Medicating slavery: Motherhood, health care, and cultural practices in the African diaspora

Ywone Edwards-Ingram

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UMI®
MEDICATING SLAVERY: MOTHERHOOD, HEALTH CARE, AND CULTURAL PRACTICES IN THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the American Studies Program

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by

Ywone Edwards-Ingram

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APPROVAL SHEET

This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Ywone Edwards-Ingram

Approved by the Committee, September 2004

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To Family, Friends, and Well-wishers
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ABSTRACT

A sophisticated exploration of the intricacies of motherhood and health care practices of people of African descent, especially the enslaved population of Virginia, can shed light on their notions of a well-lived life and the factors preventing or contributing to these principles. I situate my dissertation within this ideal as I examine how the health and well-being of enslaved people were linked to broader issues of economic exploitation, domination, resistance, accommodation, and cultural interactions. Historical and archaeological studies have shown that the living and working conditions of enslaved people were detrimental to their health. Building on these findings, I explore how aware were blacks of these impediments to their well-being and the pursuit of a wholesome life, and what means these populations employed to change the negative tangibles and intangibles of slave societies. These questions are best studied from a multi-disciplinary perspective and by using a variety of evidence.

Therefore, I collate and wed diverse selections of documentary evidence — a complex assortment of texts covering history, oral tradition, and narratives — with material cultural evidence, mainly from archaeological excavations and historic landscapes, to show the complex web of objects, beliefs, and practices that constituted this arena of well-being and autonomy. I discuss how issues of well-being intertwined with gender and race relations and how these were played out in many acts of motherhood and child care, struggles over foods and health care, other verbal and physical fights, and how the landscape and objects were implicated in social relations. I focus on Virginia but use examples from other slave societies for comparative purposes.

Blacks juxtaposed their cultural ways with those of whites and, at times, found the latter below blacks' standards for a wholesome life. Therefore, while being open-minded toward some practices and beliefs from whites, blacks continued to maintain separate activities. This dissertation presents and interprets the ideals and practices of enslaved blacks and their descendants and shows how they created and reinforced their identity as a people capable of caring not only for themselves, but for whites as well.
MEDICATING SLAVERY:
MOTHERHOOD, HEALTH CARE
AND CULTURAL PRACTICES IN THE
AFRICAN DIASPORA
Introduction

The Scenario

Instead of order, neatness, and ingenuity which might convert even these miserable hovels into tolerable residences, there was careless, reckless, filthy indolence. Firewood and shavings lay littered about the floors, while the half-naked children were cowering round two of three smouldering cinders. The moss with which the chinks and crannies of their ill-protecting dwellings might have been stuffed was trailing in dirt and dust about the ground, while the back door of the huts, opening upon a most unsightly ditch, was left wide open for the fowls and ducks, which they are allowed to raise, to travel in and out, increasing the filth of the cabin by what they brought and left in every direction. In the midst of the floor, or squatting round the cold hearth would be four or five little children from four to ten years old, the latter all with babies in their arms, the care of the infants being taken from the mothers (who are driven afield as soon as they recover from child labor), and devolved upon these poor little nurses, as they are called, whose business it is to watch the infant, and carry it to its mother whenever it may require nourishment. To these hardly human little beings I addressed my remonstrances about the filth, cold, and unnecessary wretchedness of their room, biding the elder boys and girls kindle up the fire, sweep the floor, and expel the poultry. For a long time my very words seemed unintelligible to them, till, when I began to sweep and make up the fire, etc., they first fell to laughing, and then imitating me. The incrustations of dirt on their hands, feet, and faces were my next object of attack, and the stupid negro practice of keeping the babies with their feet bare, and their heads, already well capped by nature with their woolly hair, wrapped in half a dozen hot, filthy coverings.\[Blacks are\] as incapable as children of taking care of themselves, and are extinguished promptly wherever industry is necessary for raising young. In the mean time they are pests in a society by their idleness, and the depredations to which this leads them.


---Thomas Jefferson, 1814 (Peterson 1984:1345)
Frances Anne Kemble encountered the “peculiarities” of slavery between 1838 and 1839 on, her husband, Pierce Butler’s plantation in Georgia. She was confronted with social and cultural practices as well as their material correlates. More important, she met a “difference” that encompassed people as well as things. Her narrative presents a microcosm of slave society and paints a vivid picture of the living and social conditions of the enslaved. Similar glimpses of slavery reveal an enormous amount of information about the world whites and blacks inhabited. What do we need to know to understand this encounter? Is this a case of one person instructing others about hygiene? What notions of health and well-being inspired this scene? What is the complex of beliefs and social practices we need to explore to understand this narrative? Does this vignette resonate with the above quote from Thomas Jefferson, a Virginian enslaver and planter, about the inability of black people to take care of their own?

