things… But where could I turn for protection? No matter whether the slave girl be as black as ebony or as fair as her mistress. In either case, there is no shadow of law to protect her from insult, from violence, or even from death.[83]

For black women, subjection to the will of masters "in all things" meant that they were open to unrestrained sexual abuse. Jacobs' emphasis on the lack of distinction with regard to skin color demonstrates that a slave girl's physical resemblance to whites garnered her no protection. Jacobs sustains her critique of the particular raced and gendered nature of female slavery throughout the narrative. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. notes that this critique is integral to the very structure of the work: "[Jacobs] charts in vivid detail precisely how

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master "took into his head the strangest freaks of despotism." Using this coded language, Jacobs calls attention to sexual abuse by including that the master subjected Luke to treatment "too filthy to be repeated." Jacobs, *ILSG*, 288-9. As Jacobs' narrative shows, sexual abuse of men occurred, but it is seldom mentioned in either male or female slave narratives. For an excellent analysis of how Jacobs manages to discuss such delicate topics see Gabrielle Foreman, "Manifest in Signs: The Politics of Sex and Representation in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*" in *Harriet Jacobs and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: New Critical Essays*, eds. Rafia Zafar and Deborah Garfield (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 76-99.

[82] Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 29-31. Also see Saidiya Hartman's chapter section "The Violence of the Law," in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 82-6.

[83] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 45.

the shape of her life and the choices she makes are defined by her reduction to a sexual object, an object to be raped, bred, or abused."[84] The slaveholders' control over black women through strenuous physical labor, the denial of reproductive autonomy, poor health care and sexualized violence demonstrates that black women's bodies were constantly under attack during slavery.

The present study does not intend to impugn research that uncovers the extensive bodily harm experienced by enslaved women. In fact, as I have shown, Jacobs sought to present bodily harm as one of the linchpins of slavery. But I would suggest that Harriet Jacobs' narrative forces us to give increased attention to an understudied aspect of black women's exploitation during slavery — psychological assault.[85] Thirteen years after the publication of her foundational study on black female slavery, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, Deborah Gray White reflected on this gap in her own work:

> [T]oday, I would pay more attention to the psychological impact of violence and abuse…If pursued with the rigor that the subject demands, the violence done to black women might well de-center lynching as the primary site and preeminent expression of white (sexual) anxiety on the black body.[86]

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[84] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "To be Raped, Bred, or Abused," *New York Times Book Review*, November 22, 1987, 12.

[85] While this study attempts to isolate psychological assault to bring attention to an underexplored topic, it does acknowledge that physical harm is tied to psychological assault. In other words, Jacobs' narrative shows that physical assault inevitably had a psychic impact and mental suffering had physical effects that registered on the body.

[86] White, *Ar'nt I a Woman*, 10.

White finds support for her observation about the prevalence of psychological violence in slavery in the research of Nell Irvin Painter. Painter argues that violence in slavery results in "soul murder," which "may be summed up as depression, lowered self-esteem, and anger."[87] Like White, Painter issues a compelling call for historians of slavery to "investigate the consequences of child abuse and sexual abuse on an entire society in which beating and raping of enslaved people was neither secret nor metaphorical."[88] Painter's assertion is instructive because it points out that slave narrators' descriptions of mental suffering were not purely metaphorical. Few would make the same assumption with respect to physical violence. In other words, we would not surmise that a slave narrator was relying strictly on metaphor in his or her descriptions of whips, chains or brutal beatings. It is easy to take for granted that depictions of physical brutality corresponded with "real" experiences. Painter, however, reads Jacobs' descriptions of Dr. Flint's constant threats of sexual violence as an example of real and calculable psychological torment via sexual abuse and sexual harassment: "Jacobs says that without her master's having succeeded in raping her, he inflicted injuries that young female slaves frequently suffered and that we would consider psychological."[89] Painter's

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[87]Ibid.,127.

[88] Nell Irvin Painter, "Soul Murder and Slavery: Toward a Fully Loaded Cost Accounting," *in U.S History as Women's History: New Feminist Essays,* eds. Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris and Kathyrn Kish Sklar (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 130.

[89] "Soul Murder," 135. Jacobs' narrative forces us to acknowledge the multiple factors that impacted mental well-being among slaves. It also helps us understand the need for treatment for psychological wounds. However, whether reading literature or historical records, we must be careful not to impose contemporary understandings of psychiatry on the past, or diagnose African Americans with present-day labels such as "depression" or "post-traumatic stress." These contemporary illnesses did not exist as such during the nineteenth century because the taxonomy of disease changes with respect to time, place and space.

historical tracing of psychological trauma validates the connection between figurative depictions of psychological trauma and "real" experiences of mental suffering.

Scholars have also made arguments about how slave narrators construct the "real" harm slavery inflicts in relation to larger metaphorical arguments about the institution. For example, Mary Titus contends that slavery caused bodily illness. She reads *ILSG* not only as a slave narrative, but also as an illness narrative:

> Relations between the poisonous social system of slavery and the individual afflicted body lie at the heart of Harriet Jacobs' narrative…Her recurring depiction of illness simultaneously speaks the actuality of her suffering and reflects another important discourse of a cultural moment, particularly through its employment of medical language to name social disorder.[90]

Jacobs employs medical language to expose the "social ills" of the slave institution and its psychological implications for the enslaved. Dea Boster makes a similar argument with respect to disability.[91] She examines the ways that abolitionists employed metaphors of disability to depict enslavement:

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[90] Mary Titus, "'This poisonous system': Social ills, Bodily ills and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl in *Harriet Jacobs and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: New Critical Essays*, eds. Rafia Zafar and Deborah Garfield (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 199-200.

[91] Dea Boster's discussion of disability brings together physical and mental illness under the banner of the Southern notion of "soundness." Boster explains that soundness referred to "an individual slave's overall state of health," which included his/her "body, mind, or character." *African American Slavery and Disability*, 35. In Chapter Two, I make an argument related to both Boster and Titus's claims. I contend that Jacobs' narrative offers anti-slavery psychiatric commentary as a part of her abolitionist stance. However, there is no evidence that pro-slavery psychiatrists were reading African American anti-psychiatry texts like *ILSG*. In future projects, I hope to explore how the medical language of abolitionist discourses overlapped with the language of psychiatry.

> Alongside graphic and emotional descriptions of the physical suffering and disabilities of African American slaves, abolitionist rhetoric placed the blame for such physical and emotional devastation squarely on the institution itself and emphasized the uplifting aspects of freedom, claiming that emancipation would free African American bodies from the devastating, horrific impairments of bondage.[92]

Representing the physical and psychological damage created by slavery was part of Jacobs' charge to present slavery "as it was." Indeed, presenting slavery "as it was" was the fundamental aim of slave narratives. Every aspect of the narrative was meant to prove how vile the system of slavery was and inspire readers to action. James Olney makes this point clearly:

> The theme is the reality of slavery and the necessity of abolishing it; the content is a series of events and descriptions that will make the reader see and feel the realities of slavery; and the form is chronological, episodic narrative beginning with an assertion of existence and surrounded by various testimonial evidences for that assertion.[93]

Jacobs shows that physical and psychological trauma are a reality of slavery. As the anonymous review in this chapter's epigraph demonstrates, some of Jacobs' readers saw mental suffering as the most egregious abuse of slavery and the true subject of her

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[92] Boster, *African American Slavery and Disability*, 25.
[93] James Olney, "'I Was Born'", 156.

memoir. Still, there has been no equally compelling call for the study of slave narrators' descriptions of psychological assault in their "true tales of slavery." [94]

However, scholars have noted slave narrators' references to non-physical suffering. For example, Frances Smith Foster observes that they chronicled descriptions of punishment that did not refer to solely bodily abuse:

> In addition to the physical abuse, punishments of slaves often resulted in personality changes. Happy slaves became sullen or despondent. Formerly brave men cringed at the approach of any white. Narrators tell of slaves whose despondence led to the ultimate surrender, suicide; however, the ultimate result for most slaves is depicted as the loss of curiosity and compassion and the desire to live.[95]

The present study follows through on Foster's insights concerning slave narrators' treatment of non-physical (and often post-physical) impacts of abuse. In Jacobs' narrative, the "personality changes" to which Foster refers are clearly identified as products of slavery.

Jacobs provides an example of one such personality change in one anecdote about a family torn apart by a cruel slave master. The family's story, which features the trope of the "good master turned bad by slavery," includes a portrait of a girl who, unlike her siblings, does not become an object of physical and/or sexual exploitation because

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[94] To assist in their aim to represent slavery "as it was," slave narrators included phrases like "A True Tale of Slavery" (John Jacobs) or "Slave Life in Georgia" (John Brown) in the titles of their narratives. For a discussion of authentication in slave narratives see John Sekora, "Black Message/White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in the Antebellum Slave Narrative," *Callaloo* no. 32 (July 1987): 482-515.

[95] *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Antebellum Slave Narratives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), 107.

she goes "mad."[96] The family, Jacobs explains, lived in a cottage on the edge of a plantation owned by a woman who, by a strange turn of events, inherited the land and its slaves. The mistress, a "humane slaveholder," allows the mother, father and their six children to live freely, which meant that they, as Jacobs puts it, "had never felt slavery."[97] But after the mistress takes a cruel planter for a husband the family is "convinced of its [slavery] reality."[98] The new master's claim on the family as property effectively dismantles the existing family structure.[99] Jacobs casually lists the family members' fates: the two male children were sold to Georgia, one girl was too young for work, the oldest girl bore children by the master and was sold with his offspring to the master's brother, the third girl became the mother of five daughters and the middle girl "went crazy."[100] "The life she was compelled to lead," writes Jacobs, "drove her mad."[101] The sheer psychological trauma of witnessing the dismantling of her family and the sexual

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[96] Because she is unable to work, the question of whether this is an example of a slave woman feigning madness arises. This possibility is confirmed by historical accounts of enslaved women who feigned madness in order to avoid being sold into the Deep South. See Dea H. Boster, "An 'Epeleptick' Bondswoman: Fits, Slavery, and Power in the Antebellum South," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 83 no. 2 (Summer 2009), 271-301. Whether or not the girl's "craziness" is a strategy for survival we cannot know. But Jacobs is careful to note that life in slavery "drove her mad." The story, then, is certainly an instance in which Jacobs makes a striking linkage between experiences of confinement and mental suffering. Mental suffering here is best understood as a product of a slaveholding society.

[97] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 78.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Slavery put considerable strain on family life among slaves, but it did not make it pathological. Contrary to the notion that black families during slavery consisted of single-parent family units headed by a matriarch, most slaves had family structures consisting of two parents and many children. Married couples usually had long-lasting relationships. See Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* 50-1; Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," *Black Scholar* no. 3 (December 1971): 3-15; Jones, *Labor of Love*, *Labor of Sorrow*, 36.

[100] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 75.

[101] Ibid.

exploitation of her sisters (and the knowledge that the same fate awaits her) most likely explains the middle girl's madness. As exemplified in this story of a slave girl who goes "crazy," Jacobs' narrative repeatedly demonstrates that psychological changes are consequences of the unrelenting and overlapping forms of violence, abuse and confinement on an enslaved woman's mental health.

"To Say Nothing of My Soul"

Jacobs' description of her seven-year confinement in her grandmother's attic is another telling example of the institution's ability to alter a slave's psychological state.[102] The original title of Jacobs' narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Seven Years Concealed*, suggests that she saw her confinement in the attic as a critical episode in the overall brutalization she experienced in slavery. The title notwithstanding, the episode is one of the most referenced aspects of the narrative. Valerie Smith signifies on Jacobs' chapter title to argue how the attic is Jacobs' "loophole of retreat." Smith sees the episode as exemplary of how Jacobs creatively navigates the oppressive institution.[103] According to Smith, the garret episode demonstrates Jacobs' "ability to transform the conditions of

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[102] Through bitter winters and sweltering summers, Jacobs spent seven years in the tiny attic space in her grandmother's home. The attic was nine feet long, seven feet wide and three feet high.

[103] "'Loopholes of Retreat': Architecture and Ideology in Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,*" in *Reading Black, Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology* ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Meridian, 1991), 212-226. Smith's arguments are connected to a broader issue in the study of slave narratives. Early studies on slave narratives normalized the slave as male and presented enslaved women as helpless victims. See Foster, *Witnessing Slavery*, xl-xli; Deborah McDowell, "In the First Place: Making Frederick Douglass & the African-American Narrative Tradition" in *Critical Essays on Frederick Douglass* ed. William Andrews (Boston: G. K. Hall 1991), 192-213.

her oppression into the preconditions of her liberation and that of her loved ones."[104] Nevertheless, Smith contends that the attic is also a space of irony: "… the garret, a place of confinement, also renders her spiritually independent of her master, and makes possible her ultimate escape to freedom…"[105] Thus, confinement in the garret, according to Smith, is ultimately not a place of impotence for Jacobs, but a source of power, as she is able to act according to her own will and against the imposed constraints of her master. In sum, rather than as a wholly oppressive space, Smith sees the attic as symbolic of the way Jacobs achieves freedom within confinement.[106]

Indeed, Jacobs' long confinement is a means of achieving freedom. But as alluded to in the above section, "The Mad Blackwoman in the Attic," her efforts do not provide immunity from episodes of psychological instability in the garret or long-term emotional scarring. She demonstrates that confinement takes a powerful toll on her body and mind in one of the most remarkable scenes in the narrative. This emphasis on the body and mind separately does not reflect seventeenth-century Western philosophical discussions concerning the dualism of the mind and body in constructions of the self.[107]

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[104] Smith, *Incidents*, xxxxiii.
[105] Ibid., 29.
[106] This reading of the garret is long-standing and shared by leading scholars of African American literature. See Rafia, *We Wear the Mask*, 119; Joanne Braxton, *Black Women Writing and Autobiography: A Tradition Within a Tradition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 26; Li, *Something Akin to Freedom*, 29.
[107] Feminist critics of the mind/body split, notably Catherine Keller, do not adequately account for Jacobs' reference to the "spirit/soul" in the construction of the self. *From A Broken Web: Separation, Sexism and Self* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986). In Jacobs' narrative, the spirit figures importantly in healing and resistance to cultural, physical and psychological trauma. More research needs to be done on the connections between black women's spirituality and/or religious practices and mental well-being in slave narratives. Eugene Genovese's historical study of slavery shows that black religious traditions were a "defense against psychological assault." *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage, 1976), 228-9. With respect to black women, Fox-Genovese notes

Jacobs' narrative presents a critique of this divide; in Jacobs' narrative, the mind and the body are not separate entities.

This momentary disentanglement of the body from other forms of suffering illuminates the psychological costs of enslavement. Precisely because the attic scene is unfathomable, Jacobs has the two-fold task of authenticating its occurrence and depicting its horror. With respect to the former, today's reader has the benefit of the extensive archival research of Jean Fagan Yellin, who has shown that key aspects of Jacobs' narrative are corroborated by actual life events. For example, Jacobs suffered from life-long rheumatism as a result of her long confinement in a space measured to be nine feet long, seven feet wide and three feet high.[108] Jacobs alludes to this specific detail in the narrative when she comments: "But it is a fact; and to me a sad one, even now; for my body still suffers from the effects of that long imprisonment, to say nothing of my soul."[109] Here Jacobs validates her assertion about the duration of time she spends in the garret and brings to light the lasting impact of the experience.

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that they formed religious sisterhoods. *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 332. Alexis Wells, scholar of American religious cultures, is currently conducting the first full-length project that uses Georgia as a case study to explore the ways that female-bodied experiences of enslavement yielded distinctive, woman-gendered religious cultures in the Lower South. Regarding mental health, she examines the ways women's experiences of sexual and reproductive trauma (for instance rape or infant death) contoured the existential strivings and ethical codes of the entire community, and yielded religious cultures concerned with survival. "Re/membering the Sacred Womb: The religious cultures on enslaved women in Georgia, 1750-1861" (PhD diss., Emory University, 2014).

[108] Through extensive archival work, Jean Fagan Yellin has verified various elements of Jacobs' account, including the lingering physical mark of the attic episode in letters between Jacobs and her confidante Amy Post, the nineteenth-century Quaker, feminist, and abolitionist. See "Text and Contexts," 262-282.

[109] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 224.

Employing her classic use of the "undertell," Jacobs' choice to refrain from detailing the impact of confinement on her soul serves to magnify the impact of non-bodily injury.[110] Be that as it may, the phrase is not solely a rhetorical gesture; Jacobs has much to say about her non-physical suffering. For example, when describing the moment of her escape from the attic, she describes the impact of confinement in conjunction with descriptions of physical discomfort: "My brain was all of a whirl, and my limbs tottered under me."[111] Significantly, her comments reflect that she is as destabilized mentally as she is physically in her flight.

Prior to her experience of instability while escaping from the garret, Jacobs has an episode of psychological deterioration within the attic. Jacobs begins this passage by highlighting how her long confinement created physical disability. During the second winter she loses the ability to speak because her face and tongue are stiffened by the brutally cold weather. Under these same conditions, Jacobs loses consciousness for sixteen hours. After regaining consciousness, Jacobs' speech is disabled again, but this time the manifestation is mental rather than physical, as she becomes "delirious, and was in great danger of betraying [herself] and [her] friends."[112] While the first form of speech impairment was a threat to her physical health, the second form of impairment jeopardized her freedom and endangered her entire family. In light of the possibility of

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[110] Gabrielle Foreman argues that Jacobs uses the narrative technique of undertelling aspects of her narrative from abuse (sexual and physical) to white guilt to connect with her audience, retain agency and subvert master narratives. Foreman argues that Jacobs "negotiates her way through her narrative, creating gaps and silences on her own terms." "The Spoken and The Silenced in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and *Our Nig*" *Callalo* 13 no. 2 (Spring 1990): 317. The model example of the undertell in *ILSG* is "I have not exaggerated the wrongs inflicted by Slavery; on the contrary, my descriptions fall far short of the facts." Jacobs, *ILSG*, 5.

[111] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 237.

[112] Ibid., 185.

their exposure, it is for Jacobs' mental, not physical, illness that her family seeks medical attention; their solution is to "stupef[y] [her] with drugs."[113] The language here is revealing, as to "stupefy" is to make one unable to think or feel properly. In essence, the family fights fire with fire because they recognize that her illness is of a non-physical nature.

Even after attempts to treat her with drugs, for six weeks Jacobs was "weary in body" and "sick at heart," which suggests that the physical and non-physical impacts of confinement were separate, but related, and equally powerful. Still, her physical scars slowly healed from the incident, but her "sickness at heart" continued to be a detriment to her well-being. She comes just short of declaring that she had suicidal thoughts: "Dark thoughts passed through my mind as I lay there day after day."[114] Up until her escape we find evidence of similar forms of psychological deterioration. For example, in the chapter "Preparations for Escape," she writes: "At times, I was stupefied and listless; at other times I became very impatient to know when these dark years would end."[115] Again she uses the word "stupefy," but in this case it is her experience of confinement, rather than drugs, that causes her stupefaction. Her comments suggest that during her physical confinement Jacobs oscillates between moments in which she is divorced from mental functioning and phases of mental weariness and anxiety.

Beyond its function as a means of achieving freedom, then, the garret *experience* is primarily a place of mental and physical suffering. At times, Jacobs' mental distress trumps her physical pain. She makes a striking statement to this end during the journey to

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[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid., 186.
[115] Ibid., 224.

the garret, when she is forced to hide from would-be capturers in the bushes. Describing a poisonous reptile bite, she comments: "The dread of being disabled was greater than the physical pain I endured."[116] The opposition she sets up between "dread" and "physical pain" reflects her belief that the latter is neither her sole form of suffering nor the dominant one.

The hierarchy structuring the various tolls of confinement is also evidenced in depictions of the flight Jacobs makes from the plantation to a temporary hiding place, her friend Betty's attic. She begins the episode with vivid descriptions of her physical affliction: "The pain in my leg was so intense that it seemed as if I should drop…" [117] She adds an equally riveting illustration of the psychological dimension of her suffering when Betty offers her "some nice hot supper."[118] She writes: "Betty's vocation led her to think eating the most important thing in life. She did not realize that my heart was too full for me to care much about supper."[119] Jacobs not only clearly indicates a distinction, but she also places more weight on the non-physical challenges of her life as a runaway slave. It is with this state of mind, the belief that physical pain is secondary to mental suffering, that Jacobs spends seven years in the attic.

Sorrowful Mothers

An analysis of the attic and related scenes gives us insight into the ways in which mental suffering can arise during the process of attaining freedom. But taking a step back to consider why Jacobs seeks to preserve her family in the first place gives us a fuller

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[116] Ibid., 150.
[117] Ibid., 153.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.

understanding of mental suffering among enslaved women. Jacobs suffers in the attic in order to carry out her obligations as a mother. Most slave women saw motherhood as one of the most prized gender subjectivities.[120]

As her narrative shows, mental suffering for Jacobs, like most enslaved women, appears most commonly as a byproduct of a mother being severed from her children. Orlando Patterson indicates that separation from kinship networks, or natal alienation, is a defining feature of slavery.[121] His assertion that "nothing comes across more dramatically from the hundreds of interviews with American ex-slaves than the fear of separation" suggests that our discussions about confinement in slave narratives must account for how slave narrators depict these non-bodily aspects of suffering.[122] Jacobs shows how the fear of physical separation has a harmful effect on the mental health of enslaved mothers. Mothers' separation from their children was physical and psychological. Historian John Blassingame also notes that "the hopelessness of slavery occasionally caused mental illness" and that much of it came from "excessive punishment

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[120]Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 322.; White, *Ar'nt I a Woman*, 105-6.; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 494-501. While enslaved women took pride in motherhood, they were privy to a variety of subjectivities. Xiomara Santamarina alerts us to these various gendered identities: "[M]odern readers are wrong to assume that slave women's sexuality was the only significant dimension of their experiences as gendered beings. Slave women asserted their womanhood by appealing to a variety of cultural narratives about gender that included narratives of motherhood, labor, entrepreneurship, spirituality, and collective responsibility." "Black womanhood in North American women's slave narratives" in *The Cambridge Companion to The African American Slave Narrative* ed. Audrey Fisch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 323-245.
[121] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 5-7.
[122] Ibid., 6.

and the separation of family members." He also provides examples of mothers who "went crazy" on account of being separated from their children.[123]

Before discussing the fear of separation, we must briefly consider how black women's connection to their children was curtailed by the system of slavery. Most obviously, the law prescribed black women's relationships with their children even before conception; children belonged to the slave master before they were born and sometimes even before they were conceived.[124] After children were born, slave mothers' workloads made it difficult to attend to their children's needs.[125] This hindrance to childcare caused a substantial amount of sorrow to slave mothers. Jacobs represents this sorrow in her description of her daughter Ellen's reaction to being sent to Dr. Flint's family plantation, Auburn. Much like her mother, Ellen had not felt the sting of slavery growing up.[126] But Jacobs' ability to protect her child was limited at the Auburn plantation. She was sent to work immediately upon their arrival while "[her] little Ellen

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[123] *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 298-302.
[124] Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 33-4. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution*, 205.
[125] It should be noted that black women relied on each other tremendously during slavery. They cultivated "female slave networks," which were built on cooperation and interdependence and offered healthcare, childcare and work support. Because female communities were so robust, no child was truly motherless. White, *Ar'nt I a Woman*, 119-141. Wilma King, "'Suffer with Them Unit Death': Slave Women and Their Children in Nineteenth-Century America," in *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas* eds. Darlene Clark Hine, John McCluskey Jr., and David Barry Gasper (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 152-3.
[126] Jacobs would be considered a privileged slave because she lived with her family until she was seven, she was taught to read, she was not separated from her family until she escaped to the North, her father was a well-respected carpenter who was able to hire himself out and her grandmother was free. Jacobs, like other privileged slave narrators such as Frederick Douglass, had the task of representing her life as both unique and commonplace. See Foster, *Written By Herself*, 96. Olney, "'I was Born.'" 154-6.

was left below in the kitchen."[127] Ellen, unaccustomed to such abandonment, "broke down under the trials of her new life," which manifested in the fact that she "wandered about" until she "cried herself sick."[128] Jacobs indicates that witnessing her daughter in such a terrible condition in turn caused her distress: "One day, [Ellen] sat under the window where I was at work, crying that weary cry which makes a mother's heart bleed. I was obliged to steel myself to bear it."[129] Jacobs alerts the reader to both her condition and her coping mechanism. While some mothers, like Jacobs, were able to "steel" themselves, others were unable to handle grief from denied motherhood, as Jacqueline Jones notes:

> A slave mother's love protected her children only up to a point…The reality or threat of separation from their families (a fact of slave life that became even more frequent during the late antebellum period) caused some women to descend into madness, the cries of 'Take me wid you, mammy' echoing in their ears, while others donned a mask of stoicism to conceal their inner pain.[130]

Enslaved mothers, then, had a range of responses to being separated from children that were sold away or those that remained on plantations. Because separation happened whether or not children were sold, this kind of suffering rivals any physical form of brutality, unfortunately.[131] Furthermore, the very possibility of separation was able to

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[127] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 132.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 36.
[131] Despite the legally endorsed attempts to wrestle away their children, black women continued to maintain their families. For more on the establishment and maintenance of slave kinship networks see Gutman, *The Black Family*, 45-100.