This dissertation explores the complex social, cultural, and health care practices of enslaved people. I am particularly interested in beliefs and assumptions about what constituted good health, a sound environment, and ideals about the individual and the community that inspired blacks in activities to promote well-being. How did these factors and beliefs help to shape the nature of social interactions in motherhood and other health practices? Why were certain practices of the white population regarded as complementary, while others were seen as conflicting? A careful reading and interpretation of documents and the material world gives good insights into blacks’ conceptualizations of health and paths to well-being and how these were more often sources of conflicts rather than factors that contributed to stability and development in a slave society.
I contend that slavery was as an encompassing illness that blacks saw as imperative to medicate. A slave-based society needed workers and enslaved people were the producers of wealth as well as valuable property themselves. In fact, different slave societies in the Americas exploited Africans and their descendants mainly to realize the ideal of a good life held by people of European descent. From the enslaver’s point of view, the enslaved person’s health and procreation were important to the perpetuation of the society. Blacks understood the value of their offspring and how slavery was damaging to their health and well-being and took steps to ameliorate and change adverse conditions. My aim is to show the interconnectedness of many disparate practices that can be seen as contributing to or impeding blacks' perceptions of a wholesome life.

I use a multi-disciplinary approach to address how principles of health care and motherhood practices were translated into notions of a well-lived life for I have not found a theory or a method in history, ethnography, or archaeology that can adequately accommodate this inquiry. From this perspective, I draw information and theories from all the above disciplinary lines to look at a wide range of materials and situations to explore and understand African-descended people's diverse efforts to ensure health and well-being. This was not a static repertoire of medicinal practices; it was subject to constant negotiation and used various resources.

I pay strong attention to motherhood, because it is a primary arena where blacks and whites interacted and therefore where expectations, values, and beliefs had greater potential to clash (Edwards-Ingram 2001b:34-53). My study explores issues including breastfeeding, food supplies, housing, mortuary
practices, and plant use. Because of the emphasis on motherhood and child caring, I spend more time discussing the activities of women than men.

Motherhood affected enslaved women’s abilities to work and to care for themselves and their families, so I postulate a more active role for them as they were oppressed on so many levels. I contend that, both in times of health and illness, these women manipulated their identities as laborers, entrepreneurs, medicinal specialists, and nurturers to delineate spaces of autonomy in social relationships and in places like slave quarters, in agricultural fields, and within residences of their enslavers. By exploring how enslaved women provided for the physical and spiritual needs of their families and communities, I am able to detail how their beliefs and practices impacted their lifeways.

I show examples of these women’s survival strategies, their rebellious activities, and their more clandestine protests against the slavery system which exploited them as laborers and child-bearers and subjected them to many other abuses. I also discuss how maternity practices empowered black women. Therefore, my work falls within the ambit of “the fighting histories,” studies that have explored black women's activism and subversive roles in confronting injustices in the African Diaspora (Mair 1986; Yellin 1987; Simmonds 1987; Morrison 1987; Braxton 1989; Bush 1996; King 1996). My study will help to tell the story of lesser known women and provide reflections about others whose activities and struggles cannot be known.

The preponderance of materials for this study is from Virginia. Over the years, researchers from different disciplines, especially history and archaeology, have compiled and created a great reservoir of primary and secondary resources.
I draw too from similar sources from other areas on the North American mainland and colonies in the Caribbean. Virginia regularly had a large number of blacks who interacted daily with whites during slavery and afterward. Many whites who held blacks in bondage considered themselves knowledgeable about health and well-being. Moreover, they interfered immensely in the life of the enslaved population on religious, economic, humanitarian, and other grounds. I give details of these and other practices of slavery including racial discrimination and oppression, and show how enslaved people weathered these storms by drawing strength from shared African connections, the realities of slavery, and their recognition of the importance of family and community.

Whites, especially the elites and those in authority, used both documentary and material culture means, including the built landscape, to convey information about whites' notions of a good life to others in the society. While many blacks could not read the documents of slave societies they, however, could hear the oral versions, and they could read the material culture to understand the white population's perceptions of their own lifeways as well as those of blacks. With this saturation of "messages," it would be interesting to find out to what extent blacks, in a society like Virginia with its history of intense interaction of blacks and whites, engaged in independent or separate health and well-being practices. Were beliefs and practices uniform or different in the African Diaspora? What are the implications for understanding cultural interactions and changes during slavery? These are important issues that this dissertation addresses.
Although drawing upon the previous studies and resources of the wider African Diaspora, I rely heavily on materials relating to southeastern and central Virginia to discuss incidents of caring relationships, evidence of sharing, and the assumption of care-giving responsibilities for victims of various maladies; but especially between mothers and children. Examples are drawn from specific plantations in Virginia; however, the goal is not to provide detailed case studies of these plantations but to use them to study broad practices and conditions that
Figure 2: Map of the Caribbean Region showing Jamaica, the main island that informed the comparative aspects of this work (illustrated by Heather Harvey, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation).

were both local and somewhat similar to other slave societies.