"strike terror in the hearts of all slaves."[132] Of course, the general emotional climate among slaves who were forced to face the possibility of separation took on a special character for mothers.

Jacobs represents the terror of separation among slave mothers as uncertainty and anxiety. The slave mother is "very watchful" and "knows there is no security for her children." This watchfulness, Jacobs writes, continues to increase as children age: "After they have entered their teens she lives in daily expectation of trouble. This leads to many questions."[133] Here Jacobs reveals how the lack of security and impending violence created anxiety-laden behaviors such as "watchfulness" and "questioning" among black mothers.

The ongoing feeling of insecurity weighed heavily on their minds. Jacobs describes the cumulative impact the fear of separation had on her before escaping to the North:

> I had lived too long in bodily pain and anguish of spirit. I always was in dread that by some accident, or some contrivance, slavery would succeed in snatching my children from me. This thought drove me nearly frantic, and I determined to steer for The North Star at all hazards.[134]

The passage contains a number of insights. First, it is another example of how "bodily pain" was not the only kind of suffering black mothers experienced. Second, we see that Jacobs' efforts to escape slavery are tethered to her desire to prevent familial severances. And finally, mental suffering, in this case her being driven "nearly frantic," was a part of

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[132] Patterson, 6.
[133] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 87.
[134] Ibid., 227.

the system of slavery and the fight against it. This sequence of separation and suffering occurs in the life of Fanny, a fugitive slave mother who also spends years in hiding prior to escape. Describing her encounter with Fanny on a boat to the North, Jacobs writes: "She told me of the sufferings she had gone through in making her escape, and of her terrors while she was concealed in her mother's house. Above all, she dwelt on the agony of separation from all her children on that dreadful auction day."[135] Like Jacobs, Fanny was concealed in a makeshift hiding place on her journey to freedom, but unlike Jacobs, Fanny's children were sold away from her. But they shared "the same sorrows" as mothers.[136] For all of the trouble of her experiences, Fanny dwells most on the emotional and psychological impact of being separated from her children, which is compounded by the reality that she will never see her children again.

Jacobs presents other mothers who were separated from their children and as a result experienced a great deal of sorrow, agony and even thoughts of suicide. To illustrate these heightened emotions, Jacobs provides a sketch of an auction from the perspective of a slave mother:

> But to the slave mother New Year's day comes laden with peculiar sorrows. She sits on her cold cabin floor, watching the children who may all be torn from her the next morning; and often does she wish that she and they might die before the day dawns. She may be an ignorant creature, degraded by the system that has brutalized her from childhood; but she has a mother's instincts, and is capable of feeling a mother's agonies.[137]

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[135] Ibid., 238.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid., 26.

In part, Jacobs is fulfilling her aim to humanize and legitimize black women through an affirmation of their motherly instincts within a degrading system. Even when the system is able to create "ignorant creatures" it cannot destroy a mother's "instincts" and, therefore, it perpetuates a mother's "agony." According to Jacobs, while agony of this sort was common, it remained harrowing. Among the many devastating sketches of slave life that Jacobs offers, she includes a scene with an anguished mother and notes that it made a lasting imprint on her. Speaking of a mother who watched all seven of her children be sold, she writes: "I met that mother in the street, and her wild, haggard face lives to-day in my mind. She wrung her hands in anguish, and exclaimed, 'Gone! All gone! Why don't God kill me?' I had no words wherewith to comfort her. Instances of this kind are of daily, yea, of hourly occurrence."[138] By juxtaposing the woman's exasperation and despair with her own inability to console the grief-stricken mother, Jacobs redirects the question to a broader analysis, illuminating her contention that only the end of slavery could offer the mother relief, because it was slavery that caused her suffering.

Maddening Resistance

Given this ongoing sorrow, anguish and agony, it is not surprising that black mothers found ways to resist and seek redress. Slave mothers resisted by whatever means available including infanticide, abortion, self-imposed sterility, self-induced miscarriages

[138] Ibid., 27.

and birth control.[139] Less often than their male counterparts, some slave women ran away from plantations.[140] Running away from plantations typically required that mothers separate from their children indefinitely, or, as in the case of Jacobs, at least temporarily. In any case they suffered because, as Deborah Gray White concludes, "such desperate decisions inevitably induced emotional trauma and psychological torment."[141] Wilma King reads Jacobs' grandmother's advice, that she (Jacobs) should "suffer with them [her children] till death," as an example of the tremendous amount of pressure on slave mothers to refrain from deserting their children because of the guaranteed psychological ramifications of separation.[142]

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[139] See White, *Ar'n't I a Woman*, 84-8; Gutman, *The Black Family*, 80-81. Enslaved women, whether or not they were mothers, also resisted through committing arson, poisoning, feigning illness and/or sterility, murdering, sassing, defying, committing suicide, committing truancy, fighting physically, participating in work slow downs, self-mutilating and destroying property. Raymond A. Bauer, "Day to Day Resistance to Slavery" in *American Slavery: The Question of Resistance*, ed. John H. Bracey, August Meier, and Elliot Rudwick (California: Wadsworth, 1971), 37-60; White, *Ar'n't I a Woman*, 74-5, 78-9; Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 45-9; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 330. Extreme forms of resistance (infanticide, murder and suicide) were rare and not without psychological torment. White, *Ar'n't I a Woman*, 74, 87-8; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 329. Other forms of resistance such as feigning barrenness were risky because such female slaves were often sold away. These women paid the ultimate emotional price. Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave*, 20-1.

[140] The typical runaway slave was male and between the ages of sixteen and thirty-five. Women tended to stay in bondage for several reasons. Most women between the ages of sixteen and thirty-five were mothers and would likely be leaving young children behind. Women were also more often than men confined to the plantation due to their use as field hands, domestics and child bearers, which gave them fewer opportunities to flee than did, for example, transporting goods from the plantation to town. It was also much harder to make an escape and complete the journey to the North with children. The few mothers who did run away left their children knowing that the female slave network (which provided childcare support) would look after their children. Gutman, *The Black Family*, 265; Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 43; White, *Ar'n't I a Woman*, 71, 128; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 648.

[141] White, *Ar'nt I a Woman*, 74.

[142] "'Suffer With Them Till Death,'" 160.

This kind of suffering suggests that a fuller understanding of mental suffering in the context of slavery must consider how even attempts to resist and/or counter assault resulted in mental suffering. For example, Jacobs creatively attempted to evade sexual, physical and psychological harm at the hands of her master and mistress by intentionally engaging in a sexual liaison with a neighboring lawyer and planter, Mr. Sands. She sought to avoid sexual violation by her master and hoped that Mr. Sands would eventually free her children. In fact, she presents this decision as her best option: "It seems less degrading to give one's self, than to submit to compulsion. There is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you, except that which he gains by kindness and attachment."[143] But her choice to act in opposition to moral codes regarding female respectability does not shield her from the mental suffering that results from making the decision. Jacobs anguishes more over her grandmother's potential response to the news than her own feelings of shame. Jacobs' brief severance of family ties, after being shunned by her grandmother, leads to an episode of mental suffering.

Her grandmother's conceptions of chastity and purity serve, then, as another form of confinement with which Jacobs must contend. For example, she spends time agonizing over the decision to tell her grandmother, as if that conversation were more difficult than the choice to pursue a relationship with Sands: "I had many unhappy hours. I secretly mourned over the sorrow I was bringing on my grandmother…"[144] These lines depict psychological distress resulting from "mourning" over the potential of her grandmother's suffering in the form of "sorrow." Still, the mental suffering Jacobs endures before the decision to tell her grandmother about her sexual engagement with

[143] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 84-5.
[144] Ibid., 86.

Mr. Sands is only matched by the mental breakdown that follows her confession.

In the hours following the confession, Jacobs uses the sentimental novel form to highlight the impact of confinement in slavery on her mental health. Turning briefly to previous analysis of Jacobs' use of the sentimental form, we can readily comprehend how and why Jacobs writes about mental suffering in this instance. Hazel Carby contends that Jacobs' decision to pursue an illicit relationship with Mr. Sands results in her loss of virtue and effectively "places her outside the parameters of the conventional heroine," who preferred "death or madness" to impurity.[145] Carby rightly contends that Jacobs revises this script for her own purposes:

> Jacobs' narrative was unique in its subversion of a major narrative code of sentimental fiction: death, as preferable to loss of purity, was replaced by 'Death is better than slavery.' (63) *Incidents* entered the field of women's literature and history transforming and transcending the central paradigm of death versus virtue.[146]

Indeed, Jacobs reconfigures the tradition to underscore her own understanding of the costs of the loss of impurity. Jacobs loses her impurity, a situation she finds preferable to unmitigated slavery. Carby contends that Jacobs' children, the consequences for her loss of purity, were ultimately the enslaved woman's "links to life and the motivating force of an additional determination to be free."[147] Jacobs essentially replaces a concern about purity with a concern about slavery.

While Carby discusses how Jacobs revises the dominant narrative concerning

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[145] Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, 59.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid.

death and purity, the scholar leaves unexamined the other option in the dominant narrative — a heroine's preference for madness over the loss of purity. If Carby's new paradigm – that death is preferable to slavery for Jacobs – is correct, then is madness also preferable to slavery for Jacobs? This question complicates Carby's claim. Representations of madness in *ILSG* suggest that madness, as an indirect consequence of embracing impurity, is better than slavery even if it results in death. We see this reconfiguration of the dominant narrative in the scene following the confession.

Hence, in the hours following the confession, Jacobs uses the language of sentiment and the motif of the heroine's frantic and aimless wandering to depict the psychological burden of resisting confinement.[148] Mirroring the tone of protagonists from so many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sentimental novels, Jacobs laments over how her relatives will react to what they will read as the tarnishing of her character: "Now, how could I look them in the face? My self-respect was gone! I had resolved that I would be virtuous, though I was a slave. I had said, 'Let the storm beat! I will brave it till I die.' And now, how humiliated I felt!"[149] While the language of the fictional sentimental heroine is useful for Jacobs in articulating her woes, the reference to her slave status reminds the reader of the particularity of her situation and usage.

By attending to the particularity of her experience as a slave girl we see how

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[148] The language of sensibility refers to the narrative style of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sentimental fiction. Like other women writers of sentimental fiction, Jacobs uses a pen name, Linda Brent. These works usually featured virtuous protagonists and tearful expressions of distress and/or sorrow. Jacobs' narrative, too, presents a heroine who survives love and loss and faces a series of obstacles that she must overcome. The tradition begins with Samuel Richardson's *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) and continues through the mid-nineteenth century to include Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852).

[149] Jacobs, *ILSG,* 87.

confinement creates mental illness. The illustrations of wandering can be read as vivid depictions of madness, as many such scenes in sentimental novels are, but within the context of her particular experiences, they more accurately express the ways in which enslaved women, confined physically and socially, were made psychologically ill by the peculiar institution. It is the precarious decision she makes to avoid assault at the hands of her slave master, and the resulting psychological distress, that causes Jacobs to wander frantically and break down physically. And rather than being a response to an argument with a lover, as is the case in sentimental novels, the dismay in the wandering scene in *ILSG* depicts Jacobs' reaction to overlapping forms of confinement:

> Where could I go? I was afraid to return to my master's. I walked on recklessly, not caring where I went, or what would become of me. When I had gone four or five miles, fatigue compelled me to stop. I sat down on the stump of an old tree. The stars were shining through the boughs above me. How they mocked me, with their bright, calm light! The hours passed by, and as I sat there alone a chilliness and deadly sickness came over me. I sank on the ground. My mind was full of horrid thoughts. I prayed to die; but the prayer was not answered.[150]

This passage points to how the choices she is compelled to make in confinement result in physical and mental debilitation and contemplation of suicide. The moral codes concerning acceptable femininity her grandmother promotes, in conjunction with the threat of physical and sexual harm from her master, leave Jacobs utterly abandoned and isolated. Physical exhaustion sets in as a natural result of the miles of walking. Likewise,

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[150] Ibid., 88.

her desperation over her predicament causes "horrid thoughts" that warrant a desire to die. Although she does not explicitly indicate a desire for self-harm here, her inclination to alleviate her pain via death is indicative of her level of psychological suffering. When we consider the wandering scene alongside the earlier incident of the girl "who went crazy," it becomes apparent why Jacobs is uncritical of the other girl's response. The wandering vignette serves as an elaboration on the piercing declaration that "the life she was compelled to lead drove her mad."[151] The life Jacobs was compelled to live as a slave, and which prompted her to break with moral standards concerning purity, led to psychological instability. By having the scene culminate in a death wish, Jacobs asserts that this is an appropriate response to the perils embedded in an institution that thrives on the ownership and manipulation of enslaved women's bodies and minds.[152]

What Would You Be?

As I have demonstrated, Jacobs gives considerable attention to enslaved women's particular experiences of mental suffering. However, she is also careful to link them to a group narrative concerning the lasting impact of slavery on African Americans in general. In a series of rhetorical questions following a statement about how some black men "give their masters free access to their wives and daughters," she directly addresses the reader: "What would you be, if you had been born and brought up a slave, with

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[151] Ibid., 79.

[152] Terri Snyder contends that suicide ideation appears in a wide variety of slavery narratives including those of/those written by Olaudah Equiano, Charles Bell, Frederick Douglass and Mattie Johnson. "Suicide, Slavery, and Memory in North America," *Journal of American History* 97 no.1 (2010): 39-62.

generations of slaves for ancestors?"[153] Through this piercing rhetorical gesture, Jacobs refers to the cumulative psychological effects of slavery, which occupy several temporal spaces at once. Tribulation for African Americans, she suggests, exists simultaneously in the past, present, and future.

In sync with Jacobs' conceptions about the reverberation of black female mental suffering in slavery across time, Alice Walker draws attention to how the institution's damage to black women's minds manifested in their creative productivity (or lack thereof) during slavery and after. In *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*, she offers a reading of those Southern women, or "crazy Saints," that Jean Toomer sketched in his acclaimed *Cane* (1923). In her poetic and imaginative way, Walker questions how many creative-genius black women were driven insane by slavery:

> For these grandmothers and mothers of ours were not Saints, but Artists; driven to a numb and bleeding madness by the springs of creativity in them of which there was no release. They were Creators, who lived lives of spiritual waste, because they were so rich in spirituality—which is the basis of Art—that the strain of enduring their unused and unwanted talent drove them insane. Throwing away this spirituality was their pathetic attempt to *lighten the soul to a weight their work-worn, sexually abused bodies could bear*. What did it mean for a black woman to be an artist in our grandmothers' time? In our great-grandmothers' day? It is a question with an answer cruel enough to stop the blood. Did you have a genius of a great-grandmother *who died under some ignorant and depraved white*

[153] Ibid., 68.

> *overseer's lash*? Or was *she required to bake biscuits* for a lazy backwater tramp, when she cried out in her soul to paint watercolors of sunsets, or the rain falling on the green and peaceful pasturelands? Or was her *body broken and forced to bear children (who were more often than not sold away from her)*—eight, ten, fifteen, twenty children— when her one joy was the thought of modeling heroic figures of rebellion, in stone or clay?[154] [emphasis mine]

In Walker's estimation, all the realities and demands of slave labor and life for black women that Jacobs so clearly lays out — childbearing, physical and sexual abuse, severance of families — stunted the creative potential of black women.

Creative genius aside, black women's conditions after slavery remained far too similar to life in slavery. Historian Herbert Gutman corroborates this connection: "Who the ex-slaves were just after the emancipation and how they defined themselves and their needs depended very much upon who they had been before the emancipation."[155] For example, even after emancipation economic and political realities forced black women to earn a living away from their homes. They worked in the domestic sphere for whites and often as field laborers. All of the complications that came with strenuous black female labor in slavery remained, including the implications for physical and mental health.[156] Thus, any understanding of black people after slavery, especially during the first two decades following emancipation, must consider slavery.

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[154] *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, 233.
[155] Gutman, *The Black Family*, 430.
[156] Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 15; Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 63; Davis, *Women, Race, and Class*, 87-8. Scholars speculate on whether the nutritional conditions under slavery impeded the mental and physical health and economic progress of African Americans after the Civil War. Steckel, "Women, Work, and Health," 56.

Similarly, Jacobs contends that black women's experiences during slavery were not just connected to, but also informed their post-emancipation lives through memory. Speaking of the terror of sexualized violence, Jacobs links her own suffering to that of other black female slaves:

> I know that some are too much brutalized by slavery to feel the humiliation of their position; but many slaves feel it most acutely, and shrink from the memory of it. I cannot tell how much I suffered in the presence of these wrongs, nor how I am still pained by the retrospect.[157]

In this passage Jacobs brings us a most striking connection between slavery and post-slavery life — memory. Jacobs contends here, years after her escape, that she still is pained by the "retrospect." In her chapter "Redressing the Pained Body," Saidiya Hartman historicizes the pain of slavery:

> Pain is a normative condition that encompasses the legal subjectivity of the enslaved that is constructed along the lines of injury and punishment, the violation and suffering … the operation of power on black bodies, and the life of property in which…the slave as thing supersedes the admittedly tentative recognition of slave humanity and permits the intemperate uses of chattel. This pain might best be described as the history that hurts… If this pain has been largely unspoken or unrecognized, it is due to the sheer denial of black sentience rather than the inexpressibility of pain.[158]

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[157] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 46. Rather than simply the fulfillment of sexual desire or slave-breeding, rape during slavery was a weapon of terror that had long-term effects on black women. Roberts, *Killing the Black Body,* 29-30.
[158] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 51.

African Americans, and, as Jacobs shows, women in particular, had to contend with "the history that hurts" on a daily basis. After slavery, they were confronted with both the "pain of memory" and the "memory of pain." But Jacobs' narrative reminds us that the pain of slavery was not just bodily, as Hartman's analysis might suggest, but it was also mental. Thus, Jacobs' narrative uncovers the devastating ways slavery psychologically wounded enslaved women. It also gestures towards how that devastation endured beyond slavery. In this way, Jacobs' narrative uncovers the magnitude of the psychological costs of enslavement for black women, even years later.

Her understanding of enslaved women's psychological wounding was not the dominant perspective. Slavers and psychiatrists claimed that slavery safeguarded against insanity among enslaved blacks. This claim reflects what I call pro-slavery psychiatry. In the next chapter, I explain how Jacobs' conceptions about madness and confinement constitute what I call anti-slavery psychiatry. Anti-slavery psychiatry provides a counter narrative to pro-slavery psychiatry arguments. Putting anti-slavery psychiatry in conversation with pro-slavery psychiatry illuminates how slavery and asylums are interconnected through discourses about madness and confinement.

Chapter 2
Natural and Habitual Orders: Slavery, Asylums and Psychiatric Discourses

Derangement is characterized by "every departure of the mind in its perceptions, judgments, and reasonings from its natural and habitual order; accompanied with corresponding actions."

—Benjamin Rush*, Medical Inquiries and Observations Upon Diseases of the Mind* (1835)

Benjamin Rush, the father of American psychiatry and a signer of the Declaration of Independence, wrote these words in his *Medical Inquiries and Observations Upon Diseases of the Mind* (1812), which was the first U.S. textbook on mental illnesses.[159] It was published in 1812, reprinted up through 1835 (five editions), and served as the major textbook in the field for almost fifty years. Rush, like so many eighteenth-century men of science, sought to create universal laws for understanding disease.[160] He claimed that derangement was characterized by "every departure of the mind in its perceptions, judgments, and reasonings from its natural and habitual order; accompanied with corresponding actions." Harriet Jacobs' slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (*ILSG*), posed to Rush's definition a critical question: how is

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[159]Benjamin Rush, a Quaker and Presbyterian, was an ardent abolitionist. He used environmentalist arguments to prove that slavery was to blame for any inferiority, "immorality," or "ignorance" among blacks. In 1773 he wrote, "slavery is so foreign to the human mind, that the moral faculties, as well as those of the understanding are debased, and rendered torpid." Quoted in Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro 1550-1812* (Williamson: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 187. Still, Rush held fast to beliefs about the biological differences between blacks and whites. For example, he concluded that African women were debauched by orang-outangs [sic]. Benjamin Rush, "Observations Intended to Favour a Supposition That the Black Color (As It Is Called) of the Negroes is Derived from the Leprosy." American Phil. Soc., *Transactions*, 4 (1799), 291.

[160] For a fuller discussion of the state of medicine in the eighteenth century see Roy Porter, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Medicine* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

this conceptualization of mental disease complicated when the "natural social order" in which one exists can itself be defined as deranged? In other words, Jacobs' narrative described how derangement is produced by an arguably *unnatural,* and certainly irrational, yet habitual order. Jacobs' formulations about madness in a slaveholding nation did not just push back against the ideas of Benjamin Rush. This chapter examines how Harriet Jacobs' theories engaged broader discourses in which pro-slavery debates intersected with psychiatric thought. In the previous chapter we saw how Jacobs' theory operates with respect to the experiences of the black women whose lives she documents. In this chapter, my analysis of Jacobs' narrative works to demonstrate that her theory is applicable to conversations about race more generally. The central concern here is how national debates about insanity connected slavery and asylums. I argue that ideas about the "colored insane" justified asylum keepers' approaches to treating blacks who were labeled insane in asylums.[161] Their ideas also legitimized slavery. Put another way, in this chapter we see how asylums were pulled into ideological battles over slavery through asylum keepers' and slavers' beliefs about the colored insane. In the next chapter, we will see how these same pro-slavery psychiatric discourses in turn pulled slavery into the governance of asylums.

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[161] Dominant psychiatric ideas about the "colored insane" influenced the treatment of slaves on plantations and free blacks in mental asylums. Slaveholders also consulted non-mainstream healers and homeopathic doctors. For more on treatment of the colored insane before slavery see Todd Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery: The Diseases and Health Care of Blacks in Antebellum Virginia* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 247-279; William Postell*, The Health of Slaves on Southern Plantations* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 86-7; *Moonlight, Magnolias, and Madness: Insanity in South Carolina from the Colonial Period to the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 195-204; Sharla Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 94,96.

The unifying assumption of what I call pro-slavery psychiatry was the conjecture that insanity was more prevalent among blacks in the North than in the South.[162] Harriet Jacobs' discussion of her experiences of mental suffering in the North counters this theory. She theorizes that the South and the North were equally detrimental to black mental health because confinement, whether in the form of restraints to physical spaces like plantations, or in the social, cultural, and political reach of white supremacy nationally, was damaging to black mental well-being.

This chapter demonstrates how Jacobs' representations of mental suffering in the North exemplify what I have termed African American anti-slavery psychiatry.[163] The existence of African American anti-slavery psychiatry demonstrates that, contrary to the available scholarship, the history of madness and race was not monopolized, and perhaps not even dominated, by the voices of whites. Moreover, adding African American voices to the conversation on the history of psychiatry brings to the fore new perspectives on the major issues concerning African American mental health during the era.

Borrowing from Byron

Madness in *ILSG* and its implications for pro/anti-slavery psychiatry debates begins with how Jacobs characterizes the institution as "mad." As discussed in Chapter One, Jacobs' sampling of Lord Byron's poem "The Lament of Tasso" (1817) in *ILSG* is

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[162] Arguments about the prevalence of insanity among blacks in the North coalesce around the 1840 census results. I will discuss this in more detail later in the chapter.

[163] African American anti-slavery psychiatry, which later becomes African American anti-racist psychiatry, refers to a motif or theoretical current in literature and cultural productions by African Americans that, in the service of abolition and later attainment of racial equality, implicitly or explicitly engages the reigning ideas and assumptions of American psychiatry.

demonstrative of her use of madness as a metaphor to create new understandings of slavery.[164] Sampling Byron allowed Jacobs to claim that slavery is like an asylum or "madhouse." The previous chapter demonstrates how the Byron poem helped Jacobs articulate how slavery in the South created individual madness or mental illness. In this chapter, I examine how her sampling of Byron aids Jacobs in characterizing the slave system as "mad."

The "Lament of Tasso" chronicles the long torment and torture of an inmate in St. Anna's mental asylum. To describe "the land of her birth" and make the case for how "the shadows are too dense for light to penetrate" therein, Jacobs included a selection from stanza four of "Lament."[165] The section Jacobs samples from the poem specifically describes the character of the institution as well as life within St. Anna's, a "vast lazar-house of many woes," as the poem's speaker describes it. As previously quoted, the passage from Jacobs' narrative reads:

> A land
>
> 'Where laughter is not mirth; nor thought the mind;
>
> Nor words a language; nor e'en men mankind.
>
> Where cries reply to curses, shrieks to blows,

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[164] Jacobs chooses to sample from "The Lament of Tasso" instead of Byron's more famous poem, "The Prisoner of Chillon" (1816), which focuses on the plight of an imprisoned person. This might seem curious because of her substantial use of imprisonment imagery in *ILSG*. "Chillon," however, features a protagonist who is more concerned about being persecuted because of religious beliefs. The poem emphasizes the speaker's persecution, appreciation of nature and acquired insight. In contrast, Jacobs is concerned with exposing the "evils" of slavery, not detailing introspection in confinement. Jacobs finds the "Lament" speaker's description of his confinement in a "madhouse" more fitting for depicting the institution of slavery.