The analysis of Virginia is based mainly on information about enslaved people living on elite whites' plantations or in their homes. Overall, my aim in discussing enslaved people is to offer interpretations that can contribute to a greater understanding of slavery. My goal is to show how a variety of materials and seemingly unconnected objects, issues, and events were important to motherhood, health, and well-being. This is a more holistic, concerted study of blacks' pursuit of health and well-being and their social interactions in Virginia than previous studies.
Scholarly investigations about enslaved people's health, well-being, and medicinal practices in Virginia, both in general and more focused analyses, have tended to concentrate broadly on the nature of diseases and illnesses, preventions and cures, and descriptions of related practices (Blanton 1931:153-177; Savitt 1978, 1989). These sources discuss the activities of formally- and informally-trained medicinal practitioners, including doctors, surgeons, and apothecaries as well as blacks.

Todd Savitt's *Medicine and Slavery: The Diseases and Health Care of Blacks in Antebellum Virginia* (1978), for example, is an indispensable study on the health care of blacks during the latter part of slavery. His broad approach covers diseases and treatments as well as the medicinal practices of both blacks and whites. Savitt examines factors including slave diets and conditions at slave quarters that impacted the health of enslaved people. The ideals, motivations, and activities of planters and other members of plantation management teams are highlighted in Savitt's work. He describes the threefold reason for planters' interest in enslaved workers' health:

Slaves represented a financial investment which required protection; many masters felt a true humanitarian commitment toward their slaves; and whites realized that certain illnesses could easily spread to their own families if not properly treated and contained (Savitt 1978:150).

Savitt notes that some enslavers were ambiguous about their workers' health because it meant economic loss, but were caught in the dilemma of wanting the labor and caring for the laborers. One example of a humanitarian reason Savitt presents, is a reference to a letter George Washington wrote in 1796. Washington advised that, during illnesses, his enslaved people should be well
supplied with medicines and medical care (Savitt 1978:150). Savitt treats black Virginians' medicinal practices as a dual medicinal system and argues that they sought to have some control over their own health and to use their own remedies. At the same time, because they were defined as legal property, they had to allow themselves to be treated by white doctors, planters, and managers. On their own, many blacks sought the care of physicians and medical technicians trained in European and Euro-American traditions, yet, they still relied heavily for treatment and remedies upon themselves.

My work builds on Savitt’s thesis concerning blacks’ efforts to control their own lifeways through medicinal practices. However, I explore the “folk” medicinal tradition in a more comprehensive way; I place more emphasis on understanding connections and parallels with African practices; and use archaeological data, a source that Savitt did not incorporate. This lack is not surprising because, during the 1970s, the archaeological study of African Americans was an infant discipline (Singleton 1991:155). I also present more evidence of blacks’ agency within the specificities of their experiences of enslavement by looking at more ways they sought to improve their conditions and fought against the illness of enslavement.

Shara Fett’s, Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations (2002) also builds on Savitt’s work by concentrating on African-American folkways in healing. She is interested in understanding “the social relations of slave health and healing as they emerged in daily interactions among residents of nineteenth-century southern plantations” (Fett 2002:3) in Virginia, Georgia, and North and South Carolina. Her work explores the different
conceptions of whites and blacks of what constituted illnesses and healing. She discusses enslaved women as healers, conjuring and other healing practices, plants, and power struggles between blacks and whites—themes that are also important to this dissertation and my earlier study, “African American Medicine and the Social Relations of Slavery” (Edwards-Ingram 2001b).

Fett shows how the work of enslaved women healers “enriched the southern plantation economy...and formed a critical part of southern domestic healing that until now has not received its due in the literature on gender and antebellum medicine” (Fett 2002:6). She spends less time, however, in looking at gender relations between white women and enslaved ones. I place more emphasis than Fett on understanding this form of interaction, especially in wet-nursing and other child caring practices. Although she refers to the archaeological study of rituals (Fett 2002:78-80), namely Leland Ferguson’s (1992) research on how colonoware, a coarse earthenware, was probably used in this area (see Chapter Five), she does not go into great detail about evidence from this field.

Fett includes other “physical artifacts of healing practices” including birthing beads and conjure kits, but archaeology and material culture are not her primary data. She uses historical documents, mainly slave narratives, interviews of formerly enslaved people, and medical papers of white medicinal practice (Fett 2002:9). Like Fett, I explore the rich body of historical sources from formerly enslaved people but draw on fewer materials from white medicinal sources. However, I use material culture, especially from archaeology, more extensively to discuss plants, foods, and housing.
I depart from both Savitt and Fett in the way I treat motherhood as a set of relationships among black and white mothers, planters, and babies and show how this led into a wider network of issues relating to health and well-being including landscape and resource management. Furthermore, I address how all these impacted on African Americans' larger goals to realize a well-lived life and to medicate the problem of slavery. In this vein, I focus on verbal confrontations and physical fights, contestations over foods, the symbolic power of words, numbers, things, and places, as well as birth and burial practices.

My diachronic and site-specific approach to Virginia is another way I part company with Savitt and Fett who are mainly interested in shorter time periods. Savitt's work covers the late eighteenth century and continues into the nineteenth century. He presents a generalized coverage by drawing data from several parts of the state. Fett, as mentioned earlier, mainly is interested in the nineteenth century and her references for Virginia are more generalized than those of Savitt.

In my diachronic approach, I use resources from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century and draw site-specific evidence from archaeological studies of mainly three slave quarters. This provides rich, local contexts for my discussion as I connect areas of Virginia with other places in the African Diaspora, but especially the African Americas and allows the study to go back and forth from the past to the present in order to navigate among the archaeological data, oral materials, ethnographic studies, and historical records. My synthetic and multi-disciplinary approach, rooted in the scholarship of the African Diaspora, helps to create an analysis that is sensitive to the experiences of blacks and shows how they established meanings to their lives.
The introductory chapters present methodologies and discuss problems inherent in or prompted by this study. These chapters also review key primary and secondary sources on the definitions of medicine, descriptions of Virginia's slave-based society, particularly the two main groups of people, social hierarchies, and factors that contributed to long- and short-term social interactions in health care and motherhood. More specifically, I focus on the ideology of racism and the paradox of how white Virginians simultaneously defined and treated enslaved people as both persons and property.

Blacks were intimately involved with whites, were relatives, and were also incorporated in child rearing and nursing activities. Designated as property, many enslaved individuals were treated similarly to plantation stock and were fed, sold, and housed like animals. I concentrate on whites' responses to the activities of the enslaved to refute the property status and how enslavers acknowledged, and, at times, inadequately remedied the injustice and ingratitude of enslavement. As numerous examples will show throughout this work, blacks' efforts to establish standards and meanings to their lives challenged legal and social definitions of the practices of slavery.

Later chapters cover material culture comprehensively as I interpret structures, objects, and archaeological plant and seed remains to realize my goal to explore connections between people, their beliefs, and the material world. For example, while I evaluate plants and their products in popular nutritional roles as food and medicine, I take the discussion further to highlight the symbolic level where these materials were considered efficacious in the prevention and cure of illnesses, to control risks, including the potential misfortunes of daily life, and to
evoke and tap spiritual forces to work on the behalf of enslaved people. This type of multi-level analysis is applied throughout the dissertation as I examine various texts, objects, and archeological remains in a discussion of social interaction and health care.

**The Multi-level Approach**

In *Signs of Diaspora/Diaspora of Signs: Literacies, Creolization, and Vernacular Practice in African America*, Grey Gundaker (1998a) uses a multi-level approach to examine exchanges and creations that I have found to be a useful guide for my dissertation work. She draws on the resources of the African Diaspora, particularly the network of cultural continuities and transformations that link the Americas with Europe and Africa (Thompson 1983; Gilroy 1993). Gundaker incorporates information from ethnography, art history, and material culture studies to link varied and disparate aspects of literary, religious, and other socio-cultural conventions to material life in the African Diaspora (Gundaker 1998a).

This material culture analysis has enabled her to illustrate the richness of the aesthetic, philosophical, and social resources of Africans and African-descended people. The similarities as well as the differences within her study population have provided Gundaker with ample justification for amassing data from multiple sources. This is clearly stated when she writes that,

interaction between African, African American, and European-derived practices and knowledge systems also resists unilinear notions of transatlantic continuity — *not* because there are too few connections, although the forms connections take are quite diverse and often convoluted; rather... there is *too much* information on too many levels — and too much more to learn — to expect anything
less than a wide-ranging network of connections and disjunctions between the old and the new (Gundaker 1998a:8).

Many of the philosophies and approaches to the material world in health and well-being practices can be construed as part of the complex process of culture building and change. Of particular interest to my research is the mixing and non-mixing of traditions and new practices in the historical setting of colonial Virginia and other slave societies. The concept of "fluidity" between old and new forms and the network of associations that Gundaker has described in her work provide insights on how this might have operated during slavery.

Studies in ethnography, like Gundaker's work, help to inform about "a deep and profound intimacy between people and the objects that they make and possess" (Moreland 2001:81) The importance of this concept cannot be overstated for my later chapters that deal with understanding artifacts from archaeology and in comparing evidence from the past with present-day societies in Africa and the African Diaspora.