[165] Harriet Jacobs, *ILSG*, 58.

> And each is tortured in his separate hell.'[166]

Jacobs makes a crucial rhetorical move when she includes an introductory fragment consisting of only two words —"A land." The fragment prompts the reader to pause and focus on what will be a striking comparison between the Southern slave system and the "madhouse." Jacobs' use of metaphor fits within a larger context of African American autobiographical writing. Literary scholar William Andrews writes about the rhetorical strategies in one of the earliest African American literary forms, the autobiography:

> What could not be reported explicitly in Afro-American experience had to be explored indirectly through metaphor. As Afro-American autobiography evolved, the institution of slavery and the individuality of the slave received increasingly metaphoric treatment as slave narrators realized the necessity of metaphor to their rhetorical mission.[167]

Jacobs exemplified how metaphor makes possible new ways of conceptualizing the world of mid-nineteenth-century America. Drawing on Monroe Beardsley's theory of metaphor, Andrews emphasizes the function of metaphor in slave narratives: "True metaphors reveal new and infinitely paraphrasic meanings or words in unexpected contexts. They do this by introducing a tension, a 'logical absurdity'… metaphors do not simply adorn arguments for persuasive purposes. *Metaphors are arguments* [emphasis mine]."[168]

Indeed Jacobs' narrative uses metaphor to make an argument about how best to understand the "land of her birth." Her metaphor does not oppose but diverges from

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[166] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 58.
[167] William Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography*, 1760-1865 (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 10.
[168] Ibid., 11.

dominant understandings of slavery as gruesome, repulsive, and brutal, primarily as these descriptors are measured by harm to the body. She suggests that slavery is also by definition mad, in relation to its composition and impact on subjects. In composition it is in equal parts irrational, disordered, and utterly absurd. Experientially, it is psychologically isolating, torturous, destructive, and ultimately illness-producing. Thus, for Jacobs, the first half of the Byron poem accurately describes the character of slavery as an institution of confinement in which there was a disjuncture in the expected correlations between affect and state of mind. In her discussions about madness in the North, Jacobs, like Byron, shows that "laughter" does not indicate happiness, "thoughts" are not linked to a rational state of mind, words do not lend themselves to meaning via language, and men do not embody the ideals of human existence.

Confinement and Madness in the North

Jacobs' assertion that society is disordered appears in her discussion of the fugitive slave law. Jacobs wrote *ILSG* in response to a social order imposed upon her by a society regulated by legalized forms of social and political confinement. She composed *Incidents* between 1853 and 1857, a period framed by two important legal landmarks – the Fugitive Slave Law and the Dred Scott decision. The Fugitive Slave Law, which mandated that northerners capture and return runaway slaves, was passed as part of the Compromise of 1850. The Compromise was an agreement between southern slave-holding interests and northerners. It made the word of merely two free whites, usually the capturer and the claimant, adequate grounds for the re-confinement of a free person back into slavery. With the Dred Scott decision (1857), the United States Supreme Court

ruled that people of African descent brought into the United States and held as slaves, as well as their descendants, were not protected by the Constitution and were not American citizens.

Both the Fugitive Slave Law and the Dred Scott decision were devastating blows to the abolitionist cause. They also constituted the political backbone of the confining social order against which Jacobs wrote. The Fugitive Slave Law particularly appalled Jacobs. She devoted an entire chapter to discussions of the legislation and repeatedly referred to it throughout the narrative. Jacobs' narrative demonstrated how the Fugitive Slave Law, like the numerous other laws that reinforced slavery in the South, caused a reordering of life in the North, which in turn negatively impacted the mental health of African Americans everywhere.[169] Life in the North, then, was almost as torturous as life in the South because it was predicated on contradictory and contingent forms of freedom. Thus, for Jacobs freedom posed new and undesirable mental health issues for escaped slaves, precisely because it was not really freedom.

Frances Smith Foster indicates that in Jacobs' fight for justice, bodily harm was not the dominant concern: "Jacobs revealed, as did other narrators, that this was a battle fought less on the physical level than on the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual planes. Or, in her words, 'My master had power and law on his side; I had a determined will.

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[169] Numerous southern laws restricted and reordered the lives of slaves. These confining laws intensified after slave rebellions such as that of Nat Turner. Jacobs gives significant attention to the rebellion in the narrative. Jean Fagan Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs: A Life* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2004), 34-40. Ironically, the whites of Edenton attempted to divert local uprisings by warning Edenton blacks that participants in the Nat Turner rebellion were engaging in "folly and madness." Quoted in Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs*, 36.

There is might in each.'"[170] Although Foster does not elaborate on the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual planes, she does figure the law as a force in opposition to Jacobs' "will." Maintaining these beyond-physical planes was essential for mental well-being; thus for Jacobs the law becomes a force that assaults the mind, a battle against which she engaged in to provide a first-hand account of the maddening nature of slavery as a national – rather than regional – system. Hence, in Jacobs' landscape of madness, the Fugitive Slave Law was a source of disjuncture and unreason in and of itself, and the catalyst for particular forms of madness. Jacobs' escape from the South reveals how freedom from slavery was not necessarily relief from madness. Her discussion of madness in the North shows how confinement is not just a physical, but also a social phenomenon, as escaped slaves were not free from its effects, even though they were no longer bound to plantations or, in Jacobs' case, a small attic.

In the North madness appeared in the form of experiences of paranoia, sorrow, and anxiety, but always as clearly connected to a law that is antithetical to reason. Jacobs' descriptions of how African Americans' movement in the world was constrained by the Fugitive Slave Law highlight specific symptoms of psychological stress. In the chapter entitled "The Fugitive Slave Law," she wrote: "What a disgrace to a city [New York] calling itself free, that inhabitants…should be condemned to live in such incessant fear, and have nowhere to turn for protection."[171] Jacobs' statement highlights both the inherent contradiction to the notion of freedom that the Fugitive Slave Law represents and how such unreason impacts formerly enslaved individuals. Fear is incessant or

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[170] Frances Smith Foster, *Written by Herself: Literary Production by African American Women, 1746-1892* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 103.
[171] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 287.

unrelenting, which, as Jacobs insists, has severe implications for mental well-being. In another passage she points to the effect such incessant fear has on her mind:

> All that winter I lived in a state of anxiety. When I took the children out to breathe the air, I closely observed the countenances of all I met. I dreaded the approach of summer, when snakes and slaveholders make their appearance. I was, in fact, a slave in New York, as subject to slave laws as I had been in a Slave State. Strange incongruity in a State called free![172]

The law has forced a re-ordering of Jacobs' life. While it did not necessarily incapacitate her physically, it did incapacitate her psychologically as well as legally. The law forced her to behave in ways that, outside of the context of her life as an escaped slave, would appear to even psychiatrists of the day as clear signs of mental disturbance. This re-ordering of life became normative for Jacobs' existence as she was constantly pursued for recapture. Jacobs is forced to leave New York, where she was a nursemaid for the Bruce household, for Boston because Dr. Flint, her former master, continued to search for her. Even after Dr. Flint dies, his daughter Emily and her husband Mr. Dodge come to the North to try to reclaim her. The constant threat of recapture caused a sort of paranoia for Jacobs: "I seldom ventured into the streets… I went as much as possible through back streets and by-ways."[173] This form of paranoia, Jacobs explains, was the lot of most escaped slaves in the North following the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law: "Every

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[172] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 290. New York was a particularly sluggish state when it came to the abolition of slavery and improving the conditions for free African Americans. For a fuller discussion on the state of blacks in New York see Leslie Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003).

[173] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 202.

colored person, and every friend of the persecuted race, kept their eyes wide open."[174] The Fugitive Slave Law made freedom fragile, fleeting, and easily reversible – and it also, perversely, turned freedom into a new form of mental torture.[175]

Jacobs wrote that the law dismantled family structures in ways that were similar to how families were separated when members were sold during slavery in terms of emotional impact, but different in nature:

> Many families, who had lived in the city for twenty years, fled from it now. Many a poor washerwoman, who, by hard labor, had made herself a comfortable home, was obliged to sacrifice her furniture, bid a hurried farewell to friends, and seek her fortune among strangers in Canada. Many a wife discovered a secret she had never known before—that her husband was a fugitive, and must leave her to insure his own safety. Worse still, many a husband discovered that his wife had fled from slavery years ago, and as 'the child follows the condition of its mother,' the children of his love were liable to be seized and carried into slavery. Everywhere, in those humble homes, there was consternation and anguish.[176]

Jacobs' language here, particularly her inclusion of "among strangers" in her description of the fate of once-comfortable families, recalls the moment when she herself fled the

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[174] Ibid.

[175] The fragility of freedom was a common aspect of northern urban life during the antebellum period. Even in the city Jacobs describes as welcoming in *ILSG* – Philadelphia – blacks were only granted a "quasi-freedom." Freedom in the North was not only fragile, but violent and hostile. For a discussion of African Americans' struggle to live as free people in the North see Erica Armstrong Douglass, *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2008).

[176] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 286-7.

South. As her "tears were falling fast," her grandmother insisted that she take all the money she had lest she be "sick among strangers."[177] This is one of several instances in the narrative in which aloneness is coupled with mental suffering or anguish.[178] Jacobs offers yet another illustration of the psychological toll of relocation as she describes her reunion with Luke.

In the "Fugitive Slave Law" chapter Jacobs presents a scene of Luke being tortured by his bed-ridden master. She recounts later meeting the demoralized Luke on the streets of New York: "As he came nearer, I recognized Luke. I always rejoiced to see or hear of any one who had escaped from the black pit… I well remembered what a desolate feeling it was to be alone among strangers, and I went up to him and greeted him cordially."[179] Even more curious in these references to being among strangers is that this anguish occurred with respect to efforts to obtain or maintain freedom. Even though from the age of twelve "[Jacobs] and her brother were constantly thinking about freedom," once she achieves it she is not able to completely revel in it.[180] For example, when Jacobs finally escaped from the South with her friend Fanny, she indicated the emotional costs of freedom: "We had escaped from slavery, and we supposed ourselves to be safe from the hunters. But we were alone in the world, and we had left dear ties behind us; ties

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[177] Ibid., 235.
[178] In *ILSG*, the word "alone" appears twenty-two times. The word "lonely" appears in the narrative three times. Jacobs references being among "strangers" fifteen times.
[179] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 289.
[180] Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs*, 20. John Jacobs, too, was conflicted about leaving his family. In his slave narrative, *A True Tale of Slavery*, he stated that the only hesitation he had about leaving Sawyer was "[his] sister and a friend of [his] at home in slavery." John Jacobs, *A True Tale of Slavery*, (1861; Documenting the American South, 2004), 126. http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/jjacobs/jjacobs.html.

cruelly sundered by the demon Slavery." [181]Hence, in the North she was put in the same position as her grief-stricken grandmother, alone and missing loved ones.

Aloneness thus casts a shadow even over the joy of obtaining freedom. In the opening of the second paragraph in her "Fugitive Slave Law" chapter, Jacobs stated: "I was alone again." She included these sentiments even though she had just detailed how her brother would be fleeing to California and her daughter was receiving favorable treatment at her boarding school. [182] In these passages, Jacobs' narrative reveals that intra-dependence is indeed the measure of freedom, and perhaps because of it, the lack of familiar ties created great mental strife. The emphasis on aloneness suggests" that for Jacobs, and indeed all slaves, the costs of pursuits of freedom extended beyond physical exertions to include psychological challenges.

The previous passage suggested that in many cases, instead of being forcefully broken up by a master on a plantation held up by southern laws, families were in effect broken up by a distant master held up by federal laws.[183] The minds of these escapees, which had been tormented by uncertainty in their flight from slavery, were tormented anew. In part, the stress these families felt came from the physical exertions of running away. Jacobs expressed the psychological impact of being on the run when she refused the advice of Mrs. Bruce, who told her to flee because Mr. Dodge (her new would-be

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[181] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 241.
[182] Ibid., 285.
[183] Jacobs' discussion of Southern plantation life is filled with references to the mental toll of family dismantlement. One poignant example is about her own daughter: "Ellen broke down under the trials of her new life. Separated from me, with no one to look after her, she wandered about, and in a few days cried herself sick." Jacobs, *ILSG*, 132. Literary historian Jennifer Fleischner indicates that Ellen's "night walking" was common among slaves who were separated from their families. Jennifer Fleischner, *Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl, Written by Herself: With Related Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin, 2010), 110.

master) was pursuing her: "I refused to take her advice. She pleaded with an earnest tenderness, that ought to have moved me; but I was in a bitter, disheartened mood. I was weary of flying from pillar to post. I had been chased during half my life, and it seemed as if the chase was never to end."[184] Furthermore, the passage suggests that it was not only slaves escaped from the South who were affected; freedpeople were also entangled in the web of anguish brought about by a nation's condoning black subjugation.[185] Indeed northern blacks, even if free, had to be cautious. As Solomon Northup's slave narrative indicates, the possibility of free blacks being captured and sold into slavery structured black life in the North.[186] For fugitive slaves this caution was heightened. For example, even though the Bruce family was a powerful source of support for Jacobs, she was not secure. Jean Fagan Yellin describes the Bruce home as an environment in which healing of all forms could take place, but only in the midst of fear of recapture:

> Caring for little Imogen [her Willis charge] enabled her to begin to heal the wounds – physical, emotional, and psychological – that she had

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[184] Ibid., 209.

[185] By the 1830s abolitionists were acutely aware of the threat the existence of southern slavery posed to northern blacks. They argued that the travel of slaveholders with their slaves into the North was essentially the "introduction" of slavery to the free North. Christine MacDonald, "Judging Jurisdictions: Geography and Race in Slave Law and Literature of the 1830s," *American Literature* 71 (Dec.1999), 632. At the same time, there was a divide between black and white abolitionists after the New York riots of 1834. Some white abolitionists preferred to focus on the abolition of southern slavery, while black abolitionists wanted to direct more efforts toward the practical needs of northern blacks, which they saw as just as important as the abolition of slavery. For an excellent discussion of these conflicts see Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 170-216.

[186] Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York [Sic], Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853* (1853; Documenting the American South, 1997), http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/northup/northup.html. Northup's story was not unique; all northern blacks had to be cautious of kidnapping. Douglass, *A Fragile Freedom*, 121. Jacobs was very aware of the possibility of kidnapping in the wake of the Fugitive Slave Law. Jacobs, *ILSG*, 289. See also Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs*, 72.

> suffered over the past seven years… Jacobs' psychological wounds were not so easily treated. Although finally in the north, she was unable to find peace of mind because she could not forget, even for a minute, that she and Lulu [Jacobs' daughter] were vulnerable to Norcom's [Master Flint's] claims.[187]

Although it was to come a century later, Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous declaration (which he drafted in confinement) "injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere" applies to the situation in which Jacobs and other free blacks in the North found themselves.[188] This situation, as Jacobs' narrative shows, bred mental distress.

Mourning among escaped slaves demonstrates the impact of obtaining freedom in the North. Jacobs makes constant references to how much she missed her daughter and emphasizes that she endured much grief even though she was in the free North. Even her employers noticed her "sad" state.[189] Compounding her insecurity around her fugitive slave status, which "oppressed [her] spirits," was the pain of separation from loved ones. She articulated this emotional weight using vivid imagery that manipulated the language of sentimental fiction: "The old feeling of insecurity, especially with regard to my children, often threw its dark shadow across my sunshine."[190] To make clear her condition in a less lyrical, but equally powerful manner, she provides an explanation that must have seemed reasonable to Mrs. Bruce: "I spoke of being separated from my

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[187] Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs*, 70-71.
[188] Martin Luther King Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1986), 290.
[189] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 255.
[190] Ibid.

children, and from relatives who were dear to me."[191]

The best scholarly examination of the significance of the family ties about which Jacobs writes here is Stephanie Li's *Something Akin to Freedom: The Choice of Bondage in Narratives by African American Women*. Li argues that Harriet Jacobs decided to remain in bondage in order to achieve freedom. For Jacobs, freedom from confinement was not based on the absence of physical bondage in the South or the acquisition of legal rights. Li rightly asserts that Jacobs' narrative forces us to consider the powerful role that family ties play in slaves' development of conceptions of individual freedom within confinement. From this perspective, Jacobs' decision to hide in her grandmother's garret is reflective of not only the "freedom of choice," but also "the goal of freedom."[192] The goal of freedom for Jacobs, Li argues, was to maintain intra-dependence or the ability to care for others. In *ILSG* the struggle to maintain families, which Li argues is an important feature of individual liberty in the narrative, is also the source of considerable mental suffering. Yet those very human ties are also a necessary source of mental health.

Not only did the escapees undergo tremendous psychological turmoil, those they left behind were equally distressed. When Jacobs' grandmother learned that her grandson and Jacobs' brother William had gone to the North and would likely not return, she was overcome by despair. Jacobs illustrates the complicated feelings and irony that accompanied an individual's pursuit of freedom: "If you had seen the tears, and heard the sobs, you would have thought the messenger had brought tidings of death instead of

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[191] Ibid.
[192] Stephanie Li, *Something Akin to Freedom: The Choice of Bondage in Narratives by African American Women* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 7.

freedom."[193] The preservation of family ties, then, was not only an expression of individual liberty, but was also a means of maintaining individual and communal sanity.

Pro-slavery Psychiatry and African American Anti-slavery Psychiatry

While *ILSG* is valuable because it represents freedom with respect to various forms of madness engendered by repressive legislation, severance from kinship networks and white supremacist terrorism in the North, the narrative is also indispensable because of its theoretical currency. Put another way, Jacobs' depiction of madness proves a valuable source of insight for understanding African American experiences.

When insanity among African Americans is discussed in scholarly studies, whether they are focused on insanity and slavery, race and madness, or histories of psychiatry and asylums, the primary sources are white-authored records (census data, army statistics, asylum records, government documents, family papers) and white voices (slave holders, physicians, census-takers, jailers, federal, state, and local legislators). To be sure, the available primary materials are sparser than cultural critics and historians would like. This lacuna brings us to the question: What can slave narratives add to scholarship on African Americans and mental illness in the nineteenth century? One way to begin to answer this question is to identify what we are able to surmise about the confinement of African Americans from an analysis of white-authored sources. By and large, the available sources reflect what I designate as "pro-slavery psychiatry." This is neither a term used at the time nor a term used in extant scholarship, but I developed it to categorize the theoretical thrust against which Jacobs wrote and to pinpoint her contributions to the conversation. The unifying mantra of pro-slavery psychiatry was the

[193] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 202.

conjecture that insanity was more prevalent among blacks in the North than blacks in the South, because blacks were physiologically and intellectually more suited for the conditions of slavery.

Nevertheless, we have not yet exhausted the types of primary materials that shed light on the discursive landscape concerning mental illness during the nineteenth century. Examinations of slave narratives, like that of Jacobs, provide keen insight into the contemporary zeitgeist. Rather than being silent concerning the insanity and slavery debates, as existing scholarly work on the topic suggests, African Americans such as Harriet Jacobs and other slave narrators, including no less a national figure than Frederick Douglass, had a great deal to say on the topic.[194]

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[194] Frederick Douglass wrote about mental suffering in his pre-emancipation slave narratives, essays, and speeches (*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* [1854], "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July" [1852]). Even after emancipation, he discussed mental health in his newspaper. In an 1852 article in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, he considered the case of a black woman who was denied admittance into the Lunatic Asylum of Indianapolis. He stated: "a colored insane person can disturb a whole neighborhood just as well as if he or she were white, saying nothing of their common appeals to humanity." The emphasis on justice also appeared in an 1866 article, the focus of which again was on a colored woman who sought admission into Long View Lunatic Asylum but was "refused on the ground that there was no separate ward for her." His sentiments could be read as a legitimization of asylums and/or implicit antagonism toward black women (in the first article). However, his frame of reference was more likely the real psychological costs of enslavement and the reign of white supremacy throughout the nation. Hence, his sentiments were more likely an indication of his efforts to ensure that African Americans were granted equal access to psychiatric care than support for the asylum as a paternalistic or even re-confining institution. Douglass, Frederick. "The Colored Insane," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, April 1, 1852 and "General Intelligence," *The Christian Recorder*, June 9, 1866. In subsequent research projects, I will show that virtually all slave narratives represented mental suffering alongside physical suffering. I will argue that if slave narratives are the bedrock genre to African American literature, then madness, as it appears in *ILSG*, is a foundational theme in African American literature. I have conducted a preliminary analysis on a wide variety of slave narratives that represent madness including *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave. Written by Himself* (1825), *The Fugitive Blacksmith; or, Events in the History of James W. C. Pennington* (1849), *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup*

Jacobs' sentiments on slavery, race and madness exemplify African American anti-slavery psychiatry. African American anti-slavery psychiatry refers to a motif or theoretical current in literature and cultural productions by African Americans that, in the service of abolition and later the attainment of racial equality, implicitly or explicitly engage the reigning ideas and assumptions of American psychiatry.[195] African American anti-slavery psychiatry is likely a predecessor to African American alternative narratives in popular and psychiatric debates about race and mental illness in mid-twentieth-century society.

Like Harriet Jacobs, African Americans who engaged the popular debate developed their own theories as to the cause of insanity among blacks. The arguments they made were not strictly oppositional because they conceded some aspects of racist psychiatric claims. For example, most took for granted that African Americans had been psychologically wounded. However, like Jacobs, they made claims based on experiences within a white supremacist national context rather than on "science" or racist dogmas. Nevertheless, their claims refuted the basic conclusions and diagnostic schemata of the psychiatric complex. The main racist conclusion against which Jacobs wrote was that freedom caused mental derangement for African Americans. On the other hand, the main racist conclusion against which later figures such as Martin Luther King Jr., Robert F Williams, H. Rap Brown, Malcom X, Stokely Carmichael, and Angela Davis wrote (and spoke) was that protest against racial injustice caused mental illness (specifically schizophrenia). In chapter fourteen, "A Metaphor for Race," in his book *The Protest*

(1853), *Slave Life in Georgia: A Narrative of the Life, Sufferings, and Escape of John Brown: A Fugitive Slave, Now in England* (1854), and *Memoir of Old Elizabeth, a Coloured Woman (*1863).

[195] After emancipation the term morphs into "African American anti-racist psychiatry"

Psychosis: How Schizophrenia Became a Black Disease, Jonathan Metzl explains this phenomenon of African Americans' selective appropriation of discourses on mental illness:

> The subtle distinction between a schizophrenia caused by protest against racism and a schizophrenia that reflected existing structural racism extended to the internal body as well. Like the mainstream press, black-press articles assumed a split in the black mind. But in the black press, such a split signified the adaptations necessary for survival in racist societies rather than the symptoms that arose when trying to disrupt them.[196]

Harriet Jacobs' conclusions foreshadow the various twentieth-century versions of African American anti-racist psychiatry, whether it be King's use of madness to promote maladjustment or explain the ethical or spiritual divide that was the African American (and human) experience, or Malcolm X's contention that violence was a sane response to an insane society, or black psychiatrists William Grier and Price Cobb's assertion that racism drove African Americans crazy as evidenced by "Jim Crow Shock."[197] These twentieth-century black radical cultural productions do not stand alone in the use of madness and psychiatric discourse to articulate the African American experience.

Even the most notable African American writers and artists of the twentieth century, including W.E.B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison, and Mammie Smith, used madness in their works to depict the necessary adaptations African

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[196] Jonathan Metzl, *The Protest Psychosis: How Schizophrenia Became a Black Disease*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009), 120.
[197] For fuller discussions of these perspectives see Metzl, *The Protest Psychosis*, 109-28.

Americans made to a hostile nation.[198] Metzl takes for granted the location of W.E.B. Du Bois' inspiration for the notion of double consciousness in European Romanticism, American Transcendentalism, and early psychiatry. The location of the roots of this notion in early psychiatry is particularly intriguing for this study. If indeed Du Bois was influenced by early psychiatry, then we should also consider the influence of slave narratives, which also use early psychiatry to articulate the condition of African Americans.[199] Certainly, arguments from African American anti-slavery psychiatry literature in the nineteenth century, like Harriet Jacobs' narrative, pushed back on pro-slavery discourses prior to emancipation.