Mechal Sobel (1987:3) found that Virginia in the eighteenth century had a culture with strong African influences. By examining many variables including cosmology, religious activities, naming patterns, and material culture, Sobel argued that blacks and whites shared a world that they created together (Sobel 1987:29-43, 95-99, 119-126, 214-225). In a similar vein, Richard Burton analyzed the cultural responses of Africans and African-descended groups in the West Indies. Using pertinent documents, including traveler accounts, diaries, and public records, Burton demonstrated that cultural change included processes of loss, retention and interpretation, imitation and borrowing, and creation for
members of creole society. His work clearly shows that cultural changes left many African and African-connected practices untouched or barely transformed in Jamaica during slavery (Burton 1997:27). Like Sobel and Burton, I use different sources to argue that African-related practices were evident in different slave societies in spite of the intricate mixing of white and black cultures and the creation of new world cultural forms.

The research of Mary Scrimshaw and Shelia Cosminsky (1991) on a modern-day Guatemalan sugar plantation also uses a network of disparate materials. This work, too, instructs my effort to assess enslaved women's activities in motherhood and childrearing during slavery. Scrimshaw and Cosminsky have impressively studied the interrelations among diets, illnesses, and treatments. While their work was based mainly in anthropology, their focus on the network of factors that affected how foods entered the household and how this affected family health and well-being is a good example of connecting varied factors in a study.

They have emphasized the role of women without ignoring the contributions of men and children. The activities of different members of these women's households and those of their relatives relating to health and food supplies revealed the interrelationships of people in solving problems. These researchers looked at how the production of a cash crop for an international market impacted on the domestic household of the workers in terms of food procurement and consumption. The multiple paths that Guatemalan women took, including gathering greens and fruits, gardening, selling, buying, and crediting in the marketplace, are crucial to an understanding of women's roles.
and how their health affected their work potential and their families. The themes discussed by Scrimshaw and Cosminsky are similar to the ones that this investigation seeks to address in the context of black enslavement, particularly in Virginia.

Another useful model is the on-going study of the African Burial Ground in New York orchestrated by an interdisciplinary team of scholars. The project used a multi-level approach (La Roche 1994; La Roche and Blakey 1997; Perry 1997; Blakey 2001). Information from this site helps to enrich the discussion of health and well-being in this dissertation. In fact, working in the spirit of the approach used by African Burial Ground scholars and others who have taken a similar path, I here tried to create a more sophisticated analysis and understanding of motherhood and healthcare practices of enslaved people. A multi-level approach thus enhances interpretations of objects, plants, structural materials, access to foods, beliefs, and other factors relating to the well-being of the enslaved.

**The Interpretive Approach**

My paradigm is predominantly interpretative as I emphasize the socio-cultural dimensions of health care, motherhood, and medicine. I prioritize both material things as well as texts as I look at them as evidence about the past. I also treat them as more than vestiges of that past for “they were *actively* used in the production and transformation of identities; they were used to create meaning in, and to structure, the routines of everyday life” (Moreland 2001:80). I lean towards approaches proposing culture as meaningfully constructed, involving practices and processes important to the making and exchange of knowledge.
(Williams 1982; Beaudry et al. 1991; Paynter and McGuire 1991; Hooper-Greenhill 2000). People in slavery times interacted with unequal power and within zones where cultural and social differences were either significant barriers or gateways to privileges.

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill has described how individuals in a society are part of interpretive communities when they share similar interpretive strategies and cultural frames of reference. These communities are not static and individuals can belong to a number of such communities. According to Hooper-Greenhill, “interpretive communities are located in relation to interpretive acts” they performed (Hooper-Greenhill 2000:121-122). Applying this concept to a slave society like Virginia, it follows that communication and knowledge would be more meaningful within an interpretive community of enslaved blacks who, while medicating slavery, prioritized oral traditions and practices and networks for exchanging resources toward realizing ideals for a wholesome life.

Material things were embedded in the world of knowledge and meaning making for they are associated with past and present discourses. They influenced social changes. People in the past knew that others could read messages implied in things and the landscape (Moreland 2001:80). Blacks, for instance, used objects in the presentation of self that communicated possibilities to people within their own interpretive communities, namely others with similar knowledge and interpretive repertoires. For example, healers could be recognized by their dress and decoration for they surrounded themselves with materials that spoke to their interactions with spirits and humans. An article in an 1878 issue of the Southern Workman published by the Hampton Institute, now Hampton...
University, described a conjurer, the Rev. Mr. H. who "had his hair braided like a woman, and rings in his ears" (Waters 1983:138).

Taking its cues from specific materials and actions like those of Rev. H., the interpretive approach pays attention to the belief systems or worldviews of its study population. In addition, it is concerned with meanings within historical and cultural contexts; that is, conditions in which seemingly anomalous actions like Rev. H.'s cross-dressing and work as a conjurer make sense. I postulate that a clearer understanding of blacks' efforts to medicate slavery in Virginia should emerge when meanings and symbolic values are teased out of everyday social interactions.

Another method I find useful towards achieving my goal of understanding meaning in social action is to look at processes rather than end products of social relations. What happened in episodes of illness and caring when blacks and whites interacted? What happened when blacks did not interact with whites — such as, during times of illness, death, and burial in the slave community? I am particularly interested in the world blacks and whites did not make together as well as the one "they made together."

Social interactions in Virginia were enacted mainly in terms of power relations. The subordinated — enslaved people of African descent — and their alleged superiors — mainly people of European descent — were contenders in daily struggles about the meaning of life and identity. The link between social relationships and meanings is explained clearly by Eileen Hooper-Greenhill. She writes:
Meanings are always constructed within social relationships, and relationships are always enmeshed in power networks. The meanings that are most likely to be publicly upheld are likely to be approved by those who hold the most power. But this does not mean that dominant meanings are always accepted. Running alongside dominant meanings alternative meanings are always found. The struggle over meaning is ongoing (Hooper-Greenhill 2000:50).

From this perspective, enslaved people can be studied as active receivers and distributors of material items and as major actors in creating meanings and identities. Yet, I do not overlook domination and the exploitative power of enslavers. I discuss how tightly and cruelly they controlled enslaved people.

I also explore factors that contributed to ambiguities in social relations and meanings in material assemblages that aided in creative redefinition and redistribution of power and resources. For instance, enslaved people and enslavers contended over definitions of and approaches to trash. Studies of enslaved people's houses and yards (Edwards 1998) and contemporary African-American houses, yards, gardens, and artistic creations (Thompson 1983, 1993; Gundaker 1993, 1998a, 1998b) have analyzed the clutter of materials (including broken, recycled, and found objects) associated with these places.

These investigations have shown that spiritual practices, particularly for protection, figured prominently in the making of these displays (Gundaker 1993). For these researchers (Thompson 1983, 1993; Gundaker 1993, 1998a, 1998b, Edwards 1998) and the makers and users of these yards (enslaved and free African Americans), these assemblages should not be defined narrowly as discarded-accumulated waste but rather as materials that articulated with cultural values and the presentation of self as a protected person, not a messy
one. I continue to work in the tradition of these earlier scholarly efforts and interpret materials found in and around the dwellings of enslaved people linking these to health and well-being concerns.

**The Historical Evidence**

I look at how black people are depicted in documents as a window to understand how different individuals in the past viewed their social settings and how cultural differences were explicit as well as implicit in social relations. The historical evidence includes public and private records such as wills, diaries, journals, letters, legal documents, traveler’s accounts, medical accounts, court records, prints, maps, newspapers, and plantation papers including probate records. These cultural texts provide information about social relations and medicinal practices in slave societies. From these key sources, I detail the common illnesses in the society, the beliefs and cures, and the materials used by different Virginians in medicinal practices and also the fact that slavery was itself an illness.

The historical texts seem to tell more about dominant groups in slave societies, for whites generated the bulk of the historical records. Archaeologist Marley Brown has emphasized the importance of examining factors responsible for the written record that echoes the significance of applying this practice to the archaeological data (Brown 1988:80). For documents, “as products of human creativity, [like objects and other archaeological data] they too were created and distributed within social relationships, and were crucial weapons in attempts to reproduce or transform them” (Moreland 2001:84).
If history means both the fact of the matter and a narrative of those facts — both "what happened" and "that which is said to have happened" — then both the process of production as well as the context of consumption should be considered in reading these texts. It follows that "facts are not created equal" (Trouillot 1995:2, 9, Chapter 1 and 5). At times, whites did not record information about enslaved blacks with diplomacy or even honesty (Abrahams and Szwed 1983:11). They manipulated documents in social relations at the expense of the oppressed.

The silencing of the oppressed is not simply a product of their 'absence' from texts... Rather they were silenced through the operation of various technologies of oppression which drew upon the resources provided by the material world and by the written word. ... As such the "silent majority" although illiterate [in terms of the conventional texts] were deeply entangled in the webs created by writing (Moreland 2001:77, 84).

Increasingly, scholars of the African Diaspora are lauding oral and written testimonies by both enslaved and free blacks as credible evidence. These eyewitness accounts offer alternative views of oppression by people who had experienced those times. Today, their descendants and other interested individuals have taken the story further through literary imagination in the genres of novels and films. Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (Morrison [1987] 1988) and Haile Gerima's movie *Sankofa*, for example, have crossed the line between fiction and non-fiction in their interpretations of the "pastlessness of the past" and the power of memory. Both works have explored how descendants of Africans have related to trans-Atlantic slavery and their historical consciousness about that time.
Illustrations from fictional accounts, like the above, help my reading of accounts from formerly enslaved people. This is especially so because of their potential to further understanding of social and cultural practices with historical ties with black people. I also rely heavily on interviews of formerly enslaved people collected in the 1930s and 1940s by the Federal Writers' Project of The Works Progress Administration as well as other literature generated by enslaved (Douglas [1893] 1994; Yellin 1787) and free blacks in different states (Rawick [1941]1972; Perdue et al 1976). In particular, I extensively use Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves (Perdue et al. 1976) as well as unpublished accounts in the Special Collections of the Alderman Library, University of Virginia. These interviews were taken down many years after emancipation; nevertheless they show that blacks in different areas of the American mainland related similar beliefs and practices of slavery times.