The Nexus of Scientific Racism and Pro-slavery Psychiatry

In order to appreciate the nuances and significance of Jacobs' argument, we need to unearth the roots of the arguments about madness and blackness against which her arguments stood. Pro-slavery psychiatry arguments were comprised of two separate, yet

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[198] Metzl, *Protest*, 125-28. In the same vein, literary critic Shelly Eversley explores issues of madness with respect to an emphasis on African American writers' use of the split self, what Du Bois calls "two-ness," as a way to understand the African American condition as being both American and black in the work of W.E.B. Du Bois and Ralph Ellison. Shelly Eversley, "The Lunatic's Fancy and the Work of Art," *American Literary History*, 13, no. 3 (2001): 445-68. In subsequent projects, I will show how madness is a salient and prevalent topic in the broader corpus of African American literature beginning with poets such as Phillis Wheatley and ending with lyricists such as Kendrick Lamar. The theme of madness in African American literature is contextual and diverse. The discussion of madness changes based on the particular historical milieu in which writers and artists wrote. I also have observed madness in relation to a number of themes including injustice, poverty, wisdom, war, addiction, city life, love, relationships, family, community and home. I have already begun to examine madness in twentieth-century black women's narratives. See Diana Martha Louis, "Bitch You Must Be Crazy: Mental Illness and Ntozake Shange's For Colored Girls," *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 37 no.3 (2013).

[199] An adequate explanation of this genealogy is beyond the scope of this project, but I hope to explore it further in subsequent research.

cross-fertilizing, spheres of thought that coalesce around the 1840 census.[200] One sphere is comprised of mainstream psychiatrists, superintendents, and asylum reformers who inadvertently reinforced pro-slavery discourses. The other sphere is comprised of psychiatrists, politicians, and physicians who, using pro-slavery arguments, contributed to mainstream psychiatric discourses.

1840 Census

Both camps drew upon the 1840 U.S. census to make claims about African American sanity. The 1840 census was the first to collect data concerning the incidence of mental illness in the United States. According to the findings, the total number of those reported to be insane and feeble-minded in the United States was more than 17,000, of which nearly 3,000 were black. The ratio of insanity among northern whites was 1:995. For southern whites the ratio was 1:945. There were 2.7 million blacks in the South, and of them 1,734 were reported insane or retarded, resulting in a ratio of 1:1558. But in the

[200] While earlier censuses collected basic data on population, the 1840 census added several categories including literacy rates, the number of educational institutions and the sum of insane and mentally retarded persons under state-funded care. The national census is a product of the Constitutional Convention of 1787, when statesmen decided that congressional representation was to be dependent upon each state's population. Thus, enumeration of the citizenry was necessary for fulfilling the constitutional mandate. This is also the convention that settled on the infamous three-fifths compromise, which in effect disregarded African American humanity by considering slavery in terms of representation and taxation. The census also represented the nation's keen interest in the use of social statistics to support a nationalistic sentiment. As Gerald Grob puts it, the census "seemed to offer proof that America was destined to become the predominate world power." The way in which the 1840 census was used to reinforce racism showed how comfortably slavery was etched in America's imagination of itself. Gerald Grob, *Edward Jarvis and the Medical World of Nineteenth-Century America* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1978), 70. For historical background on the census see Walter F. W. Stull Holt, *The Bureau of the Census: Its History, Activities, and Organization* (Washington, D.C., 1929), chap. 1; Carroll D. Wright and William C. Hunt, *The History and Growth of the United States Census* (Washington, D.C., 1900), passim.

free states about 1,200 blacks out of 171,894 were reported insane or retarded, a ratio of 1:144.[201] The prominent historian of psychiatry Gerald Grob verifies that the statistics in Jarvis' article are generally accurate. The figures, if taken as accurate, suggest that free blacks had an eleven times higher incidence of mental illness than blacks in the South, and six times higher than whites. The census did not distinguish between freed and enslaved blacks in the South. Edward Jarvis, nineteenth-century physician and social statistician, refuted these findings because he found significant errors in the 1840 census figures. For example, he showed that there were more instances of insanity among whites than were reported. He also found 133 black insane paupers in Worcester, Massachusetts, even though the total black population was listed as 151. There were also instances in which more blacks were counted as insane than there were black residents within the locality. Notwithstanding the fact that the accuracy of the census findings was contested within two years of their release, pro-slavery activists and medical doctors alike seized the moment to comment on the relationship between slavery and mental illness.[202] The implications of the study were grave for African Americans, as Sander Gilman explains: "The anti-abolitionists were thus provided with major scientific evidence that blacks were congenitally unfit for freedom."[203] This census data and data from later censuses continued to fuel claims about race and insanity into the late nineteenth and early

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[201] These ratios appear in Edward Jarvis' article, "Insanity Among the Coloured Population of the Free States," *American Journal of the Medical Sciences*, n.s VII (January 1844), 72-73. The raw census data can be found in the Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States, as Obtained at the Department of State, from the Return of the Sixth Census (Washington, D.C., 1841), 4-103. Gerald Grob, *Edward Jarvis*, 70-72.

[202] His findings first appeared in "Statistics on Insanity in the United States," *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 27 (1842): 116.

[203] Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology*: *Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 137.

twentieth centuries.[204] These very ideas were circulating at Milledgeville when African Americans began to enter in large numbers a little over two decades after 1840.[205]

Mainstream Psychiatry

Mainstream psychiatrists and asylum reformers used the faulty census results to support, perhaps inadvertently, pro-slavery claims. In part, they relied on the census because they were following the trend in the developing field of medicine, which favored quantitative methodologies for determining the individual and social causes of disease.[206] However, psychiatry as a field had a tenuous relationship to medicine in general; as a growing specialty, psychiatrists had their own understandings of the etiology of mental illness.[207]

Mid-century psychiatrists, who numbered only a couple of dozen asylum doctors in mid-nineteenth-century America, worked from the premise that human beings were

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[204] See Gilman, *Difference and Pathology*, 139-42. The physician played a key role in the development of a good and healthy citizenry. Thus, following the release of the 1840 census physicians and scientists produced a body of publications containing interpretations of the data along with policy recommendations. Grob, *Edward Jarvis*, 38. For a discussion of how census data was used before and after emancipation to support research on the mental and physical health and mortality rates of blacks see John S. Haller, *Outcasts from Evolution: Scientific Attitudes of Racial Inferiority, 1859-1900* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 40-68.

[205] Mab Segrest, "'Exalted on the Ward: Mary Roberts,' the Georgia State Sanitarium, and the Psychiatric 'Specialty' of Race," *American Quarterly*, 66 no.1 (2014): 78.

[206] For background on the state of nineteenth-century medicine see Charles E. Rosenburg, "The American Medical Profession: Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Mid-America*, XLIV (July 1962), 163-71; Joseph F. Kett, *The Formation of the American Medical Profession: The Role of Institutions, 1780-1860* (New Haven, 1968); Richard H. Shryock, *Medicine and Society in America 1660-1860* (New York, 1960); William Rothstein, *American Physicians in the Nineteenth Century: From Sects to Science* (Baltimore, 1972).

[207] Most asylum superintendents during the nineteenth century had no medical training. For more on the relationship between mainstream medicine and psychiatry see Gerald Grob, *The State and the Mentally Ill: A History of Worcester State Hospital in Massachusetts, 1830-1920* (Chapel Hill 1966) and *Edward Jarvis.*

governed by immutable laws that offered guidelines for proper social behavior. If these guidelines were violated then mental illness could result. Thus, not only was mental illness often self-inflicted, it was also curable, particularly if treated soon after onset. Mental instability could emerge from situational causes such as financial troubles or bereavement. It was also possible for one to become mentally ill as a result of physical abnormalities in the brain. Thus, treatment for mental illness included drugs, tonics, bleeding and laxatives, but such measures were coupled with moral treatments.[208] As Gerald Grob explains, the moral treatment "in effect involved re-educating the patient in a proper moral atmosphere."[209] This environmental argument was accompanied by the unchallenged pre-Civil War contention that insanity, although somatic in some cases, ultimately had its roots in the accelerated course of civilization or an unhealthy social order.[210]

Following this logic, Edward Jarvis, the prominent social statistician and psychiatrist, called attention to the technical errors in the collection of the census data, but not without adding his own analysis on race and insanity. In his 1842 article "Statistics on Insanity in the United States," Jarvis argues that the higher incidence of insanity among free blacks in general was unsurprising.[211] His claims, however, were not

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[208] For more on the state of nineteenth-century psychiatry see Norman Dain, *Concepts of Insanity in the United States, 1789-1865* (New Brunswick, 1964), and Gerald Grob, *Mental Institutions in America: Social Policy to 1875* (New York, 1973) and *The State and the Mentally Ill.* For an extended discussion of the transition from the moral treatment to custodial care see Gerald Grob, *The State and the Mentally Ill*.

[209] Grob, *Edward Jarvis*, 42.

[210] In this formulation, psychiatrists thought Africans to be less prone to mental illness because of their less-developed state of civilization. See Benjamin Reiss, *Theaters of Madness: Insane Asylums and Nineteenth-Century American Culture*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 69-70.

[211] "Statistics on Insanity in the United States," *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 27

necessarily of the same tenor as those of pro-slavery advocates.[212] Jarvis' conceptions of race and insanity were connected to his general thoughts about mental illness. He attributed the higher rates of insanity in the North to the southern enslaved blacks' "lower state of civilization." He believed that higher states of civilization generated greater mental activity and, therefore, more opportunities for derangement. Therefore, for Jarvis it was understandable that free blacks, who occupied a "false social position" in the North, had more instances of mental illness. Whether in the North or the South, "higher states of civilization" caused mental illness. He believed that occupying the position of a slave did not require higher states of civilization.

Jarvis' conclusions were not exceptional, but instead representative of psychiatric thought during the period. Prominent mental health reformer Dorothea Dix and renowned asylum superintendents Samuel Woodward and John Minson Galt II, among others, thought America to be an extreme case for observing the increase in insanity via advancements in civilization.[213] For them, this was most likely due to the dominance of Jacksonian democracy.[214] The supposed link between insanity and civilization was

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(1842): 116-21.

[212] Edward Jarvis had complicated views on slavery. Upon seeing slaves in the northeast he noted that slaves were "a lazy, idle unprofitable race, doing not half the work a white can do… caring nothing for his owner's interests." He continued, "It would be a blessing to this country to transport the whole to Africa." Quoted in Grob, *Edward Jarvis*, 25. These lines reflect his general attitude toward blacks as lacking in moral character. He abhorred slavery, but believed involuntary servitude prevented the development of physical and moral senses. Quoted in Grob, *Edward Jarvis*, 45, 53.

[213] It should be noted that this conception was held throughout European psychiatry as well.

[214] For a more detailed discussion of Jacksonian society and insanity, as well as prominent psychiatrists during the era who subscribed to this idea, see chapter three, "Insanity and the Social Order," of David Rothman's *Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic*. (New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 2005), 110-129. While the Whigs opposed Jackson's laissez-faire economics and extensions of

substantiated by Dix's claim that there were "comparatively fewer" instances of insanity in the southern states, which were populated mostly by blacks and Indians.[215] While nineteenth-century psychiatrists thought that insanity in the entire population was linked to the progression of civilization, they relied on racial doctrines to explain the 1840 U.S. census results. Thus, Dix and others essentially fused their mainstream psychiatric thought with the American racial climate, which served to indirectly reinforce pro-slavery claims. For example, Galt reasoned that the higher rates were "perhaps owning not only to the less degree of mental cultivation, but much also to the absence of all cares for the future, the great depressing influence with the whites."[216] Galt's perspective represented the general consensus among superintendents of asylums throughout the country. When it came to the care of the black insane, psychiatrists drew more on social and cultural constructions of race entrenched in the practice of slavery than on any kind of empirical scientific research.[217] Galt's comments are particularly valuable to this study because,

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suffrage (to all white men), the one matter that the Jacksonians and the opposing Whigs agreed upon was to avoid quarrels over slavery. Jacobs, too, linked the social order and mental illness; however she located the rise in insanity not in Jacksonian democracy, but in a slaveholding society.

[215] Dorothea Dix, "Memorial Praying a Grant of Land for the Relief and Support of the Indigent Curable and Incurable Insane in the United States," *Senate Miscellaneous documents*, 30th Cong. 1st sess., doc 150, p.2. Her statement dovetails with her lack of sympathy for slaves, whose condition she viewed as less severe than that of the insane. While working for mental health reform she "turned her back on the prejudice, hate, and violence of the slave system." Quoted in David Gollaher *Voice for the Mad: The Life of Dorothea Dix* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 265.

[216] Quoted in Norman Dain, *Disordered Minds: The First Century of Eastern State Hospital in Williamsburg, Virginia 1766-1866*, (Williamsburg: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1971), 112.

[217] Interestingly enough, early scientific studies on differences between the races contributed to social and cultural perceptions of race. Moreover, scientific studies supported claims of black inferiority and justified slavery. Chapter two provides an analysis of how pro-slavery arguments incorporated scientific racist claims. For other discussions of the use of scientific studies for pro-slavery and anti-slavery arguments see

like the more prestigious Western State Hospital at Staunton, the Eastern Hospital was open to all classes, whites and free blacks, but it excluded slaves.[218] Eastern State Hospital was unusual because most hospitals did not accept black patients at all. Ironically, in the wake of the 1840 census results, Galt came under pressure from slave owners to treat slaves. Dain explains how race-specific policies were developed to care for the enslaved insane:

> Slaves would be accepted at the Eastern State Hospital at $1.50 a week, exclusive of clothes and transportation, and placed with free Negro patients. A resolution of the General Assembly on January 11, 1848, required the mental hospitals of Virginia to report on the propriety and costs of making provision for the Negro insane either within or outside their establishments. In replying Galt considered how to insure that no danger or disadvantage to whites would occur; the directors decided that $8000 would do for the necessary facilities, an amount less than retention

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Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968). It should be noted that while the reigning scientific schools of thought each had their own version of pro-slavery discourse and/or dehumanization of Africans and African Americans, southern apologists such as Samuel Cartwright relied more on religion than, say, polygenism because they could not reconcile how polygenism challenged their literal readings of the Bible. For a discussion of the use of various scientific strains of thought such as monogenism, polygenism, and naturalism in the slavery debates see Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, (New York: W.W Norton, 1996), 63-104; for an extended study on the American school of thought on polygeny as support for slavery see William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes Toward Race in America 1815-59*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

[218] The Western State Hospital at Staunton refused to take blacks and was otherwise generally more selective about the patients it served. For example, it preferred the recent insane over chronic cases and did not usually accept patients coming from jails or almshouses. Eastern State Hospital, which had always taken free black patients, was seen as a pauper institution. Dain, *Disordered Minds* 105.

> of insane blacks in jails would cost. Of two new buildings authorized, one, the Gothic, would have a section for black men. An additional building for black females was requested, to replace their 'some what ruinous' accommodations.[219]

As this passage indicates, the enslaved insane generally experienced poor accommodations in asylums.[220] This was in part a function of their being housed in separate structures. One of the most influential superintendents, Samuel Woodward, implemented the practice of segregation at Worcester hospital.[221] The emphasis on separate quarters for black patients is another example of how asylum practices were heavily dependent on broader pro-slavery racial politics.[222] Although he does not provide an extended analysis, Grob acknowledges that pro-slavery perspectives influenced asylum superintendents: "The paternalism that was characteristic of antebellum slave society led to somewhat different policies [among southern superintendents]."[223]

The erection of separate buildings for black patients was linked to the public

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[219] Ibid., 110.

[220] Kenneth Stampp describes the deplorable living and health conditions that slaves endured on plantations. Stampp claims that the incidence of disease and death was much higher among blacks than whites because slaves were poorly fed, clothed, and housed. Contrary to the claims made by proponents of slavery, slaveowners did a poor job of caring for slaves. Kenneth Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-bellum South* (New York: Vintage, 1989), 279-321.

[221] Grob, *The State and the Mentally Ill*, 50n. The African American patients admitted in 1833 (shortly after the hospital's opening) were housed in the brick shop. Gerald Grob, *The Mad Among Us*, 89.

[222] Gerald Grob also makes this point in *The Mad Among Us: A History of the Care of America's Mentally Ill*: "The most significant differentials in care and treatment were clearly a function of race. African-American insane persons were either denied admission to asylums or else were confined in rigidly segregated quarters." Gerald Grob, *The Mad Among Us: A History of the Care of America's Mentally Ill* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 88.

[223] Grob, *The Mad Among Us*, 89.

concern about interracial mixing.[224] Galt believed that separate quarters were in the best interests of white patients. However, the practice was primarily instituted to maintain peace at the hospital. In a later study, Grob notes that racial tensions often erupted in the asylum despite extensive segregation efforts.[225] For example, white patients wandered into black quarters and assaulted black patients. White patients also often looked upon black patients in the same light as servants. As a result, violent racially-charged fights occurred at hospitals. In sum, Grob states: "The asylum environment thus replicated the racial tensions found in the larger society."[226]

The replication of larger societal racial politics is evident in the perspectives of superintendents. In his oft-quoted study on the Eastern State Hospital in Williamsburg, Virginia, Norman Dain provides a brief yet (for the purposes of this study) significant analysis of the superintendents' perspectives with respect to the North/South debate:

> Galt's insensitivity to the problems faced by slaves and his claim that they did not fear for the future were typical, even in an educated and otherwise

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[224] Grob explains why the decision to segregate patients was not based on practicality: "The proportion of free black patients fluctuated at about 10 percent from the time the hospital opened and remained so after 1845, and the number of slave admissions could not have been high. In 1862 there were forty black patients out of a total of three hundred, or 13 percent. Increased numbers of blacks, then, could not account for Galt's proposal to segregate the black males fully for the first time." Ibid., 111.

[225] Out of eleven million citizens, four million were black. Grob explains that the high numbers of African Americans in the South at the start of the Civil War made it difficult for asylum administrators to ignore the black insane. Asylum administrators in the South had varied approaches to treating African American patients, ranging from segregated quarters and wards to wholesale exclusion. Grob, *The Mad Among Us*, 89. African Americans comprised 36.8 percent of the southern population and 1.7 percent of the national population. See U.S. Bureau of the Census, Negro Population, 1790-1914 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1918), 44-57 cited in Gerald Grob, *Mental Institutions in America: Social Policy in 1875* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2008), 244, n39.

[226] Grob, *The Mad Among Us*, 90.

> sensitive man, of a citizen of a state that in he [sic] second quarter of the nineteenth century sold excess slaves into the Deep South cotton country. That he never considered the separation of families and friends, which such commerce inevitably entailed, as conducive to insecurity and anxieties at least among some slaves was a blindness shared by many asylum superintendents, not to speak of laymen, and testifies to the power of racism in both North and South [sic]. They saw problems in the Negro's life as arising only from his freedom, not his enslavement.[227]

Dain is right to point out the problems with Galt and his peers' resolutions. However, Dain fills in the "blindness" of the superintendents with an analysis from a contemporary scholarly perspective, as if there were not voices making similar counter claims during the period. Dain's analysis makes visible the omissions in modern scholarship concerning African American experiences of insanity and confinement. Referring to Gerald Grob's claims about the good intentions of early psychiatry, Mab Segrest points out the problem with the dominant narrative on the history of psychiatry: "By bracketing the southern and racial narratives, he considerably distorts his thesis on nineteenth-century psychiatric history and extracts African American psychiatric experiences from his overarching thesis."[228] Following Segrest's lead, this study makes the history of psychiatry more representative through the inclusion of African American voices. While pre-emancipation African Americans may not have been directly in conversation with mainstream psychiatry, they were certainly on the front lines of slavery debates. Slavery debates fused scientific racism with psychiatry to justify, maintain, and later mourn the loss of

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[227] Ibid.
[228] Segrest, "Mary Roberts," 79.

slavery.

Pro-Slavery Arguments

Discussions of madness and blackness that pro-slavery advocates took up to undergird psychiatric claims had their roots in Enlightenment-era ideas concerning human capacity. Most notably in the American context, this discursive field includes the influential thought of Thomas Jefferson.[229] Jefferson's remarks in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781) fall in line with these ideas about black cognitive capacity and preparedness for full citizenship. In *Notes* his premise is that racial stratification is rooted in the principles of science. He contends that both African Americans and American Indians "have never yet been viewed by [whites] as subjects of natural history [and

[229] Jefferson's views were in concert with European speculations on the intellectual capacity of Africans and Negroes. In the section "Anthropology" in his *Lectures on Philosophy of the Spirit* (1827), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel is concerned with the linkages between racial features or characteristics and cognitive capacity. He contends that one way to measure where racial groups fall on the scale of human capacity is to consider their relationship to nature. Based on the premise that animals are distinct from humans because of their union with nature, he argues that the linkages between man and nature are more pronounced in less civilized nations such as those in Africa. According to Hegel, Africans, due to their lack of civilization, are not only less physiologically and mentally developed, but they are also more accustomed to slavery because they lack the ability to be free conscious thinkers. In *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (1837) he makes another notable charge. Hegel argues that in addition to a lack of ethical or rational capacity, Africans lack a communal existence, which proves for him that they are not a part of social or human history. Immanuel Kant takes Hegel's articulations on collective history a step further when he claims that blacks are linked to pasts that did not "prepare them for either democracy or citizenly practices because they [African pasts] are not based upon the development of reason in public life." Quoted in, Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 51.

therefore] are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind."[230] In the same essay Jefferson supports this argument with the infamous claim:

> Religion, indeed, [had] produced a Phyllis Whately [sic]; but it could not produce a poet. The compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism… Ignatius Sancho [had] approached nearer to merit in composition; yet his letters do more honor to the heart than the head.[231]

Jefferson's thoughts supported arguments for the inherent inferiority of African Americans.[232] Such ideas about African American mental capacity lingered throughout the nineteenth century as a justification for slavery.[233] Jeffersonian ideas about race and mental capacity were intensified in the mid-nineteenth century by the dissemination of the 1840 federal census. The data collected on the occurrence of mental illness in blacks had particular significance for the abolitionist struggle. Vocal pro-slavery actor and Secretary of State John C. Calhoun took the opportunity to use the statistics to defend

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[230] Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, (1781; Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library, 1993), 200-1, http://web.archive.org.

[231] Ibid., 196.

[232] While Jefferson believed that blacks were inferior, he did not like the institution of slavery. So while his distaste for slavery was not picked up by pro-slavery advocates, they did use his assumptions about the inherent differences between the races.

[233] For an extended discussion of the use of scientific studies for pro-slavery and anti-slavery arguments see Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968). It should be noted that while the reigning scientific schools of thought each had their own version of pro-slavery discourse and/or dehumanization of Africans and African Americans, southern apologists relied more on religion than, for example, polygenism because they could not reconcile the theory's challenges to their literal readings of the Bible. For a discussion of the use of various scientific strains of thought such as monogenism, polygenism, and naturalism in the slavery debates see Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W.W Norton, 1996), 63-104; For an extended study on the American school of thought on polygeny as support for slavery see William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes Toward Race in America 1815-59* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

slavery. Writing to the British ambassador, Calhoun contended:

> The census and other authentic documents show that, in all instances in which the States have changed the former relation between the two races, the condition of the African, instead of being improved, has become worse. They have invariably sunk into vice and pauperism, accompanied by the bodily and mental afflictions incident thereto—deafness, blindness, insanity, and idiocy—to a degree without example; while, in all other States which have retained their ancient relation between them, they have improved greatly in every respect—in number, comfort, intelligence, and morals. [234]

Calhoun's assertions about the suitability of blacks to slavery and the census findings legitimized medical claims about blackness and madness. Physician C.B. Hayden's interpretation of the census data also supported the correlation between freedom and mental illness.[235] In his 1844 article, "On the Distribution of Insanity in the United States," he explains the higher rates of insanity among blacks in free states:

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[234] *The Works of John C. Calhoun,* ed. Richard Cralle (6 vols.: New York, 1870-1876), V, 333-39.

[235] Hayden was not alone in his assertions. Under the banner of medical science, other physicians made similar claims. See Samuel Forrey, "Vital Statistics Furnished by the Sixth Census of the United States Bearing upon the Question of the Human Race," *New York Journal of Medicine and the Collateral Sciences* I (1843): 151-67; and "On the Relative Proportion of Centenarians, of Deaf and Dumb, of Blind, and of Insane, in the Rates of European and African Origin, as Shown by the Censuses of the United States," *New York Journal of Medicine and the Collateral Sciences* 2 (1844): 310-20. For historical reflections on the faulty use of the census see Benjamin Pasamanick, "Myths Regarding Prevalence of Mental Disease in the American Negro: A Century of Misuse of Mental Hospital Data and Some New Findings," *Journal of National Medical Association* 56 (1964): 17; and Thomas S. Szasz, "The Sane Slave: A Historical Note on the Use of Medical Diagnosis as Justificatory Rhetoric," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 25 (1971): 228-39

> [In] the non-slave-holding states, the blacks are in a condition of social helotage, constituting the pauper caste and the heirs of all the ills which poverty entails upon its subjects. The negro of the South, on the contrary, cares not for the morrow, well knowing, that another will provide what he shall eat, what he shall drink, and wherewithal he shall be clothed; his simple mode of life secures him health, and in the winter of life he crowns "a youth of labor, with an age of ease."[236]

A decade after the census, the discussion of insanity and blackness that it had sparked continued to fuel the pro-slavery debates against which Jacobs wrote. In his 1851 article, "Report on the Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro Race," Samuel Cartwright, an American physician and pro-slavery advocate, drew on the census results and the research they generated to make claims about insanity among African Americans.[237] With this article he joined the chorus of proponents of southern slavery:

> The laws of nature are in perfect unison with slavery, and in entire discordance with liberty… [Slavery improves African Americans] in body, mind, and morals. [Liberty] is not only unsuitable to the negro race,

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[236] C.B Hayden, "On the Distribution of Insanity Among the Coloured Population of the Free States," *Southern Literary Messenger*, 10 (1844): 180.