Folklore accounts of medicinal practices are also central to this study for they are interwoven with material culture. They embody "a set of folk beliefs expressing social ideas and values" and can inform on "folk ideas about kinship, community identity, society, history, culture, and nature" (Yentsch 1988:5). I draw information on folklore from historical sources such as those documented by enslavers, travelers to Virginia, members of the clergy, and in court records. Also, folk beliefs and practices collected in Virginia in the late nineteenth century by the Hampton Institute provide references about medicine and motherhood.

Knowledge and experience are powerful factors of human existence and black people have both consciously and unconsciously recalled and suppressed them as they dealt with everyday realities. When they chose to tell their stories,
they selected the times, places, and the individuals to whom these stories should be told (Price 1983:5-30). Narratives and interviews of formerly enslaved individuals, for example, offer more information from their viewpoints (Douglass [1893] 1994; Perdue et al. 1976; Escott 1979). When added to accounts of slavery written by whites, these sources broaden interpretations of medicinal practices.

It should be clear from earlier discussion that to understand the complex cultures of the African Diaspora it is imperative to explore connections and disjunctions between Africa and the Americas (Gundaker 1998a:8). Therefore, I review information about past and current cultural practices relating to health care and well-being in Africa and the African Americas. In order to incorporate oral traditions, I explore contemporary data and use the comparative approach by tapping sources of folk medicinal wisdom within my own Afro-Jamaican heritage and family traditions.

Both in the past and today, elderly people in the African Diaspora have been treated with esteem and as reservoir of knowledge that one should access and use with care (Genovese [1974] 1976; Price 1983:5-30; Sobel 1987:43). Old people were venerated for their wisdom and power in traditional African societies because they were considered to be closer to the ancestors and the spirit world. During slavery, blacks’ reliance on folk medicine gave the elderly a special role for they were usually the ones with specialized medicinal knowledge. Moreover, they attended the sick, cared for young ones, and passed on their knowledge of medicinal traditions and practices (Genovese [1974] 1976:523).

From my own experiences, I knew that my parents were knowledgeable in Jamaican folk traditions. Over the centuries, Jamaicans have stressed the
importance of protective rites for events like births, death, and burials. My parents have followed many of these traditions and my discussions with them have helped me in the search to produce a more evocative and sensitive analysis of black enslavement and in understanding events in the wider Diaspora. Tidbits of wisdom from my parents are sprinkled throughout this work (Wilbert Edwards, personal communication, 1999-2003; Rhona Vassell, personal communication, 1999-2003). Knowledge that has been orally transmitted from generation to generation in families as well as in neighborhoods throughout the Diaspora has remained vibrant because of the power of such interpretive communities to nurture and exchange resources.

Archaeological Studies

John Moreland in *Archaeology and Text* has highlighted the inclusive nature of archaeology and his contention supports the multi-level approach to understanding the past.

Historical archaeology is a practice which recognizes that artifacts and texts are more than just sources of evidence about the past; that they had efficacy in the past; and which seeks to determine the ways in which they were used in the construction of social relationships and identities in historically specific circumstances (Moreland 2001:111)

In their search for meanings, particularly from black people’s perspectives, archaeologists have questioned simplistic interpretations that have failed to deal with the complex lifeways of enslaved Africans and their descendants in the Americas (Epperson 1990; Howson 1990; Potter 1991; Ferguson 1992; Edwards 1998; La Roche and Blakey 1997; Singleton 1999; Haviser 1999; Leone and Fry 1999; Orser 2001). Armed with theories and
methods emphasizing blacks as agents in culture and identity building and with positive notions about the importance of diverse African cultures in the interpretation of the African Diaspora, archaeologists have focused on creativity, resilience, and empowerment as important themes. As summaries of the state of this field of historical archaeology have shown, studies of plantations, especially slave quarters and human burials, as well as topics including, dietary practices, living conditions, religion and rituals, social interaction, and racism, have dominated the scholarship (Singleton and Bograd 1995; Samford 1996; Edwards-Ingram 1999; Blakey 2001).

The topic of religion and ritual, for instance, has been actively studied with noteworthy results. Archaeologists have been able to interpret objects as medicinal materials by studying the locations where they were found as well as how they were associated with other materials (McCarthy 1993; Brown 1994; La Roche 1994; Fesler 1996; La Roche and Blakey 1997; Leone and Fry 1999). Evidence like buried caches, beads, modified items such as coins, shells, and animal bones, and conventional pharmaceutical wares in the form of salve pots, ointment jars, and bottles suggests strongly that enslaved people not only medicated themselves, but their living areas at slave quarters and in enslavers' residences as well (Orser 1994; Stine et al. 1996; Leone and Fry 1999). I explore this area more in Chapter Five.