[237] Samuel Cartwright, "Report on the Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro Race," *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* 8 (1851): 691-715. A copy of the article also appears in Samuel Cartwright, "Report on the Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro Race," in *Defending Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Old South: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Paul Finkelman (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin, 2003) and Samuel Cartwright, "Report on the Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro Race," in C*oncepts of Health and Disease: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Engelhardt Caplan, ed. (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1981). Subsequent references will be made to the later reprint.

but actually poisonous to his happiness.[238]

Cartwright's treatise warrants close attention largely because many of the themes and arguments therein had implications beyond slavery.[239] Remnants of his stance resurface in the perspectives of psychiatrists, including the superintendent of Milledgeville, and in the intake records and annual reports about African Americans at the hospital.

Cartwright's report presents the results of an investigation he conducted with three other doctors concerning the distinct diseases and physical conditions of African Americans. He sought to contribute to the recent and growing body of research on what was called "science and mental progress" with respect to southern blacks. The report insists that the differences in disease between whites and blacks are rooted in the "deep, durable and indelible" anatomical and physiological distinctions between the races.[240] Cartwright posited that the origins of mental illness in African Americans were not located in the social or cultural world, but rather were inherent in the body. Moreover, he attributed the differences between blacks and whites to "unalterable physiological laws."[241] Like Thomas Jefferson, Cartwright compared blacks to apes, saying that they both have a smaller "field of vision" which allowed them to "exclud[e] the sun's rays."[242] Also like the statesman, the doctor contended that this distinction could be observed in

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[238] Cartwright, "Report," 324-5.
[239] Although extreme in his views, Samuel Cartwright, along with men like Josiah Clark Nott, was among the many southern physicians to argue for physical and mental differences between races. For more on the ideas of these physicians see John Haller, "The Negro and the Southern Physician: A Study of Medical and Racial Attitudes, 1800-1860." *Medical History*, 16 (1972), 238-53.
[240] Cartwright, "Report," 305.
[241] Ibid., 324.
[242] Ibid., 306.

African American music, which he contended "has melody, but no harmony."[243]

Cartwright further claimed that an irregularity in black peoples' brains had halted the development of their civilization on the African continent. This stunted development, he argues, effectively "ma[d]e the people of Africa unable to take care of themselves."[244] Here Cartwright and other like-minded slavery advocates differ from mainstream psychiatry. Mainstream psychiatrists viewed the "primitive civilization" of Africans as favorable for mental health.[245] Cartwright's frame of reference on the matter was older scientific racist discourses, not mainstream psychiatry, which explains why he concluded that, if left alone, American blacks were naturally inclined to return to a backward and barbaric state. These "unalterable physiological laws," according to Cartwright, were responsible for "mental debasement" in African Americans, which made them unfit for liberty.

In Cartwright's formulation slavery is not only more suitable than freedom for blacks, but it is also a necessary form of treatment for their mental debasement. Forced labor and exercise have the effect of "vitalizing the blood more perfectly than is done when they [African Americans] are left free to indulge in idleness."[246] Cartwright's discussion of idleness supported his claim that physiologically and anatomically, blacks reveal that they are not only like apes, but also most distinctively like white children. He advised on the best course of action given this conclusion: "Like children, they require

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[243] Ibid.
[244] Ibid., 307. For Cartwright, the term "civilization" referred to progress in the form of industry, arts and sciences, complex language systems, a government structure with separate legislative, judicial and executive branches (as opposed to an omnipotent chief or king), and structural developments such as roads, buildings, and monuments.
[245] Reiss, *Theaters of Madness*, 69-70.
[246] Cartwright, "Report," 307.

government in every thing; food, clothing, exercise, sleep—all require to be prescribed by rule, or they will run into excesses."[247] Cartwright's comparison of slaves to children is of particular interest to historians of psychiatry. Scholars have noted that the insane were also treated like children who were in need of constant instruction. Like slaves, the insane had no rights to property (including themselves). However, while this comparison between the insane and the slave is partially accurate, it is also problematic because, unlike lunatics, slaves were not given the opportunity to grow up or be cured. Vehement slavery apologist George Fitzhugh unwittingly makes this clear in his paternalistic pro-slavery tract:

> Children cannot be governed by mere law; first, because they do not understand it, and secondly because they are so much under the influence of impulse, passion and appetite, that they want sufficient self-control to be deterred or governed by the distant and doubtful penalties of the law. They must be constantly controlled by parents or guardians, whose will and orders shall stand in the place of law for them, Very wicked men must be put into penitentiaries; lunatics into asylums, and the most wild of them into straight jackets [sic], just as the most wicked of the sane are manacled with irons; and idiots must have committees to govern and take care of them. Now it is clear that the Athenian democracy would not suit a negro nation, nor will the government of mere law suffice for the individual negro. He is but a grown up child, and must be governed as a child, not as

[247] Ibid., 309.

a lunatic or criminal.[248]

Fitzhugh's statement reflected the reigning ideology among slavery advocates – African American inferiority is immutable and therefore should govern every aspect of their lives. His statement rejects the comparison between the insane and the slave.

Cartwright, however, was keenly interested in the occurrence of insanity among slaves. Cartwright presented two diseases in particular that relate specifically to the mental health of blacks —"drapetomania" and "dysaesthesia *aethiopis*." He indicated that drapetomania is a mental disease causing slaves to run away. The illness that caused blacks to "abscond from service," as Cartwright describes it, was preventable and curable. Cartwright claimed that most incidences of mental illness appeared when masters treated their slaves either as equals or cruelly. Thus, the disease can be prevented by whites ensuring that blacks remain in a position of submission to whites, rather than equals. He claimed that when slaves are not in awe of their masters, they "become rude and ungovernable and run away."[249] He posited that blacks could also be prevented from running away if whites refrained from abusing their God-given right to govern blacks through neglect and condescension. Instead, he argued, whites should provide for all their slaves' needs in addition to being kind, protective, and gracious toward them.

Like drapetomania, Cartwright reported that dysaethesia *aethiopis* was a mental illness specific to blacks, but it manifested differently in slaves than in free blacks.[250] He described the disease as different from all other mental diseases because it appears

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[248] George Fitzhugh, "Sociology for the South," in *Defending Slavery*, 190.
[249] Cartwright, "Report," 319.
[250] He indicated that dysaesthesia *aethiopis*, unlike drapetomania, affects "both the mind and body." Cartwright, "Report," 320.

physically on the body as skin lesions that are "thick and harsh to the touch."[251] Unlike drapetomania, dysaethesia *aethiopis*, he indicated, was not particular to slaves, but rather was "more prevalent among free negroes living in clusters by themselves."[252] He contended that enslaved blacks only show evidence of the disease when they live as "free negroes," particularly with regard to their "diet, drink, [and] exercise," and further claimed that most free blacks, all of whom lack white guardianship, have the disease.[253] He reasoned that those who have the disease are "apt to do much mischief," but not intentionally.[254] Their mischief, he contended, was primarily caused by "stupidness of mind and insensibility of the nerves" and "idleness," which he linked to lung function, blood deterioration, unclean skin and an inactive liver, among other things.[255] He noted that in the case of blood illnesses, blacks were not unique. Cartwright considers blood deterioration a major contributing factor to contraction of the disease for all races. About blood deterioration he says:

> That the blood, when rendered impure and carbonaceous from any cause, as from idleness, filthy habits, unwholesome food or alcoholic drinks, affects the mind, is not only known to physicians, but to the Bard of Avon when he penned the lines 'We are not ourselves when Nature, being oppressed, commands the mind to suffer with the body.' [256]

Of course, the latter portion of the quote is compelling because it suggests that prolific literary writers had special insights about the nature of mental and bodily suffering. Their

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[251] Ibid., 322.
[252] Ibid., 320.
[253] Ibid.
[254] Ibid., 321.
[255] Ibid., 321, 323.
[256] Ibid., 332.

insights, he believed, supported and/or even stood in for scientific inquiry. Cartwright's use of Shakespeare was akin to asylum superintendents' also looking to literature for inspiration and scientific theories.[257]

The use of Shakespeare was not the only aspect that linked Cartwright to asylum superintendents. Samuel Cartwright's disease categories were an example of the intersection between polemics and medicine. Sander Gilman explains the implications of Cartwright's ideas: "In both instances, manifestations of the blacks' rejection of the institution of slavery were fitted into the medical model of insanity."[258] Whether in the form of extremist diatribes from Samuel Cartwright, "objective" information dissemination from Edward Jarvis, clinical analysis from Samuel Woodward, or philanthropic polemics from Dorothea Dix, pro-slavery psychiatry arguments were far-reaching.

These ideas about black in/sanity continued to have traction after slavery ended. As historian Herbert Gutman contends, "neither the Civil War nor the Thirteenth Amendment emancipated northern whites from ideological currents that assigned inferior status to nineteenth-century blacks, women, and working-class men."[259] Thus, from the perspectives of whites, how black in/sanity would be defined after slavery was informed by pro-slavery psychiatric thought. And as the previous chapter showed, whites' ideas were also informed by slavery-based stereotypes about black femininity.[260] These ideas

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[257] For a discussion of superintendents' use of Shakespeare see Reiss, *Theaters*, 79-102.
[258] Gilman, *Difference and Pathology*, 138.
[259] Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750-1925* (New York: Pantheon, 1976), 293.
[260] Conceptions of black women post-slavery were largely influenced by the stereotypes about black women, which Harriet Jacobs discusses. As the previous chapter showed, black women were excluded from notions of respectable womanhood during slavery.

also showed up in post-emancipation asylums.[261] In the next chapter, I reconstruct the narratives of several formerly enslaved black women who were sent to the Georgia Lunatic Asylum. The narratives of Viney W., Jane G., Eliza B., Amanda C., Olivia W. and Alice M. emerge in fragmented form from newspapers, census data, patient entry ledgers and hospital annual reports.

Harriet Jacobs' narrative helps us understand the slavery-derived social and cultural ideologies that shape perceptions of black women's sanity, as Chapter One showed. And as this chapter showed, Jacobs' narrative also provides a counter narrative to the pro-slavery psychiatric thought that asylum care during slavery and after. Harriet Jacobs' discussions about black women in slavery provide a theoretical lens through which to interpret the unique experiences of formerly enslaved women in asylums. As the next chapter will show, narratives about black women in asylums reveal how asylums incorporate aspects of slavery.

After emancipation, figures like the Mammy and Jezebel persisted and new ones emerged, including the sassy, defiant and aggressive Sapphire. Post-slavery cultural narratives presented black women as neglectful and abusive mothers and as having a disdain for honest work. They were thought to be in need of moral instruction from whites. All of these cultural and ideological conceptions appear in the records of black women who were sent to Georgia's Lunatic asylum. Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 13; Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*; 70-2, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Daughters of Sorrow: Attitudes Toward Black Women, 1880-1920* (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1990), 46.

[261] There are notable distinctions between Northern and Southern asylums. However, when it came to the care of the "colored insane," in both cases the policies and practices reflected pro-slavery psychiatric thought. Indeed, Northern asylum superintendents largely left the question of how to treat the colored insane to Southern psychiatrists' expertise and experience. Gerald Grob, *The Mad Among Us: A History of the Care of America's Mentally Ill* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 88-9. Gerald Grob, *Mental Institutions in America: Social Policy to 1875* (New York: The Free Press, 1973), 248-56. Southern asylums, then, are ideal sites for examining how notions of insanity among formerly enslaved black women continue to shape lives after emancipation.

Chapter 3
All the Colored Insane Were Men, All Insane Women Were White, but Some of Them Were Brave: Slavery, Asylums and Mad Black Women in the Post-Slavery South

This chapter's title signifies on the brilliantly titled book *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave*, which pointed to the limitations of Black studies and Women's studies for addressing the unique experiences of black women.[262] We are reminded of the classic marginalization of black women in scholarly and popular discourses when we consider the experiences of nineteenth-century black women in post-emancipation asylums. Extant scholarship on women's experiences in asylums focuses on gender alone. Similarly, as I will demonstrate in some detail, studies on the experiences of black patients in post-emancipation asylums only consider race. There are no studies on black women, whose experiences were based on the intersection of race and gender, in nineteenth-century asylums. Furthermore, scholars who consider black women's experiences of confinement after slavery have examined various spaces of confinement, for example, plantations, attics, prisons and Jim Crow society, along with the varied ways confinement manifests socially, culturally or physically across time, space and place. However, these studies give little attention to how slavery's psychic wounding of black women reverberated across time, and no attention to the asylum as a critical space of confinement for them. Uncovering the experiences of black women in post-emancipation asylums is the central concern of this chapter. To address this concern, I examine archival materials including patient intake ledgers, *The Atlanta Constitution* newspaper articles and the writings of GLA superintendent Theophilus Powell, which

[262] Gloria Hull, Barbra Smith, and Pat Bell-Scott eds. (New York: Feminist Press, 1982).

together provide a window into the experiences of Viney W., Jane G., Olivia W., Alice M. and Amanda C., black women who were sent to Georgia Lunatic Asylum (GLA) between 1881 and 1894.[263]

An examination of the experiences of these black women at GLA complicates scholarship on women and madness, confinement after slavery (literary, cultural and historical) and post-emancipation asylums. Their records show that, during and after slavery, medical discourses shaped the category of madness and justified confinement in asylums. They also reveal how the post-slavery criteria for African American female sanity were based on the interwoven social discourses of gender, race and mental illness that had been developed in the antebellum period. Finally, the narratives uncover how American psychiatry made black women mad in the sense of both constructing disorder according to prevailing notions of black femininity and inflicting real psychological harm within asylums.

Black Women of GLA

Before presenting each woman's narrative, I would like to discuss in more detail the two types of sources from which they are gleaned—newspaper articles and patient intake ledgers.[264] The newspaper articles about the black women originally appeared in

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[263] First name and last initial will be used to protect the identities of the women. After first use only first names will be used. Last names have been edited out of the records. For a discussion of why I chose GLA as a site for examining black women's experiences see the section "On Sources" in the introduction.

[264] I provided a brief description of these sources in the introduction, but it is useful again here to ground the present discussion of the women in this chapter. It should be noted that minor discrepancies exist between the patient intake ledgers and the newspaper articles, including name spellings, ages and admission dates. For example, Olivia's name in the newspaper article is spelled with an added "s." However, in the patient ledger her name is

the *The Atlanta Constitution* (1888-1894). The stories about black women usually were printed in the section of the newspaper entitled "In the Open Field: Short Stories of Minor Happening Gathered from Many Sources, The City Briefly Mirrored." Consequently, their stories appeared alongside other minor happenings in the lives of everyday people. For example, the stories note mundane occurrences such as the spelling bee winner, new fruit imports from Cuba and petty crimes. The proximity of black women's stories to these everyday happenings suggests that the women were ordinary, and, further, that their experiences were commonplace. The way in which these narratives are presented as, and assumed to be, commonplace reflects the ubiquity of certain received ideas about black female in/sanity in the post-emancipation South.[265]

The patient ledgers include a wide range of information about the women's conditions upon arrival. The records include demographic information such as county/state of origin, age, number of children, marital status, occupation, gender and race. The overarching diagnostic categories were "lunatic," "idiot" and "epileptic." The ledgers also document various supposed precipitating causes of insanity including: "blow to the head," "change of life," "menstrual derangement [sometimes menstrual suppression or menstrual irregularity]" and "ill treatment by her husband." The records

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spelled without an "s" at the end. In Olivia's case, a census record confirms that her name was actually spelled without an added "s." Viney is listed as thirty years of age in the intake records, but reported as forty years old in the newspaper. The most curious discrepancy is in regard to admission dates. For example, the newspaper records indicate that Olivia was sent to the asylum on July 17; however, the intake ledger notes that she entered the hospital July 16. The newspaper record indicates that Amanda was sent to the asylum on July 13; the patient intake ledger indicates that she arrived at the hospital on July 12.

[265] It should be noted that newspaper reports about individuals being committed to GLA cut across race and gender lines. This study, however, focuses on the commitment of black women.

also list patients' past medical histories, which provided asylum keepers with information about the nature and degree of insanity. Past medical and personal history descriptions of the women include "homicidal or suicidal," "will wander," "gets into a state of nudity," "inclined to be violent," "dangerous with fire," "destructive," "hereditary tendency," "duration of insanity," "eats and sleeps well," "uses snuff" and "has been treated by city physician." These descriptors had been variously applied to all patients. Here I argue that mainstream psychiatry overlapped with conceptions of black femininity that emerged during the slavery era. These intersecting discourses resulted in unique experiences for black women. Before examining how these discourses map onto the bodies and minds of Viney, Jane, Olivia, Alice and Amanda, I will provide a transcript of the newspaper articles and patient ledgers in which they appear. Together, they present a limited yet valuable portrait of each of these women.

Olivia's narrative is the most complete. Her census record indicates that on June 1880 she was twenty-one years old and working as a housekeeper. There is no mention of prior insanity.[266] She lived with her husband Felix, a twenty-three-year-old farm laborer. He had been unemployed one month during the census year. She also lived with her two children — John W., who was three, and Anna, who was one. Olivia appeared in two newspaper articles, once on July 14, 1894, and again on July 18, 1894:

> FOUR LUNATICS—The Fulton County jail has been converted into a lunatic asylum. There are now four lunatics inside its walls and they have

[266] Ancestry.com, "1880 United States Federal Census about Olivia Wood" accessed 23 June 2014, Ancestry.com. Original Source: Tenth Census of the United States, 1880. (NARA microfilm publication T9, 1,454 rolls). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. National Archives, Washington, D.C. Beginning in 1840, the United States Census enumerated instances of insanity. The census taker did not indicate that Wood had a mental illness.

> been there for some time. Two of them are women, Olivia and Jane. The former is extremely violent and is kept in a darkened dungeon in the basement of the jail. Jane is the negress who shot the negro man out of the tree because she suspected him of conjuring her babe to death. A fifth lunatic, Amanda, was sent to the state lunatic asylum yesterday.[267]
>
> SENT TO THE ASYLUM— Two lunatics who have been inmates of the Fulton County jail for the past month were carried to the asylum yesterday. Olivia, a colored woman, was very violent and it was necessary to handcuff her. The other was a negro boy.[268]

Olivia's patient narrative reads as follows:

> Olivia c/" [colored]
>
> Lunatic from Fulton County. Native of Georgia. Age 28. Married. Cook. Baptist. First symptoms appeared about two months ago. Not hereditary. Cause—ill treatment by her husband. Not suicidal or homicidal but somewhat violent. Does not use tobacco. Received a violent blow on the jaw from her husband. Eats and sleeps well. Not dangerous with fire. Has been treated by city physician.
>
> Address: Harriet Foster, 436[269] Atlanta, GA.
>
> 52 Grady St.

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[267] "In the Local Field" *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, July 14, 1894, ProQuest Historical Newspapers (230533617).
[268] "In the Local Field," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, July 18, 1894, ProQuest Historical Newspapers (230522929).
[269] This address was stricken through on Olivia's hospital record.

Received 16 July 1894.

Died 10 Oct. 1896. Exhaustion.[270]

Amanda, who appeared in the July 14th *The Atlanta Constitution* newspaper article, was also sent to GLA. Her patient ledger reads as follows:

Amanda c/“ [colored]

Lunatic from Fulton County. Native of Georgia. Age 45. Widow six living children two deceased. Cook. Baptist. First symptoms appeared some months ago. Inclined to be violent. No hereditary tendency. Cause change of life. Probably had an attack previous to this one but not suicidal, homicidal or violent. Destructive. Uses snuff. Eats and sleeps well. Not dangerous with fire

Received 12 July 1894

Discharged 23 Jan 1895

Restored

Address Missie Coursey 71 Plum St.

Atlanta, GA[271]

Viney also entered the hospital in 1888. A newspaper report about Viney appeared in *The Atlanta Constitution* on July 4, 1888:

Viney, a colored woman about forty years old, was so violent that her family had her arrested. In court she evidenced a dangerous type of

[270] Olivia W., intake ledger, 16 July 1894, Collection 350, Box 22, vol. 11, Central State Hospital Admissions Registers, 1842-1924, Georgia Archives.
[271] Amanda C., intake ledger, 14 July 1894, Collection 350, Box 22, vol. 9, Central State Hospital Admissions Registers, 1842-1924, Georgia Archives.

> insanity, and the jury quickly adjudged her to be crazy. Judge Calhoun committed her to the state lunatic asylum.[272]

Her intake ledger reads as follows:

> Lunatic from Fulton Co Ga. Age 30 years. Single -- Occupation cook. Duration two or three months. Cause unknown. Not known as to whether she is homicidal or suicidal. Duration two or three months -- will wander from home and get into a state of nudity. Nothing more could be furnished concerning her history by the person who brings her.
>
> Received July 11, 1888
>
> Died 31 April 1895
>
> Dropsy
>
> Address
>
> Ordinary
>
> Atlanta
>
> Ga.[273]

Jane, who was also named in the July 14th *The Atlanta Constitution* newspaper, was sent to Milledgeville. However, I could not locate her patient ledger. I also could not locate the ledger of Alice, who was declared insane by a police officer, and thus would likely have ended up at GLA. Alice's story appears in a July 2, 1881, *The Atlanta Constitution* article:

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[272] "Sent to the Lunatic Asylum: Ordinary Calhoun and a Jury Hear Two Lunacy Cases," *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 4, 1888, ProQuest Historical Newspapers (495153437).
[273] Viney W., intake ledger, 11 July 1888, Collection 350, Box 21, vol. 9, Central State Hospital Admissions Registers, 1842-1924, Georgia Archives.

> Alice, a negro woman, was found lying upon the sidewalk on Peachtree street yesterday by Officer Simmons. In her arms was a small deformed child, to which she was clinging. When approached by the patrolman Alice began calling loudly for help. To the officer it was apparent that she was either drunk or insane and an arrest was the result, but before reaching the station-house the latter was found to be the case. The child was taken from her and by direction of the county commissioners given to a colored woman. To-day [sic] Alice will be taken before a committee upon lunacy for an examination.[274]

Now that we have a sketch of these women's lives, we must consider what we cannot know given the fragmented nature of the sources. Although we can conjecture that these women were enslaved, we cannot know for sure, or whether they were enslaved in the city or in a rural area. However, according to their reported ages and counties of origin, they came of age from 1848 through 1866 during slavery. The most glaring limitation is that their stories are mediated through the language (and perspectives) of doctors, judges, police officers, journalists, census-takers and family members; we do not hear the women's voices directly, if at all. So how do we read the narratives in light of these silences? How can we use these records to discover what the asylum was like for black women and how they might have understood their experiences? Harriet Jacobs' slave narrative provides a theoretical lens through which we can interpret black women's post-slavery asylum narratives.

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[274] "Yesterday's Arrests: Johnson's 83-An Insane Woman--Jackson Goes to Jail--Smith, the Vagrant--Stolen Jewelry--The Result of a Drunk," *The Daily Constitution*, July 2, 1881, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, (494784557).

Jacobs' theoretical ideas on madness and confinement are useful in three ways. First, as the most well-developed narrative about black women's experiences of mental suffering during slavery, it offers insight into the formerly enslaved women's perspectives. Also, as the most penetrating account of the female slave experience, her narrative sheds light onto the cultural parameters of acceptable black womanhood developed under slavery. In addition to representations of black femininity, the records contain ideas that reflect the lingering power of pro-slavery psychiatry, a discourse that Jacobs countered; as a representative anti-slavery psychiatry text, *ILSG* illuminates, and offers a counter-narrative to, the enduring legacy of pro-slavery psychiatric thought at GLA. Finally, Jacobs' narrative helps us understand how black women's experiences at GLA differed from those of whites, both men and women, and from those of black men.

Sent to the Lunatic Asylum: Black Women's Journeys to GLA

Amanda, Olivia, Viney, Jane and Alice's distinct experiences at GLA correlated with their specific raced and gendered existence before they arrived in the asylum. Furthermore, they were black women confined in Jim Crow society; their narratives, then, depict both physical and social confinement. Tara Green writes about how physical and social confinement impacted African Americans:

> Given the similarities of experiences from one era to the next, it is more appropriate to describe the experiences of men and women under slavery, during Reconstruction, and within the penal system as confinement… [Confinement] describes the status of individuals who are placed within boundaries—either seen or unseen—but always felt. It describes the status

> of persons who are imprisoned and who are unjustly relegated to a social and political status that is hostile, rendering them powerless and subject to the rules of those who have assumed the position of authority.[275]

Even before the GLA black women enter the physical boundaries of asylum, they experience "unseen" boundaries of social confinement. Their narratives beg the questions: What were the political and social statuses of the GLA women? To what rules and to whose authorities were they subjected? We find answers to these questions through attention to the recurring theme of violence in the newspaper articles. An examination of white and black male physical violence in the articles reveals how black female sanity was steeped in two discourses. As I will discuss in more detail in my analysis of asylum life at GLA, one discourse was the dominant understandings of mental illness. The other discourse that influenced how black women's sanity was determined was post-emancipation conceptions of black femininity.

Post-emancipation conceptions of black femininity after slavery were influenced by earlier stereotypes. For example, the Sapphire figure was an offshoot of the Mammy and the Jezebel. Unlike the docile Mammy or the sexually loose Jezebel, the Sapphire was defiant to whites and controlling to black men.[276] This stereotype was powerful in shaping social expectations for black womanhood. Jacqueline Jones describes how whites viewed "aggressive" freed women: "northern and foreign observers conveyed the distinct impression that black women were particularly outspoken and aggressive (by implication

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[275] Tara Green, *From the Plantation to the Prison: African American Confinement Literature* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2008), 3.
[276] Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow* (New York: Vintage, 1985), 70-2; White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 185, 189.

relative to black men) in their willingness to confront white authority figures."[277] Jones' argument suggests that to be labeled a "violent" black woman was not simply a reference to specific actions. The labeling of the GLA women reflects the ways in which their bodies were viewed as always already potentially "uncontrollable," and therefore needing to be contained at the slightest evidence of deviance from, or resistance to, the reigning social norms. The possibility of physical confinement was a persistent threat to deviant black women, especially those who were reported to be violent.

The interplay between violence and deviance plays out in subtle, yet powerful ways in Alice's story. Alice is found to be "insane" by Fulton County police officer Simmons.[278] The article indicates that she will be "taken before a committee upon lunacy for an examination," which suggests that she will be subjected to the authority of the medical profession in addition to that of law enforcement.[279] The officer's determination that Alice was "insane," rather than "drunk," even "before [they reached] the station-house" suggests that the authority of the law and the medical profession were interrelated.[280] Most likely, Alice, like other black women, would have been threatened by officer Simmons' authority because of the racial tensions in the late nineteenth century. Tera Hunter describes the atmosphere in Atlanta during the time as volatile: "Black Atlantans during Reconstruction were subjected to other kinds of physical

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[277] Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 70.
[278] "Yesterday's Arrests: Johnson's 83-An Insane Woman--Jackson Goes to Jail--Smith, the Vagrant--Stolen Jewelry--The Result of a Drunk," *The Daily Constitution*, July 2, 1881, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, (494784557).
[279] Ibid.
[280] Ibid.

violence, especially at the hands of white civilians and police."[281] When officer Simmons approaches Alice, who was "clinging" to "a small deformed child," she begins to "[call] loudly for help" from the policeman, presumably for herself and her child.[282] Once Alice was taken to the police station, her child was "taken from her and by direction of the county commissioners."[283]

Alice's call for help is the only hint of her voice available; we do not have access to her perspective. Harriet Jacobs helps us understand the possible meanings of Alice's desperation. Jacobs contends that black women feared the possibility of being separated from their children and suffered mentally when it occurred. Alice's status as an "insane" black woman opened her up to the violence of separation. Whether she was calling out to the policeman for help or whether her scream signified her fear of the officer, she lost her child as a consequence of her commitment. Jacobs reveals how white male violence against black women is interconnected with notions of black female insanity in a scene in which she describes a confrontation with Dr. Flint over her desire to marry a free carpenter.

Upon hearing her intention, Dr. Flint threatened to send Jacobs to jail because, as he exclaimed, "it would take some of her high notions out of [her]." She identifies this moment as the first time her master physically assaults her. This physical violence is coupled with a questioning of her sanity:

> When I had recovered a little from the effects, I exclaimed, 'You have

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[281] Although white residents were resentful and abusive towards blacks, former slaves strove for dignity and self-determination. For them, freedom meant having autonomy and a decent livelihood. This of course went against white efforts to reestablish pre-emancipation racial hierarchies. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 34, 43.
[282] "Yesterday's Arrests," July 2, 1881, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, (494784557).
[283] Ibid.

> struck me for answering you honestly. How I despise you!'… Finally, he asked, 'Do you know what you have said?'
>
> 'Yes, sir; but your treatment drove me to it.'
>
> 'Do you know that I have a right to do as I like with you—that I can kill you, if I please?'
>
> 'You have tried to kill me, and I wish you had; but you have no right to do as you like with me.'
>
> 'Silence!' he exclaimed, in a thundering voice. 'By heavens, girl, you forget yourself too far! Are you *mad*? [emphasis mine] If you are, I will soon bring you to your senses. Do you think any other master would bear what I have borne from you this morning? Many masters would have killed you on the spot. How would you like to be sent to jail for your insolence?'[284]

In part, Dr. Flint perceives Jacobs as defiant because she declares her intent to marry, rather than asking for permission. However, and most strikingly, she is considered "mad" for resisting the system's predisposition to render her human property. Jacobs' high notions, that she belongs to no man, almost lead to her imprisonment, just as they had led to the same charge of being "mad" that justified officer Simmons' detainment of Alice.

While violence against Alice was considered acceptable, Jane, Olivia and Viney's stories reveal how even the perception of black female violence was not tolerated by whites. Jane was sent to jail because she "shot [a] negro man out of the tree because she suspected him of conjuring her babe to death."[285] Likewise, Olivia was called "very violent" in one article and "extremely violent" in another, although there is no description

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[284] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 61-2.
[285] "In the Local Field," July 14, 1894, ProQuest Historical Newspapers (230533617).

of her crime.[286] The record only includes the construction of a violent and insane black woman. Because of these dual labels, Olivia found herself locked "in a darkened dungeon in the basement of the [Fulton County] jail."[287] Viney, who was about forty years old, was said to be "so violent that her family had her arrested."[288] The newspaper writer indicates that she evidenced such a "dangerous" kind of insanity that the jury "quickly adjudicated her to be crazy."[289]

Although Viney is described as the most violent among the women, her intake record does not include any reference to violence. This inconsistency reflects the way in which police officers, family members, judges and doctors measured black women's sanity in relation to perceptions of their femininity.

Black women not only dealt with the threat of violence from whites, but many of them were also subjected to intra-community violence, especially from black men.[290] Viney's story appears alongside narratives about a black man named Jake Collier, who also was sentenced by Judge John Calhoun. Judge Calhoun, like the average white Southerner, had a gendered and raced notion of violence that condoned violence inflicted on black women's bodies. Calhoun found Collier guilty of "[giving] his wife a drubbing" and fined him "$15 and cost yesterday and bound him over to the city court for $100."[291]

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[286] Ibid.; "In the Local Field," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, July 18, 1894, ProQuest Historical Newspapers (230522929).
[287] "In the Local Field," July 14, 1894, ProQuest Historical Newspapers (230533617).
[288] "Sent to the Lunatic Asylum: Ordinary Calhoun and a Jury Hear Two Lunacy Cases," *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 4, 1888, ProQuest Historical Newspapers (495153437). There is a discrepancy about Viney's age. In the newspaper article she is reported to be forty years old. However, the GLA intake records note that she is thirty years old.
[289] Ibid.
[290] Frankel, *Break Those Chains At Last*, 103; Schwalm, *A Hard Fight For We*, 260-268.
[291] "Sent to the Lunatic Asylum," July 4, 1888, ProQuest Historical Newspapers (495153437).

Collier's violence against his wife was brutal:

> Then he seized her about the waist and threw her from the window to the ground. She struck on her head, but before she could get to her feet Jake was in front with a pistol in her face.[292]

Undoubtedly the details of Mrs. Collier's assault were presented to Judge Calhoun. Calhoun quickly judged Viney to be insane, but Collier was determined to be not violent enough to be sent to GLA. The Collier story exhibits how once again, violence inflicted upon black women's bodies was acceptable. In fact, Olivia's intake record suggests that Mrs. Collier was more likely to end up in the asylum than Mr. Collier. The record indicates that the cause of her insanity was "ill treatment by her husband," who had given her "a violent blow on the jaw."[293] All of the ways in which violence surfaces in black women's GLA narratives, whether through perceptions of black female violence or acceptance of violence on black female bodies, illuminate the ways in which conceptions of black femininity worked in tandem with the reigning ideas about mental illness to confine black women in asylums like GLA.

Pro-Slavery Psychiatry at Georgia Lunatic Asylum

Well after emancipation, tenets of pro-slavery psychiatry permeated all aspects of life at GLA: segregated facilities, regulations of daily life, poor provisions and the practices and/or perspectives of superintendents, patients and doctors. Aspects of pro-slavery psychiatry show up in each woman's narrative before and after she enters the hospital. But prior to an examination of their stories, let us briefly turn to the hospital's

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[292] Ibid.
[293] Ibid.

historical trajectory and its overarching philosophical climate for the context of the women's confinement.

Even before black patients were admitted into GLA in 1867 from the Freedmen's Bureau Hospitals, the hospital had a reputation for providing a very low standard of care due to questionable leadership, insufficient funding and unspecialized care. Gerald Grob describes the situation from the perspective of external reviewers, including renowned reformer Dorothea Dix and representatives from the *American Journal of Insanity*, the organ of the field:

> In Georgia…the Milledgeville asylum cared for idiotic and epileptic patients as well as the insane. Dr. David Cooper, its first superintendent, was highly eccentric, and, indeed, perhaps insane. Upon reading Cooper's bizarre and barely comprehensible first *Annual Report*, the editor of the new *American Journal of Insanity* questioned its very authenticity. Dix wrote to one correspondent that she had been informed that Cooper 'is really insane, but being harmless, the Trustees consent to his remaining in charge of the Institution.' The appointment of a new superintendent in 1847 did not improve conditions at the asylum; as late as 1872 two physicians who conducted a study for the legislature remarked that they 'commend nothing, for the very simple reason, *that we saw nothing to commend*... We can say nothing about the Asylum but that in the past it has been a failure, and now needs a thorough reorganization.'[294]

[294] Gerald Grob, *The Mad Among Us*: *A History of the Care of America's Mentally Ill* (New York: Macmillan, 1994), 48. Conditions for black patients were consistently poor on account of segregated facilities, inadequate provisions and outbreaks of tuberculosis and other diseases. And

During Dr. David Cooper's brief administration from 1842 to 1845 there were relatively few patients in the asylum, black or white. The asylum conditions were not favorable, but the hospital was manageable. His alleged insanity notwithstanding, Cooper took a humanitarian approach to running the asylum; he strove to provide moral therapy to all patients. For Green, moral therapy entailed kind treatment, orderly environments and pleasurable labor.[295] Like so many 1840s asylums, he governed the hospital within the patriarchal family structure with himself at the head and a matron by his side.[296] This approach became more difficult to sustain as the population increased.

Alongside the white population, the number of colored insane rose dramatically over the decades. In response, the Georgia legislature allocated $11,000 in 1866 for the building of an asylum to treat the colored insane.[297] While no separate asylum was built, a separate structure to treat blacks was erected on the Milledgeville hospital grounds.[298]

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although in 1897 the hospital's third superintendent, T.O. Powell, boasted of the hospital's treatment advancements and humane care, by 1909 it faced charges of misconduct. Georgia General Assembly. *Joint committee appointed to investigate the charges in connection with the conduct of the Georgia State Sanitarium* (Atlanta, GA: Chas. P, Byrd, State Printer, 1910). For Powell's remarks see T.O. Powell, "A Sketch of Psychiatry in the Southern States," *American Journal of Insanity* 54 (1897): 31.

[295] At the end of Cooper's term there were only sixty-seven patients. Cranford, *Damnation*, 28-32. Popular in the 1830s and 40s, the moral treatment philosophy held that a right and orderly environment could cure insanity. For an extended discussion of moral treatment see Gerald Grob, *The State and the Mentally Ill: A History of Worcester State Hospital in Massachusetts, 1830-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 43-79. The superintendent and matron were aided by a steward, watchman, two attendants and two servants.

[296] Elaine Showalter refers to this organization of the hospital as characteristic of the Victorian age's domestication of asylum spaces. She argues that in those times "asylums became increasingly like the family, ruled by the father, and subject to his values and his law." For a full discussion see the chapter "Domesticating Insanity" in *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1985), 23-50. quote on p.50.

[297] Hurd, *The Institutional Care*, vol. 2, 164.

[298] Ibid.

In 1867, the first black patients were admitted to Georgia's state mental facility via the Freedmen's Bureau Hospital.[299] In August of 1866, a colored building was completed, but by 1870, it could not accommodate the growing numbers of colored insane. As a result, the state legislature again appropriated funds, this time $18,000, to increase the size of the existing building.[300] The state legislature passed an act in 1877 that made the GLA free to all citizens, which resulted in a spike in admittance, for both whites and black patients.[301] Not long after, in 1879, the colored building was again enlarged with the aid of $25,000 in state funds.[302] Then in 1881, $82,166 of state funding supported the construction of a new colored building equipped to hold 541 patients.[303] The building became filled to maximum capacity by 1888.[304] As the ongoing expansion plans suggest, black patients were often in overcrowded dwellings.

This overcrowding made for poor health care for black patients, but these material realities grant only limited access to the social climate of the hospital. Benjamin Reiss argues that at stake in nineteenth-century asylums was the fate of American culture;

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[299] Cranford, *Damnation*, 44.
[300] Hurd, *The Institutional Care,* vol. 2, 164.
[301] Ibid., 161.
[302] Ibid., 164
[303] Ibid.
[304] Cranford, *Damnation*, 61. It should be noted that over the course of the century, the monies dedicated to colored buildings were modest compared to those for whites. For example, funding allocations for the expansion of facilities for the white population before 1860 were: 1849, $10,500; 1851, $24,500; 1853, $56,500; 1855, $110,000; 1857, $63,500, 1858, $30,000. Thus, before the colored patients arrived, almost $300,000 had been appropriated for the construction of white buildings. After 1870 the appropriations for white facilities totaled $1,362,875: 1870/1, $105,000; 1881, $165,000; 1883, 92,875; 1893; 100,000. For colored patients the allocations were: 1866, $11,000; 1870, $18,000, 1879, $25,000; 1881, $82,166. Over the course of a decade and a half, only $136,000 was spent on colored facilities. Thus, before 1881 white facilities received five times as much funding as black patients. While the number of black patients never exceeded whites from 1866 to 1881, the black to white ratio was certainly less than 1:5. Allocation figures from Hurd, *The Institutional Care,* vol. 2, 163-4.

asylums were "at once laboratories for purifying the national culture and theaters where this process could be observed."[305] What was at stake for GLA's administrators? As the patients' narratives show, hospital administrators held fast to pre-emancipation conceptions of race and insanity. From their perspective, an ideal society was one in which black inferiority was a given and their submission to whites natural.

The goal of restoring pre-emancipation race relations is evident in superintendent Theophilus Orgain Powell's explanation for the late-nineteenth-century asylum population spikes. Powell's theory is captured in the memoir of Peter Cranford: "There was a great increase in insanity among the negroes immediately following the war, and in general [Powell] attributed it to their assumption of responsibilities without adequate preparation."[306] The end of slavery not only explained the increase of insanity among blacks; Powell also saw emancipation as partially responsible for increased admission among whites. In a report to the state legislature on the steep rise in admissions, Powell explains: "Prior to the war, families could provide nursing care at home by using slaves."[307] Powell's conclusions suggest that the institution of slavery was instrumental in both the management of in/sanity among blacks and the administration of mental health care in the South. According to his logic, whites suffered psychologically because they no longer had slaves to "care" for them, while blacks suffered because they were unable to handle freedom.

This inability to imagine the history of psychiatry outside Southern black/white

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[305] *Theaters of Madness*: *Insane Asylums and Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 3.
[306] Quoted in Cranford, *Damnation*, 60-61. Peter Cranford was a chief psychologist at the hospital from 1950-1952, during which time he wrote his memoir.
[307] Ibid.

race relations was characteristic of Powell's approach to treating the colored insane. For example, in his 1897 presidential address to the American Medico-Psychological Association (later the American Psychiatric Association) in Baltimore, he contextualizes care for the colored insane with respect to the peculiar institution. Caring for the "negro lunatic," he contends, "has always been a separate and peculiar problem."[308] Even after emancipation, he conceptualizes the developments in black mental health care with respect to the master-slave dynamic: "The burden of [negro lunatics'] support has fallen upon their former owners, themselves struggling to rise from the impoverishment of war."[309] Slavery is Powell's ever-present frame of reference for the treatment of the colored insane.

Beyond recalling slavery, Powell echoes pro-slavery psychiatry in his presidential address by fusing mainstream pre-emancipation psychiatric discourses with scientific racist ideology. For example, he perpetuates the idea that advancements in civilization increased the incidence of mental illness. As David Rothman points out, the idea was entrenched in nineteenth-century psychiatric thought: "Before the Civil War, practically no one in the United States protested the simple connection between insanity and civilization."[310] When pre-Civil War psychiatrists applied the civilization/advancement theory to the colored insane, they were careful not to disrupt pro-slavery ideology. For example, in 1840 John Minson Galt, whom Powell names as one of the "pioneers in

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[308] T.O. Powell, "A Sketch of Psychiatry in the Southern States," *American Journal of Insanity* 54 (1897), 29.
[309] Ibid.
[310] David Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 2005), 113. See David Rothman's chapter "Insanity and the Social Order" for fuller discussion of how psychiatrists associated insanity with the advancement of civilization, especially via the expansion of Jacksonian democracy. Rothman, *Discovery of the Asylum*, 109-129.

caring for negro lunatics," reasoned that the U.S. census reports of higher rates of mental illness among free blacks was "perhaps owing not only to the less [sic] degree of mental cultivation, but much also to the absence of all cares for the future, the great depressing influence with the whites."[311] Powell's post-emancipation iteration of this idea follows his tribute to the "pioneer" psychiatrists:

> Following their emancipation the negroes have become subject to the same penalties that other races have paid for liberty, license and intemperance. Among those penalties insanity is not the least. A recent estimate, based upon the records at the census office, shows that brain disease in the negro as compared with the whites has increased from one-fifth as common in 1850 and 1860 to one-third as common in 1870 and one-half as common in 1880 and 1890. Or, stated in another way, the ratio of insanity per million among the negroes has risen from 169 in 1860 to 886 in 1890.[312]

Like his pre-slavery icons, Powell draws upon "scientific" statistics to substantiate his conclusion that slavery had hygienic benefits for blacks.[313]

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[311] Quoted in Norman Dain, *Disordered Minds: The First Century of Eastern State Hospital in Williamsburg, Virginia 1766-1866* (Williamsburg: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1971), 112. These perspectives were more polemical than factual. Historian Todd Savitt argues that mental illness did occur on plantations. Insanity was often part and parcel of the harsh realities of a life of enslavement. He comments on the various causes of insanity among slaves: "Organic diseases also caused insanity. Some slaves (and whites and free blacks) suffered derangement secondary to physical trauma, brain tumors, epilepsy, tertiary syphilis, pellagra, or other dietary deficiency disease, puerperal fever, tuberculosis, aneurysms, hypertension, and a host of other maladies." Todd Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery: The Diseases and Health Care of Blacks in Antebellum Virginia* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 250–251.

[312] Powell, "Sketch," 30.

[313] Other post-slavery psychiatrists used Powell's statistics to make claims about the

Powell also blends pro-slavery ideas with contemporary developments in mainstream psychiatry. For example, he aligns himself with the field's movement away from emphasizing the impact of environment on mental health toward considering patients' genetic or hereditary predispositions to mental illness.[314] Like other psychiatrists of his time, Powell was influenced by approaches to treatment that emphasized rigorous scientific research. For example, he declares that the field of psychiatry would be advanced by the incorporation of "laboratory" research and "skilled neuro-pathologists" in asylums. But, as Elaine Showalter argues, these theories were often "closely linked to class prejudice and to ideas of race superiority."[315] Although Showalter does not elaborate on the issue of racial superiority, the role of race cannot be avoided in a discussion of nineteenth-century Southern asylums, as Powell makes explicitly clear.

When it came to the colored insane, Powell's emphasis on heredity revived pre-slavery beliefs about the physiological differences between races. He contends that racial distinctions shape the mental health of the colored insane: "We have been confronted

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suitability of blacks to enslavement. For example, J.F. Miller published a study in the North Carolina Medical Record that made similar claims. For a discussion of Miller's article as well as a discussion of how census data was used before and after emancipation to support research on the mental and physical health and mortality rates of blacks see John S. Haller, *Outcasts from Evolution: Scientific Attitudes of Racial Inferiority, 1859-1900* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 40-68. Reference to Miller's argument appears on pages 45-6.

[314] For a discussion of this transition in the field of psychiatry see Grob, *The State and the Mentally Ill*, 198-228. While the moral therapy movement stalled by the end of the nineteenth century and asylums became custodial rather than curative, Powell did not abandon the moral therapy model of asylum care. He retained his commitment to providing kind and humane treatment. In this way, he continued to carry out the vision of Philippe Pinel, who a century before replaced the chains of patients at the Paris Asylum with moral therapy. In his speech, Powell announces his aversion to "mechanical and chemical restraint" and his preference for "improved accommodations," which included systematic employment, amusements, chapels and libraries. Powell, "Sketch," 32.

[315] Ibid., 108.

with the question of providing for a class emerging from servitude, of different race, habits, instincts and training."[316] Powell's statement recalls the stance of Samuel Cartwright, one of the most infamous pro-slavery psychiatrists, who surmised that "the negro [was] a slave by nature" in his 1851 *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* article.[317] Similar to Powell's demarcations along racial lines, Cartwright claimed that the different races possessed distinct "mental, physiological and anatomical organization," and therefore required specific measures for mental health treatment.[318] In the same vein, Powell argues that caring for the colored insane is a Southern "specialty."[319]

Distinct treatment showed up most readily in the segregation of black and white patients at GLA, which Powell thought was to the "advantage of both races."[320] However, McCandless informs us that segregation was not advantageous for the colored insane because they "worked more and died faster than their white counterparts."[321] These terrible outcomes exemplify how race shaped black patients' asylum experiences in the South; and, as Powell's presidential address reveals, GLA was no exception.

Powell's references to the "colored insane" do not distinguish the treatment of black women from that of black men. His conflation of male and female care suggests that race is the primary category of difference in pro-slavery psychiatric thought. Indeed,

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[316] Powell, "Sketch," 29.
[317] Samuel Cartwright, "Report on the Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro Race," *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* 8 (1851): 691-715. A copy of the article also appears in *Defending Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Old South: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Paul Finkelman (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin, 2003), 163. Subsequent references will be made to the reprint.
[318] Ibid., 173. For a discussion of Southern doctors' alleged specialization in the medical care of slaves see John S. Haller Jr., "The Negro and the Southern Physician: A Study of Medical and Racial Attitudes," *Medical History* 16 (1972): 243-48.
[319] Powell, "Sketch," 29.
[320] Ibid.
[321] McCandless, *Moonlight, Magnolias, and Madness*, 10.

race figures importantly in black women's GLA narratives. However, Powell's emphasis on race leaves unaccounted for the gendered descriptions in black women's patient ledgers.

Anti-Psychiatry and White Women's Asylum Narratives

Insight into how gender functions in black women's narratives can be found in white women's postbellum representations of madness and confinement. White women's asylum narratives are useful because certain women had the opportunity to speak back to the psychiatric establishment, and thus their stories offer alternative perspectives on the asylum.[322] Their asylum narratives often contrasted with the authority figures' records.[323]

Mary Elene Wood argues that asylum narrators drew upon several literary genres to tell their stories, including the spiritual autobiography, captivity narrative, sentimental fiction, political treatise, and, interestingly, the slave narrative.[324] For example, Wood contends that Elizabeth Packard's autobiography is comparable to Harriet Jacobs' slave narrative.[325] Wood argues that writing is instrumental in both women's ability to achieve

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[322] Jeffery Geller and Maxine Harris declare that the women were "keen observers of their environment, meticulous chroniclers of their own experiences, and often poetic and witty recorders of their subjective and emotional state." *Women of the Asylum: Voices From Behind the Walls, 1840-1945* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994), 7-8. Roy Porter contends that the perspectives of the mad offer us new understandings of reason, culture and society. *A Social History of Madness: Stories of the Insane* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), 3.

[323] Jeffery Geller argues that asylum narratives are just as reliable as accounts from asylum professionals. Jeffery Geller, "Women's Accounts of Psychiatric Illness and Institutionalization," *Hospital and Community Psychiatry* 36 (October 1985): 1056-62.

[324] Mary Elene Wood, *The Writing on the Wall: Women's Autobiography and the Asylum* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 14.

[325] Elizabeth Packard has received more scholarly attention than any other female asylum narrator in the antebellum period. In 1860 Packard was involuntarily admitted to Jacksonville Insane Asylum in Illinois by her husband because of their differing religious

freedom.[326] Also like slave narrators, Packard and others authenticated their writings by including letters and official documents to validate their sanity.[327] Asylum narrators aimed to move their readers to political action, which was also the driving force behind slave narratives.[328]

There are other important linkages between the two types of confinement writings; slave narratives and asylum narratives both revise existing genres, incorporate the stories of multiple inmates, and subvert social constructs. In addition, as I have shown in the previous two chapters, slave narratives make an ideal basis for comparison because of their sophisticated discourse on madness and confinement. Black women's slave narratives highlight the ways race and gender influence experiences of madness and confinement. Current scholarship on nineteenth-century women and madness focuses on

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views; she spent three years in confinement. She was released from confinement after a jury declared her sane and wrongfully incarcerated. She went on to campaign for asylum reform and married women's rights. The first biography dedicated to her life was *The Private War of Mrs. Packard* by Barbara Sapinsley (1991). Since then, her work has been canonized in literary studies of asylum narratives. Other scholarship has examined her life in relation to important nineteenth-century figures such as Dorothea Dix and Mary Todd Lincoln. Still others have considered her role in the history of law, psychiatry and marriage and divorce. Most recently, Linda Carlisle published a biography of her life that gives more attention to less studied areas such as her religious ideas and political ideals as well as her influence on the psychiatric profession. For an exhaustive list of studies on Packard see Linda Carlisle, *Elizabeth Packard: A Noble Fight* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 12-14.

[326] Harriet Jacobs wrote and sent letters from the attic to deceive her master into believing she was in the North, in hopes that her master would sell her children to their father, Mr. Sands. Jean Fagan Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs: A Life* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2004), 56-7. Packard, too, wrote and sent letters secretly to obtain her freedom from confinement in the asylum. Wood explains that Packard's narrative also revised the familiar trope in sentimental fiction, that is, men writing, signing, and sending letters, which corresponded with their control over women's bodies. *The Writing on the Wall*, 31.

[327] Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, 14, 27, 30, 36.

[328] Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, 35.

the experiences of white women.[329] While white women's experiences provide some insight into the function of gender in asylums, they do not speak to issues of race. As Powell's sentiments show, race was an important category at GLA. Thus, we must consider how race and gender worked together to shape the experiences of black women who could be labeled as both the "colored insane" and "female insane."

Still, we must be cautious when we bring together what seem to be two relevant concepts — "colored insanity" and "female insanity" — to examine freedwomen's stories. Let us consider the latter, for example. Black women could not be lumped with the "female insane." One reason they could not be lumped with the female insane was because gender functioned differently in their lives than it did in white women's lives, to say nothing of the interrelation between gender and insanity.

With regard to gender alone, Harriet Jacobs' narrative helps us understand how it functioned differently in nineteenth-century black women's lives. She contended that formerly enslaved women understood their condition as different from their white female counterparts. For example, Jacobs describes how beauty was understood in black women in relation to white women: "That which commands admiration in the white woman only hastens the degradation of the female slave."[330] Here she shows that black women's beauty opened them up to sexual assault, whereas the same quality would enhance a white woman's respectability. In fact, white women could only be respectable because black women were considered lascivious. Black women's and white women's conditions

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[329] For example, acclaimed scholar of women and madness Phyllis Chesler compares the "woman" to the "slave" with no regard to the American slave system. Thus, her analysis omits the experiences of enslaved women, let alone mad enslaved woman. (Chesler, *Women and Madness* 101).

[330] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 46.

were distinct, yet interdependent.

Likewise, black women's conditions were also related to but different from those of black men. Jacobs makes this point in her discussion of slavery's impact on female slaves: "Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, *they* have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own."[331] Jacobs' comments about the slave system reveal that race was not the only determiner of black women's suffering in slavery. Historian Deborah Gray White confirms that a consideration of either race or gender is inadequate for understanding black women's lives: "For black women, race and sex cannot be separated. We cannot consider who black women are as black people without considering their sex, nor can we consider who they are as women without considering their race."[332] Black women's GLA narratives force us to re-examine binaries along the lines of race, gender and class in discussions about insanity. As the section below shows, we can no more lump the black female experience with the white female or black male experience than we can conflate the experiences of the black female insane with the white female insane or colored male insane.

Race, Gender and Black Women's GLA Narratives

Although white women's narratives do not account for black women's asylum experiences, they do shed light on gendered aspects of the asylum. Examining black women's experiences in relation to three themes in white women's narratives — the

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[331] Ibid., 119.
[332] *Ar'n't I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 6.

distinction between sanity and insanity, the significance of motherhood and family ties and the exposition of asylum life — provides insight about black women's GLA narratives.[333] This section considers these themes in conjunction with Powell's sentiments and Jacobs' theorizations to analyze black women's narratives at GLA.

In regard to the first theme, white women contested the boundaries of sanity and insanity in various ways. Some women, such as Elizabeth Packard and Phebe Davis, made distinctions between what was and was not insane in order to prove their own sanity.[334] Others, such as Lydia Smith and Clarissa Lathrop, blurred the lines between insanity and sanity in their narratives.[335] Women like Tizah Shedd protested their wrongful imprisonment.[336] White women's thoughts on the line between sanity and insanity are of limited usefulness for understanding black women's perspectives on the topic. Harriet Jacobs' commentary on madness and confinement helps us further imagine what GLA black women such as Olivia, Viney and Amanda would think about the in/sanity distinction.

As an anti-psychiatry tract, Jacobs' narrative conveys that formerly enslaved women were likely to concede their insanity because slavery caused lasting mental suffering. Citing Ecclesiastes 7:17 to explain her plight as a slave, Jacobs exclaims:

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[333] These themes are in no way exhaustive, but they cover a fair amount of ground. They are also particularly useful for reading the selected black women's narratives. Other themes not analyzed in these intake records in particular are spiritualism and religion, the law and reform activities/approaches. I hope to consider these themes in subsequent projects.

[334] They depended on the assumption that other inmates were insane to assure outsiders that they were sane.

[335] Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, 18.

[336] Chesler foreword in *Women of the Asylum*, xx.

"'Oppression makes even a wise man mad;' and I was not wise."[337] Jacobs' discussion of madness here reflects her belief that painful experiences of mental instability are caused by the mad social ordering of slavery. As my analysis in Chapter One shows, Jacobs concedes that black women are made mentally unwell by slavery. This leads us to believe that for black women, more important than the fact of their insanity would be its cause. In the absence of their voices, Jacobs' words oppose Powell's assertion that freedom caused the increase in insanity among blacks; she writes: "Everywhere the years bring to all enough of sin and sorrow; but in slavery the very dawn of life is darkened by these shadows."[338] Jacobs' metaphor suggests that the slave system did not protect against sorrow, but rather that it was a breeding ground for insanity.

In addition to holding an alternative perspective on the cause of their insanity, black women at GLA would have been pre-occupied with obtaining the rights and freedoms denied to them in slavery.[339] Adequate health care was paramount to freedpeoples' claims to freedom. Consequently, some GLA black women would have desired the right to insanity, that is, the right to be sick from slavery; and more importantly, the right to humane treatment within both medical institutions and society.[340]

An 1852 article in the *Frederick Douglass' Paper* provides us with a sense of this justice-driven perspective. The article speaks of a colored woman who was by law denied entrance into the Lunatic Asylum of Indianapolis. The case was brought to the

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[337] *ILSG*, 298.
[338] Ibid., 45.
[339] In Georgia and throughout the South, African Americans strove to define and realize freedom in every aspect of their lives, during the Civil War, Reconstruction and beyond. Noralee, *Break Those Chains at Last: African Americans 1860-1880*, eds. Robin Kelley and Earl Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 14, 41-2.
[340] After the Civil War white Southerners made a concerted effort to exclude blacks from institutions such as schools and hospitals. Frankel, *Break Those Chains At Last*, 50.

legislature, and the court ruled that "colored persons had the right of all persons having a legal settlement in the State, to the benefits of the Insane Asylum." Pleased with this decision, the writer remarks: "Certainly, this decision is proper, for a coloredinsane [sic] person can disturb a whole neighborhood just as well as if he or she were white, saying nothing of their common appeals to humanity."[341] The writer concedes the woman's insanity and takes for granted that the mid-nineteenth-century asylum was beneficial for blacks and whites. Thus, the primary issue was equal access to asylum care. A similar reference to how the asylum discriminates against black would-be patients appears in *The Christian Recorder*: "An application was recently made for the admission of a colored woman to the Long View Lunatic Asylum, which was refused on the ground that there was no separate ward for her, although her right to admission was not denied."[342] To be sure, black women's desires for equal access would not necessarily have correlated with their perspectives about white treatment practices. Some black women would have been wary of white doctors, given the history of medical experimentation on black bodies and the use of medicine for white planters' economic interests.[343] In sum, black women's historical realities would have provided them with a range of perspectives on the

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[341] "The Colored Insane," *Frederick Douglass' Paper* April 1, 1852.
[342] "General Intelligence," *The Christian Recorder* June 9, 1866.
[343] Some African Americans respected white medicine over black medical practices. Other African Americans not only distrusted white medicine, but they also developed their own approaches to health care. Sharla Fett, *Working Cures*: *Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), ix-x. Sharla Fett provides an excellent discussion of black healing practices. However, more work needs to be done on black mental health treatment methods. Peter McCandless has some discussion of how even whites looked for mental health treatment from black alternative medicine practitioners including root doctors, conjurers, and herbal specialists. *Moonlight, Magnolias, and Madness: Insanity in South Carolina from the Colonial Period to the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

distinction between in/sanity that white women's narratives simply could not capture.

Black women's concerns about motherhood and family ties would have also differed from those of white women. Some white women embraced the concept of motherhood within the patriarchal family structure to establish their authoritative voice within the public sphere.[344] At the same time, white women subverted the concept because their husbands used the notion of male authority to admit them into the asylum.[345] Wood explains how Elizabeth Packard walked this fine line:

> The institution of middle-class motherhood provides her with a discourse with which she can expand what counts as "domestic." Motherhood is one area of the women's sphere where middle class women were expected to exercise reason and strength of mind, despite the conflicting ideology that described them as incapable of these qualities. The autobiography is in a sense the chronicle of her changing relationship to the ideology of motherhood as she comes to see it as connected to her incarceration.

Packard's use of motherhood as a strategy for gaining a political voice corresponds with her use of the trope of true womanhood to affirm her sanity.[346] Women who embodied true womanhood, like the ideals of motherhood, were considered rational and sane. Women who deviated from the ideals of true womanhood were open to charges of

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[344] The public sphere was seen as the realm of reason, especially with respect to issues of politics and religion. Women were not permitted to engage in these public discourses. Women were relegated to the private sphere, which was located in the home.

[345] Nineteenth-century women writers protested against laws that gave their husbands the right to admit them to the asylum against their will. Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 4.

[346] The ideals of true womanhood included submissiveness, purity, piety and domesticity. For more on true womanhood see Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," in *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Columbus: University of Ohio Press, 1976), 21-41.

insanity.[347] Thus, women like Lydia Smith and Clarissa Lathrop foregrounded their status as middle-class white women to legitimize their narratives.[348] Other narrators showed how confinement rendered them domestically disabled. Domestic disability, Phyllis Chesler contends, referred to women's inability to fulfill gender expectations. For example, Catherine Beecher protested her inability to engage in domestic activities such as cooking, cleaning or sewing.[349] Charlotte Perkins Gilman's semi-autobiographical fiction narrative emphasizes how being labeled as mad separated her from her child.[350] Women's separation from their children and families often made them feel rootless and powerless, as Lydia Smith's and Clarissa Lathrop's narratives show.[351] These women had to reconsider the meaning of family and find new sources of identity. For example, Elizabeth Packard's relationship with her family was replaced by her connections with other asylum inmates and the superintendent.[352] We have seen the various ways white women's narratives engaged issues of motherhood and family. What of black women? What ideas would black women at GLA express in their asylum narratives?

Issues of race, gender and madness are apparent in even the mediated available narratives. From the first line of the GLA patient entry ledgers, we witness how race and gender shape black women's asylum experiences. The ledgers of Olivia, Amanda and

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[347] For example, Theophilus Packard, Elizabeth Packard's husband, claimed that his wife was insane in part because she deviated from the four ideals of true womanhood. Linda Carlisle, *Elizabeth Packard: A Noble Fight* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 30-31, 117.
[348] Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, 17.
[349] Chesler, *Women and Madness*, 68-9.
[350] Ibid.
[351] Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, 17.
[352] Ibid., 46.

Viney all begin with their names, but with no honorifics.[353] White women's ledgers open with either "Mrs.," "Ms." or "Miss." These titles in white women's narratives symbolize their ability to access notions of true womanhood, which could be used to assert their sanity. However, as Harriet Jacobs' narrative shows, formerly enslaved black women were always denied access to the cult of true womanhood. In white women's narratives, one of the cornerstones of true womanhood was good motherhood.

As compared to their white female counterparts, motherhood had a distinct meaning for black women at GLA. Forty-five-year-old Amanda entered GLA on July 12, 1894. She had "six living children [and] two deceased."[354] Two days after Amanda, Olivia entered the hospital.[355] She is listed as twenty-eight years old but there is no reference to her two children, John and Anna, who would have been seventeen and fifteen respectively.[356] The archival records provide us with these facts about their status as mothers, but what would Amanda's and Olivia's asylum narratives say about motherhood? Because Amanda's patient ledger lists her children, we can assume that she may have been asked about whether or not she had children. How would a formerly enslaved mother of eight experience that moment? Olivia may or may not have been asked the question. Indeed, information about the women could have been furnished by

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[353] During slavery, white doctors called black patients by their first names without honorifics. They often continued this practice after emancipation, and at GLA, this practice was standard. Steven Stowe, *Doctoring the South: Southern Physicians and Everyday Medicine in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2004), 266. Olivia, intake ledger; Amanda, intake ledger; Viney, intake ledger. Subsequent references will include patient name and "intake ledger."

[354] Amanda, intake ledger.

[355] Olivia, intake ledger.

[356] Olivia, intake ledger; Ancestry.com, "1880 United States Federal Census about Olivia Wood" accessed 23 June 2014. According to the census of 1880, Wood would be thirty-five, not twenty-eight. Likewise John and Anna were three and one, respectively in 1880.

those who brought them to the hospital.

Nevertheless, the meaning of motherhood for Olivia and Amanda, as black women, would have been shaped by their previous confinement in slavery. Jacobs contends that slavery for black women was synonymous with their inability to be mothers to their children. Indeed, it was one of the most devastating elements of slavery for them. Jacobs' argument suggests that for Amanda and Olivia, the meaning of motherhood would have been deeply connected to their status as freedwomen. Historian Noralee Frankel confirms that this sentiment was prevalent among black women after slavery: "[They] held definite opinions about what freedom meant...it meant being allowed to live with their families without the threat of any of them being sold."[357] Unsurprisingly, after the Civil War freedwomen searched anxiously for their children and other family members who had been torn from them during slavery.[358] Freedmothers not only searched for their children, but they also fought against former slave masters who kept bondschildren as apprentices without compensation.[359]

Jacobs' narrative also reveals that mothers were separated from their children even when they were not sold away because their labor in the fields or homes of whites prevented them from caring for their children. This kind of separation, Jacobs argues, was also psychologically wounding. Jacobs' argument suggests that women like Amanda and Olivia could have understood being separated from their children in these terms as well.

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[357] Frankel, *Break Those Chains At Last*, 42-3, 90, 97-8, 113. See also Hunter, *To 'Joy my Freedom*, 35, 40, 43.
[358] Frankel, *Break Those Chains At Last*, 7-8.
[359] Frankel, *Break Those Chains At Last*, 51-2. Black women appealed to the Freedmen's Bureau to get their children back. For more on the laws that made such "apprenticeships" possible see Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 35-6.; Frankel, *Break Those Chains At Last*, 111.

They, like many black women, likely resisted post-emancipation working conditions that continued the conflict between work and family:

> Besides doing the cooking, washing, sewing, and gardening, freedwomen took charge of caring for their own children. Pregnant and nursing mothers wanted to give up outside work. Mothers sometimes argued with their employers about giving their babies more attention instead of working in the fields.[360]

Freedwomen had to negotiate the demands of labor with their desire to maintain their families. The previous quote also shows how freedwomen's conceptions of motherhood cannot be separated from their past experiences of bondage. Their past experiences created sensitivities about the meaning of motherhood that were, as Jacobs puts it, "peculiarly their own."[361] Neither white women nor black men at GLA would have to contend with this history of denied and constrained motherhood or the lingering pain of those denials and constraints.

Olivia and Amanda were not only mothers, but they also were or had been married. The latter was a widow. Harriet Jacobs' narrative reveals that marriage, like motherhood, had a distinct meaning for formerly enslaved black women. Jacobs recounts that her master was furious that she wanted to marry outside his authority. She contends that the right to marry a partner of one's choosing was essential to freedom. Jacobs shows that formerly enslaved women would have been unsettled by the fact that their marriages

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[360] Frankel, *Break Those Chains At Last,* 89. Also see Hunter, *To 'Joy my Freedom*, 50-62.
[361] Jacobs, *ILSG*, 119.

were controlled by whites and unrecognized by law.[362] Although scant marriage records prevent us from knowing when Olivia and Amanda were married, it is possible that they were like hundreds of bondspeople throughout the South who sought legal marriages after emancipation:

> Emancipation brought legalized marriage to the formerly enslaved couples...African Americans' reasons for wanting to marry after the war varied. For many, marriages symbolized freedom because they no longer needed a master's permission. Legalized marriage also meant that children now belonged to the mother and father and could not be sold.[363]

Beyond the right to legally marry, the political climate of the period complicated marriage among black women. Whether or not they valued marriage, some black widows refused to marry again because doing so would jeopardize their government pensions.[364] As Baptist women, Amanda and Olivia may have been obligated to marry in order to join the church.[365] Thus, marriage was connected to communal participation, which was vital for African American survival after emancipation.

Olivia, Viney and Amanda not only had different set of issues to contend with when it came to motherhood and the insanity/sanity dichotomy, but they also experienced life in the asylum differently than did their white female and black male counterparts.

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[362] Many slaves had long-standing marriages that lasted after emancipation. For more on marriage in black communities before and after slavery see Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, 1750-1925 (New York: Pantheon, 1976), 50; Leslie Schwalm, *A Hard Fight for We*: *Women's Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997) 239-248.
[363] Frankel, *Break Those Chains At Last*, 100.
[364] Ibid., 103.
[365] Olivia, intake ledger; Amanda, intake ledger; Frankel, *Break Those Chains At Last*, 102.

White women's narratives include various descriptions of life within the asylum with respect to issues of classification, labor and health conditions.

White women's gendered labor expectations correlated with their classification as women in the asylum. Their classification as white women in the asylum was determined by medicalized conceptions about white female madness. Throughout the nineteenth century psychiatrists assumed that mental illness among white women was tied to their reproductive systems.[366] White female narratives such as Charlotte Perkins' *The Yellow Wallpaper* reveal how gendered perceptions of mental illness informed white female-specific treatments such as the rest cure.[367] Powell boasted that in the 1890s, treatment at GLA still reflected the moral therapy.[368] Accordingly, he strove to provide "homelike" environments and "careful and systematic employment which reveals that patients' labor at GLA was a part of the treatment plan."[369]

Descriptions about labor figure importantly in white women's narratives. Because patient labor was unpaid and often excessive, many asylum narrators compared their lot to that of slaves.[370] For example, Elizabeth Packard used slavery as a metaphor

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[366] Nancy Tomes, *A Generous Confidence: Thomas Story Kirkbride and the Art of Asylum Keeping, 1840-1883* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 151-61; Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 55-6. For more on nineteenth-century theories about mental illness and women see Jeffery Geller, "Women's Accounts of Psychiatric Illness and Institutionalization," *Hospital and Community Psychiatry* 36 no. 10 (October 1985), 1059-60.

[367] Geller, *Women's Accounts*, 1059. Diana Martin explains that the rest cure had "three core elements: isolation, rest, and feeding, with electrotherapy and massage added to counteract muscle atrophy." The rest cure was almost exclusively used for women. "The Rest Cure Revisited," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 164 no. 5 (May 1, 2007): 737–38.

[368] As previously mentioned, Powell also believed very strongly in scientific approaches to mental health care. Powell, 33.

[369] Ibid., 32.

[370] In his study of nineteenth-century asylums, Benjamin Reiss notes that patients referred to their confinement "as a kind of slavery, where labor was compulsory and

in her writings and speeches to advocate for asylum patients' rights, which encompassed issues of abusive labor.[371] Patients often performed labor practices related to their previous occupations. For example, patients with agricultural experience grew vegetables and other products, which were consumed by the patients at the institution and/or sold.[372] Labor was not only specialized, but it was also gendered. Elaine Showalter describes how women patients in early asylums "did needle-work," as opposed to male patients who "were taught a trade."[373]

White women's classification as female not only affected how they were treated, but also where they were treated. Classifications along sex, class and diagnosis lines determined where patients were housed in the asylum.[374] White women's narrative descriptions of "the dreaded back wards of the asylum" reveal how placement in the asylum corresponded with the quality of care patients received.[375]

Narrators such as Sophie Olsen, Adeline Lunt and Lemira Clarissa Pennell claimed that awful conditions throughout the asylum caused insanity. Patients experienced physical and sexual violence as well as deficiencies in sleep, food and exercise.[376] Overcrowding exacerbated these problems and led to high instances of

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uncompensated, and where patients were subjected to the whims of capricious attendants with no recourse for complaint." *Theaters of Madness*, 62. For more on excessive labor see Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 41.

[371] Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, 27; Reiss, *Theaters of Madness*, 175; Carlisle, *Elizabeth Packard*, 116. Narrators such as Elizabeth Stone and Adriana Brinckle also used images related to slavery such as chains and shackles to depict the brutality of their confinement. Chesler, foreword to *Women of the Asylum*, xiv.

[372] Ibid., 41.

[373] Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 40.

[374] Ibid., 34, 36.

[375] Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, 9.

[376] Chesler, foreword to *Women of the Asylum*, xiv, xxiii; Wood, *The Writing on the Wall*, 8; Geller and Harris, *Women of the Asylum*, 4; Chesler, *Women and Madness*, 62.

sickness and disease.

While black women experienced many of these same conditions, white women's narratives' discussions of the horrors of life in the asylum do not capture many of the raced and gendered features of asylum administration to which Viney, Olivia and Amanda were subjected. The issue of classification, as I previously mentioned, is foremost in black women's narratives. Black female patients are not just listed as female, but also as "colored;" the shorthand for race is the letter "c" above a dash, which is above two dots.[377] Race and gender determined black women's classification at GLA. On the one hand, black women's patient entry ledgers, like those of white women, abound with gendered forms of irregularity in the intake records: "womb disease," "menstrual derangement," "menstrual suppression," "menstrual irregularity," and "uterine disease." These significations reveal that the women were subjected to the reigning ideas about madness and the female reproductive system. Powell, like his contemporaries, believed that women were more susceptible to mental illness because they were inherently more "delicately constituted."[378] On the other hand, their signification as "colored" meant that they were also subjected to Powell's conception that mental illness in blacks was a "penalty" of them being freed from slavery.[379] Black women's classification, like white

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[377] Amanda, intake ledger; Olivia, intake ledger; Viney, intake ledger.

[378] "The Lunatic Asylum: Dr. Powell, the Superintendent, Is in Atlanta with His Annual Statement," *The Atlanta Constitution* (1881-1945), ProQuest Historical Newspapers (495184932).

[379] Powell, "Sketch," 30. Powell still believed in the theory that there was a correlation between the advancement of civilization and the increase of insanity. Thus, part of his explanation for increases in insanity among blacks was simply that they were now more exposed to white society. White society had for a century been paying a price for advanced civilization. Powell also makes this point in 1889. "The Lunatic Asylum." Although it is beyond the scope of this study, black women's reproductive capacity was also under special scrutiny during the era of eugenics. See Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the*

women's, influenced their treatment as well. If Powell promoted domestic forms of labor as treatment for white women, what did a return to a "homelike" work environment mean for formerly enslaved women?

Viney, Olivia and Amanda would have conceptualized labor as treatment differently than their white female and black male counterparts. With few exceptions, white women rarely "worked as domestics either during or after the war," as Tera Hunter notes.[380] Black women's experiences in the asylum trouble white women's use of the trope of slavery. The comparison would also have had different meaning for black women who had previously been enslaved. For formerly enslaved black women, unpaid labor in the asylum recalled exploitative slave labor. Hence, black women in late nineteenth-century Atlanta defined freedom in part as the attainment of control over their labor.[381] They formed labor unions and trade organizations and organized protests to resist white attempts to reestablish a subservient labor pool.[382] Black women domestic workers were critical to late nineteenth-century labor struggles. Their ideas about the significance of labor certainly clashed with Powell's aim to provide "careful and systematic employment, indoors and out, shop and field."[383] Their ideas would be informed by past enslavement. Jacobs argues that excessive labor during slavery, which kept mothers away from their children, had a devastating psychological impact on black

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Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty (New York: Vintage, 1997); Harriet Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Harlem Moon, 2006).

[380] Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 17.

[381] Frankel, *Break Those Chains At Last*, 42.

[382] Ibid.,, 7-8; Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 27-8.

[383] Powell, "Sketch," 32.

women.[384] In Jacobs' formulation, Powell's use of labor as a "means to divert and lead the mind into normal channels," either in the kitchen or the field, would have been oppressive, not curative, for Viney, Amanda and Olivia.[385]

Like white women, black women's classification influenced both how they were treated and where they were treated. Superintendent Powell confirms that patients were segregated in "associated dormitories" according to race and diagnosis as well as gender at GLA.[386] Thus, the women's classification meant that they were not housed with whites, male or female. They were housed in separate wards, but not buildings, from black men. Because all three women were labeled as "lunatics," they would have been in the main ward rather than in those dedicated to the "convalescent," "feeble-minded," "epileptic" or "inebriate."[387] Although Powell believed it was important to separate patients with these "acute" and "chronic" illnesses, he contended that separation along racial lines was more critical: "The further segregation of the colored insane will, in time, no doubt become a more important problem."[388] Powell's concerns about segregation suggest that race was

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[384] After emancipation, African American women made strategic choices about the kind of labor they would perform. Not only did they want to receive fair wages, but they also wanted to perform work that did not take them away from their families. Middle-aged black women often chose to be cooks because it allowed them the flexibility to spend time with their children. Tera Hunter argues that laundry work was more attractive because it allowed women to maintain familial and communal connections. *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 50-65.

[385] Powell, 32. Many black women performed agricultural labor after emancipation. However, in late nineteenth-century Atlanta, African American women worked predominantly in the domestic sphere as housemaids, child-nurses and laundresses. They often did field and domestic labor. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 21, 50-51; Frankel, *Break Those Chains At Last*, 14-15, 82.

[386] Powell, "Sketch," 32.

[387] Amanda, intake ledger; Olivia, intake ledger; Viney, intake ledger; Powell, "Sketch," 32. Powell does not indicate whether the buildings reserved for severe illnesses were segregated. It is likely they were segregated at least by ward.

[388] Powell, "Sketch," 33.

integral to the structure of the asylum as an institution and that it shaped social relations.

Segregation in the asylum reinscribed longstanding cultural hierarchies. Powell believed segregating patients along racial lines was good for blacks and whites. In his presidential speech, he notes that it was the "unanimous...opinion" among Southern practitioners that "the separation of white and colored patients is to the advantage of both races."[389] White supremacist beliefs undergirded racial segregation in the South. The vast majority of whites did not question what they regarded as custom and natural in every facet of society in the region.

As a white Southerner, Powell understood both the dangers of disrupting cultural mores and the imperative of maintaining them. He does not indicate interracial conflicts at GLA. However, racial violence occurred in many hospitals in spite of attempts to segregate patients, many of whom had deeply entrenched prejudices.[390] For example, GLA patient Mrs. Sallie M. of Bibb County, Georgia, was reported as "disposed to be violent toward negroes."[391] Seventy-four-year-old Mary B. "fear[ed] negroes [would] kill her."[392] Mary B. was received in the hospital on June 19, 1879. She had only been in Georgia for five years (a native of Ireland, she had lived in Scotland for forty-nine years), but she quickly became accustomed to the racial tensions of the South. Her case record presents the classic narrative of ethnic white immigrants taking on the baggage of American race conceptions.[393]

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[389] Ibid., 29.
[390] Grob, *The Mad Among Us*, 89-90.
[391] Sallie M., intake ledger, 28 June 1879, Collection 350, Box 19, vol. 5, Central State Hospital Admissions Registers, 1878-1881, Georgia Archives.
[392] Ibid.
[393] See Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 2008); *Theodore W. Allen, The Invention of the White Race, Volume 1: Racial Oppression and*

Sallie's and Mary's racial views illuminate how asylum life for Olivia, Amanda and Viney was potentially as hostile as Southern culture outside the asylum walls.[394] This parallel would have likely applied when it came to physical and sexual abuse. Harriet Jacobs contends that unlike white women, black women's experiences of sexual abuse proliferated because they were unprotected by law. In addition, she argues that white men used the stereotype that black women were inherently lascivious to justify sexual assault. After emancipation, black women continued to experience rape and sexual and physical assault based on these slavery-derived cultural conceptions.[395]

Black women's raced and gendered experiences at GLA not only mirrored the broader social and cultural climate, but they also reflected the deplorable material realities of African American life outside the hospital. Whether in separate asylums or separate wards, segregation resulted in substandard accommodations for black patients from food provisions to housing.[396] In 1897, shortly after Viney, Amanda and Olivia arrived, the dilapidated Negro building at GLA burned down due to the negligence of a hospital worker.[397] This incident was horrific because the African American patients were

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Social Control (New York: Verso, 2012) and *The Invention of the White Race, Volume 2: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* (New York: Verso, 2014);
[393]Nell Irvin Painter (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011). Mary B., intake ledger, 19 June 1879, Collection 350, Box 19, vol. 5, Central State Hospital Admissions Registers, 1878-1881, Georgia Archives.
[394] After emancipation, whites were hostile, bitter and violent towards African Americans in the form of lynchings, forced labor, rapes, race riots and vagrancy laws, among other atrocities. Frankel, *Break Those Chains At Last*, 8; Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 17-18.
[395] Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 17-19, 34.
[396] North Carolina and Virginia had separate wards for African Americans starting in 1880 and 1885, respectively. Alabama had a separate hospital for the colored insane under the same management as the original hospital for white patients. Hurd, *The Institutional Care*, vol. 2, 377-8. For commentary on the state of black wards/hospitals see McCandless, *Moonlight, Magnolias, and Madness*, 284.
[397] Cranford, *Damnation*, 65.

left with no shelter; the patients lived in tunnels with makeshift beds made from mattresses and blankets.[398] Overcrowding amongst the white population would have made it difficult to find large quantities of these materials, certainly not enough for six hundred persons. Those who were sick were subjected to unsanitary conditions that undoubtedly worsened their situation. Even when the new building was restored, overcrowding posed health risks.

Overcrowding led to higher death rates among black patients.[399] Black women's narratives at GLA present evidence of poor health conditions. According to the intake ledger, Olivia "[ate] and [slept] well" and "[did] not use tobacco."[400] Although seemingly in good health, twenty-eight-year-old Olivia died of "exhaustion" two years after she entered the hospital.[401] Viney died of dropsy seven years after she arrived.[402] These illnesses were less common than consumption, the major cause of death among black patients at GLA.[403] Powell also notes that tuberculosis affected black women at higher rates.[404] He resolved that "isolation of tuberculosis cases is the most rational method at [his] command."[405] Powell's statement suggests that the treatment options available for

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[398] Ibid.
[399] McCandless, *Moonlight, Magnolias, and Madness*, 283-4.
[400] Olivia, intake ledger.
[401] Exhaustion is the nineteenth-century term for what we now know as chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS). CFS is characterized by extreme fatigue, memory or concentration difficulties, headaches and sore muscles and joints.
[402] Dropsy is the nineteenth-century term for what we now know as edema. Edema is a disease in which there is excess fluid in the tissues and cavities of the body.
[403] Powell, "Sketch," 30. Consumption was another name for tuberculosis.
[404] Ibid.
[405] Ibid., 30. The higher number of African American deaths from consumption also reflects a history of medical treatment in which black patients were kept away from whites in order to prevent the spread of disease and contamination into the white community. See Marion M. Torchia. "The Tuberculosis Movement and the Race Question, 1890-1950," *Bull. Hist. Med*. 49.2 (1975): 152-68.

severely ill black patients were limited, which diminished their chances for survival. While isolation was the main treatment method for all tuberculosis patients, close quarters increased the chances of an outbreak. Black patient buildings were always overcrowded. There was limited space to isolate black tuberculosis patients outside the colored building, which increased the spread of disease among the black population.

The views of Viney, Amanda and Olivia about the in/sanity distinction, motherhood and family ties, and asylum life would have been connected to their past experiences of enslavement. As Harriet Jacobs shows, they could have entered the asylum with psychic wounds from slavery. The conditions of the asylum – including sexual and physical abuse, separation from children and families, excessive labor and white hostility – echoed the conditions of slavery. Jacobs contends that confinement under these conditions creates mental suffering among black women. Confinement in the asylum likely exacerbated past wounds and created additional forms of mental distress. Finally, and unsurprisingly, treatment of black women at GLA did not take into account a history of slavery and brutalization.

In conclusion, even without Olivia, Viney, Amanda, Alice and Jane's first-person asylum narratives, we can imagine the issues they faced. Their reconstructed narratives reveal that the practice of psychiatry with respect to black women was linked to the politics of race and gender in the post-emancipation South. Their stories powerfully illuminate the fact that asylums like GLA served as a continuation of the problems associated with confinement, rather than as a solution to the challenges posed by emancipation.

Conclusion

This dissertation uncovers how two prototypical American institutions of confinement in the nineteenth century — slavery and asylums — are interrelated. Black women's narratives illuminate how slavery and asylums are connected through discourses of madness and confinement that begin in slavery and reverberate through the end of the nineteenth century. Using Harriet Jacobs' slave narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: *Written by Herself* along with the reconstructed narratives of black women such as Olivia, Amanda, Viney, Alice and Jane, who were confined in Georgia's state mental hospital between 1881-1895, this project makes several arguments about madness and confinement.

First, popular understandings of madness and confinement among African Americans in the nineteenth century were connected to national debates about race and insanity. Psychiatrists and slave owners alike relied upon pro-slavery psychiatric thought to explain the cause of madness among enslaved blacks. Pro-slavery psychiatric thought is identified by its two primary assumptions: (1) slavery offered mental health benefits for blacks and (2) the maintenance of pre-emancipation race relations was ideal for the mental health of blacks after slavery ended. As an anti-slavery psychiatry text, Harriet Jacobs' *ILSG* counters the claims of pro-slavery thinkers. African American anti-slavery psychiatry is defined as a motif or theoretical current in literature and cultural productions by African Americans that, in the service of abolition and later the attainment of racial equality, implicitly or explicitly engages the reigning ideas and assumptions of American psychiatry. Jacobs uses madness as a metaphor for the social ordering of slavery to reveal how confinement creates mental suffering among both free and enslaved

blacks in the form of paranoia, anxiety, sorrow and anguish.

Second, this dissertation pushes conversations about slavery and insanity beyond the singular emphasis on race to untangle black women's particular experiences of mental suffering. Jacobs offers the most sophisticated analysis of black women's experiences of psychic wounding during slavery. Jacobs makes the case that slavery uniquely affected the minds of black women through descriptions of severed family ties, suicide attempts, death wishes, sexual and physical abuse and her seven-year concealment in her grandmother's garret. Jacobs also contends that slavery created lasting psychic wounds among enslaved women.

Finally, pre-emancipation discourses on madness and confinement continued to impact formerly enslaved black women who were sent to Georgia Lunatic Asylum. The reconstructed narratives of black women at GLA show that the post-slavery criteria for African American female in/sanity were based on the interwoven social discourses of gender, race and mental illness. American psychiatry made these black women mad in the sense of both constructing disorder according to prevailing notions of black femininity and inflicting real psychological harm at Georgia Lunatic Asylum. Their stories are mediated through the language (and perspectives) of doctors, judges, police officers, journalists, census-takers and family members; we do not hear the women's voices. Harriet Jacobs offers a theoretical lens through which we can read the silences in their narratives. Her insights reveal that slavery-derived cultural parameters of acceptable black womanhood influenced how the GLA women's sanity was determined.

Limitations and Possibilities

This dissertation examines insanity, race and gender in antebellum and postbellum America; however, the story of madness and blackness is much older.[406] During the Middle Passage Africans starved themselves and committed suicide.[407] Africans committed these acts for a number of reasons, including their adherence to cultural and spiritual/religious beliefs (African and Christian) and resistance to enslavement. They also committed these acts as a normal response to extreme cultural, physical and psychological devastation. They escaped from the physical and emotional weight of enslavement. These references to suicide appeared both in the narratives of slaves and those of ex-slaves after emancipation. Other Africans committed suicide to resist enslavement. These individuals preferred to die rather than live as slaves. A deeper examination of these experiences would provide rich insight into the complexity of madness in African American history and life.

Slavers also had financial interest in madness among enslaved Africans. They purchased insurance policies on their human cargo because many captured Africans could not, or chose not to, survive the dreadful trans-Atlantic voyage. Insurers covered "natural death" because they understood it to be a normal occurrence. Natural death occurred with the onset of disease, sickness or "when the captive destroy[ed] himself

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[406] Sander Gilman writes about issues of madness that pre-date the nineteenth century. See his chapter "On the Nexus of Blackness and Madness" in *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell Press, 1985), 131-149. Also see *Seeing the Insane* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

[407] See Terri Snyder, "Suicide, Slavery, and Memory in North America," *Journal of American History* 97 no.1 (2010): 39-62.

though despair, which often happen[ed].”[408] Insurance laws suggest that issues of madness and insanity were inscribed into the capitalistic practices that expanded and maintained the slave trade.

More research also needs to be done on black women’s experiences and perspectives in American asylums more broadly. This project highlighted the perspectives of psychiatrists on the care of slaves in asylums, but it did not discuss black women’s experiences as slaves within those asylums. Although most asylums excluded African Americans, a few colonial and antebellum asylums accepted them in small numbers. Histories of American asylums privilege the perspectives of superintendents, who theorized about the care of the colored insane. A number of studies have included the voices of inmates, but those voices have been predominately white.

While the project considered the perspectives of the black female insane after slavery, it focused on a small sample of postbellum black women’s experiences in a single asylum. The project can be widened beyond its present scope through the inclusion of more black women’s stories at a variety of asylums. I suspect that the pattern that emerged in this dissertation around the major concerns of black women — the severance of family ties, physical and sexual abuse and stereotypes of black femininity — would be pervasive.

The limitations of this study also open up new avenues for scholarly inquiry. One of the many possibilities for future studies is an expansion of the historical time frame.

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[408] Quoted in Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 147-8. For a discussion of slavery and insurance see Michael Ralph, “‘Life…in the midst of death’: Notes on the relationship between slave insurance, life insurance and disability,” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 32 no. 3 (2012). http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/3267/3100.

The story of madness in African American life begins long before Jacobs pens her slave narrative. For reasons previously mentioned, it would be fruitful to analyze earlier periods for more complicated cultural narratives. Indeed, we cannot understand black women's experiences with madness at any point in American history without considering how it is informed by both historic and period-specific social, political, physical, cultural and psychological confinement.

In the nineteenth century, virtually all slave narratives represent mental suffering. I have conducted a preliminary analysis on a wide variety of slave narratives that represent madness including *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave. Written by Himself* (1825), *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup* (1853), *Slave Life in Georgia: A Narrative of the Life, Sufferings, and Escape of John Brown: A Fugitive Slave, Now in England* (1854), *Memoir of Old Elizabeth, a Coloured Woman* (1863), *A True Tale of Slavery* (1861) and *The Fugitive Blacksmith; or, Events in the History of James W. C. Pennington* (1849). Future studies would illuminate related issues beyond the scope of this dissertation such as manhood and madness as well as madness among whites under the system of slavery.

For instance, in his narrative, John Jacobs writes in detail about his father's despair about both his own enslavement and his inability to protect his wife and children from the brutality of the institution. He attributes his father's death to bodily and mental illness: "My father, who had an intensely acute feeling of the wrongs of slavery, sank into a state of mental dejection, which, combined with bodily illness, occasioned his death

when I was eleven years of age."[409] Male slaves' conceptions of manhood shaped how and why they experienced mental suffering.

James Pennington includes descriptions of the impact of enslavement on the mental well-being of whites in his narrative. He contends: "There is no one feature of slavery to which the mind recurs with more gloomy impressions, than to its disastrous influence upon the families of the masters, physically, pecuniarily, and mentally."[410] Pennington recognizes the physical and mental ways slavery disturbs individuals. In his narrative, this disturbance occurs among both slaves and masters.

In future studies on slave narratives, I can also give more attention to how narrators represent African American anti-slavery psychiatry, and how it figured in national abolitionist debates. Studies have considered the use of medical language in abolitionist and anti-racist discourses as well as the language of physical disability.[411] However, there is no evidence that pro-slavery psychiatrists were reading African American anti-psychiatry texts like *ILSG*. In future projects, I hope to explore how the medical language of abolitionist discourses overlapped with the language of psychiatry.

Madness also figures prominently in twentieth- and twenty-first century African

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[409] John Jacobs, *A True Tale of Slavery*, Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina, UNC Chapel Hill, accessed August 27th, 2014, http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/jjacobs/jjacobs.html, 86.

[410] J. W. C. Pennington, *The Fugitive Blacksmith; or, Events in the History of James W. C. Pennington, Pastor of a Presbyterian Church, New York, Formerly a Slave in the State of Maryland, United States*, Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina, UNC Chapel Hill, accessed August 27th, 2014, http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/penning49/penning49.html, 69.

[411] See Mary Titus, "'This poisonous system': Social ills, Bodily ills and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl in *Harriet Jacobs and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: New Critical Essays*, eds. Rafia Zafar and Deborah Garfield (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 199-200; Dea Boster, *African American Slavery and Disability: Bodies, Property, and Power in the Antebellum South*, 1800-1860 (New York: Routledge, 2013).

American literature in relation to issues of community, love, home, family, war and drug and alcohol abuse, to name a few. Most notably, Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin and Toni Morrison all represent madness explicitly in their literary works. There also is much to be done in terms of neo-slave narratives that represent the lasting impact of psychological wounding from slavery. The most notable of these works are Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Gayl Jones' *Corregidora*, and Octavia Butler's *Kindred*. These texts grapple with the legacy of the painful psychological ramifications of enslavement for black women. Many of the issues that are raised in this dissertation continue to resurface as critical sites for examining the construction of black womanhood in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For example, these authors depict the ways in which issues connected to sexual abuse and motherhood impact the mental well-being of their protagonists. These texts demonstrate how black women negotiate and survive despite historical and personal trauma long after the end of slavery.

Contemporary Issues

This dissertation is not only useful for its potential for generating new scholarship; it is also useful for understanding contemporary issues and provides a lens for reading present-day reports about African Americans who are labeled as mentally ill. In 2014, for example, there were several high profile cases in the news. In Washington, D.C., thirty-four-year-old Miriam Carey, an unarmed black mother, was fatally shot five times from behind in front of her one-year-old daughter. Carey was attempting to drive onto the lawn of the White House because she believed she had an urgent message for the president. None of the news reports about Carey's case acknowledged, let alone

examined, the ways in which perceptions of black womanhood and psychology shape police encounters.

Issues of madness abound in contemporary popular culture. Madness and confinement are salient themes in hip-hop lyrics. For example, Jay-Z and Kanye West's song "Niggas in Paris" from their 2011 album "Watch the Throne" was at the top of the hip-hop music charts for several months in 2011. The song was extremely popular; it not only sold three million digital units, but it also won Best Rap Performance and Best Rap Song at the fifty-fifth Grammy Awards. The song's popular refrain, "That shit cray," reflects the way in which discourses around craziness or insanity make their way into popular culture. The song also highlights African American artists' articulations on the meaning of "craziness." For example, one of Jay-Z's lines, "Psycho, I'm liable to go Michael / Take your pick, Jackson, Tyson, Jordan, Game 6," indicates three meanings for "psychosis." The reference to Michael Jordan suggests that craziness can stand in for extreme ability or talent. The other two figures, Jackson and Tyson, also were known for their exceptional talent. But unlike Jordan, Jackson and Tyson were suspected to be mentally ill. Although I cannot fully unpack this construction of madness here, pointing to it opens up a broader exploration of how the language of psychiatry and psychology appeals to artists (and consumers).

Madness does not just appear in hip-hop through lyrics, it also shows up as a part of the individual personal lives of artists. Rappers and R&B singers such as Gucci Mane, Chris Brown, Danny Brown and DMX, among others, have been vocal in the media and in their music about their mental health struggles. Other African American celebrities have also participated in the conversation around mental health, such as comedian Dave

Chappelle, who vehemently rebutted widespread and incessant charges that he was insane for refusing a multimillion-dollar television contract, abruptly ending his successful show and allegedly fleeing to Africa.

Issues of madness in the black community also appear in popular films. For example, *Twelve Years a Slave* (2013) and *For Colored Girls* (2010) represent madness among black women. The former includes a heart-wrenching scene of an enslaved mother who was inconsolable because her children were sold away from her. *For Colored Girls* features several scenes of mental suffering amongst black women related to physical and sexual violence. Representations of madness and confinement in these films demonstrate that the issues explored in this dissertation are a part of the African American experience.

Furthermore, representations of madness and confinement in popular culture exist alongside serious health concerns. Mental illness is a salient issue among black people, and black women in particular. Issues of madness and confinement appear in discussions of the contemporary mental health crisis. According to statistics from the American Association of Suicidology, suicide is the third-leading cause of death for African Americans between the ages of 15-24. This high prevalence of suicide is linked to mental illness, particularly in the form of depression. Despite such prevalence, the topic of mental illness within black communities has been insufficiently examined, particularly for black women, who are more likely to attempt suicide than their male counterparts. Medicine traditionally treats the individual and not the social circumstances that cause or contribute to mental illness.

This dissertation not only helps us to begin to unpack specific social

circumstances surrounding mental illness in African American communities, but it also illuminates African American viewpoints. These viewpoints do not only appear in cultural productions; they also appear within everyday life. I encountered a viewpoint on mental illness at a graduation party for a student who had recently earned her Ph.D. at Emory University. Her mother began to reflect upon the various professional choices of the women in their family. She stated that a visionary who lived on their street named "Black Mammy" had prophesied that she and her daughter would be teachers and her sisters would be judges. Black Mammy's predictions had come true.

On another occasion, my friend's mother told me more about Black Mammy. Black Mammy had a rebellious spirit. One day she protested against a white police officer's brutality by urinating on the sidewalk in front of him. Shortly after the incident, Black Mammy was sent to the Milledgeville State Hospital (the name of GLA in the mid-1950s). My friend's mother urged me to let her know if I found any information about Black Mammy in my research. Black Mammy's story reminded me of the sacred nature of the GLA records. They were not just figures, names and numbers on a page; they were people with lives full of meaning. Their lives were essential to the social fabric of the communities from which they came.

Challenges and Discoveries

In the process of answering the driving question of this dissertation — what were black women's experiences with madness and confinement in the nineteenth century? — I was surprised by a number of issues that emerged. First, this project taught me the power of interdisciplinarity. Some of the most original contributions of this work came

from bringing my expertise in slavery studies and slave narratives to asylum studies and asylum narratives. Studies of asylums and mental illness provided language and conceptual parameters for understanding mental suffering in slave narratives. The language of madness and confinement allowed me to talk about mental suffering and slavery without pathologizing African Americans.

I was struck by the extent to which studies about race, madness and slavery excluded the experiences and voices of black women. In addition, I discovered complete gaps in studies on nineteenth-century women and madness. The women in these studies were, without exception, white. Accordingly, the major arguments about asylum narratives did not account for black women's unique experiences. Thus, black women's experiences were submerged on many fronts. This erasure of black women in academic research compounded the difficulty of discovering their experiences, but made the search even more important.

In the same vein, I did not anticipate how much I would have to rely on the writings of white slavers, asylum administrators and white women. Because black women's stories were so heavily mediated and their records so scant, I had the difficult task of restoring their voices in creative and imaginative ways. The nuances that emerged in my examination of black women's experiences illuminate the glaring generalizations in scholarship about race and madness, insanity and slavery and asylums. I gained a sense of how much more work needs to be done to establish a more fully developed history of these topics. In future research I will broaden my primary sources to include Georgia Supreme Court cases, which will provide more narrative details and points of view.

Studies on Harriet Jacobs' slave narrative made numerous nods to the

psychological components of confinement. However, there was no sustained analysis of psychic wounding even though it figures so importantly in Jacobs' tale. Writing about mental suffering in Harriet Jacobs' narrative showed me how pervasive madness is in African American history, culture and life. The ways in which it emerged show that we must look for madness in African American life in different ways than we do in broader society. I discovered that it was not that African Americans were not talking about madness, but that madness had a particular meaning for them, rooted in their unique American experiences. My exploration of madness taught me that African Americans' conceptions about madness are fundamental to their experiences in the United States, and, further, that a lack of serious attention to madness elides issues that are at the heart of their cultural worldviews.

Beyond African American experiences, madness and confinement are longstanding themes in the human experience. A fuller examination of these issues will help us begin to understand how madness and confinement function and have functioned in American society throughout history. Understanding the history of madness and confinement unable us to see how black women's responses to social and cultural confinement does not make them more "crazy" than any other group; in fact, it makes them equally human.

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