Archaeologists use microplant remains (phytoliths and pollen) as well as macroplant remains (seeds and wood) to reconstruct environmental and economic patterns and plant use (Minnis 1981:143). The emphasis of my analysis is on the macroplant evidence, mainly seeds. Until recently, the low priority
assigned to the recovery of seeds on African-American sites partly explained the limited discussion about medicinal needs. Yet, the picture has not changed significantly in later years when a higher priority is assigned to recovering botanical remains. More seeds have been recovered and more species have been identified but cultivated staples, nuts, and a few wild species have dominated these collections (Raymer 1996; Mrozowski and Driscoll 1997; Higgins et al. 2000; Franklin 2004).

The evidence overwhelmingly seems to support claims about dietary and subsistence practices rather than about medicine, which usually has been defined too narrowly in these studies as cures for specific ailments. Thus, the symbolic use of plants in folk medicine has largely been ignored as has the plants' relationship to African Americans' broader concepts of health and well-being. More creative studies have focused on potential factors contributing to illnesses and have incorporated findings from charcoal wood remains to make connections to the use of wood as fuel and for building structures, including slave quarters (Raymer 1996; Higgins et al. 2000). I carry these interpretations further and link them more explicitly to health and well-being.

Other scholars like folklorists, anthropologists, and art historians have spent more time considering the ceremonial and symbolic use of plants and especially how these are connected to African-related and American-derived activities (Thompson 1983:138-139; Sobel 1987:96-97; Gundaker 1993:61,63). They have found that black people accentuated the spiritual and symbolic qualities of plants. This perspective promotes a better understanding of how
blacks viewed woodlands, gardens, yards, and the particular plants within these settings.

For example, African Americans ascribed a symbolic value to staples like peas, believing that they influenced good luck. The cowpea or black-eyed pea was prescribed by a formerly enslaved Virginian woman as a food that should be eaten on New Year's Day for one to have plenty of money throughout the year (Perdue et al. 1976:248), echoing a tradition widely followed by blacks and whites throughout the South. Some white Virginians, too, tapped the qualities of food to heal. In 1711, planter William Byrd ate potato to cure a cold, perhaps based on pharmacological as well as symbolic references. He had it with milk for breakfast and supper for two days but his cold was not cured (Noël Hume 1978:38).

I employ a broader agenda to discuss how plants applied to health and well-being than that used in a 1996 article by Mark Groover and Timothy Baumann entitled, “They worked their Own Remedy”: African-American Herbal Medicine and the Archaeological Record” in South Carolina Antiquities. This work is important because it is perhaps the most comprehensive treatment of both the ethnohistorical archaeobotanical data in the analysis of African-American medicine to date. Groover and Baumann have demonstrated that ethnohistorical evidence about plant use could be used to determine the potential visibility of medicinal plants in the archaeological record.

Their study of South Carolina details eighteenth- and nineteenth-century folk medicine as well as materials collected during interviews in the 1960s and 1970. The information covers about two hundred and seventy years of traditions and practices (Groover and Baumann 1996:23). However, the number of plants
listed in their ethnohistorical data set, 108 species, far exceeded the 29 plants listed in their archaeological data set associated with medicinal use (Groover and Baumann 1996:24-27). This is important, for the archaeological dataset, unlike the ethnohistorical one (the latter not generated by archaeologists), is based on a narrow definition of medicine. Thus the uses of nearly ¾ of the plants African Americans reportedly collected and or cultivated remains unaccounted for. While my work cannot comprehensively close that gap, it does describe philosophical and practical contexts in which such uses make sense.

Groover and Baumann should have counted more staples, and if the data was available, more fuel and construction materials, that would be applicable in a more complex discussion of foods and symbolic association of plants among African Americans. Also, they should have considered how plants were implicated negatively in well-being, such as, when they are used in the punishment of enslaved people. In Chapter Four, I incorporate evidence from varied fields of inquiry to move the plant analysis beyond these authors’ limited approach to examine the wider impact of plants on enslaved Virginians’ health and well-being and vice versa.

This underscores the importance of my analysis of the archaeological and the oral history evidence from Virginia about plant use. More studies of the documentary and the oral evidence of plants have been done for South Carolina and areas of the Caribbean than for Virginia (Grimé 1979; Laguerre 1987; Groover and Baumann 1996). In fact, I did not find a comprehensive list pulled together for Virginia, so I created one (see Table 6).
I rely on evidence gathered from formerly enslaved people up to the 1940s to create a plant list for Virginia. Groover and Baumann's list includes materials from interviews as late as the 1960s and 1970s. In my discussion of these materials in Chapter Four, I use contemporary materials to show comparisons and connections with the documentary data and also compare it to archaeobotanical finds from African-American sites in order to illuminate the value of the interdisciplinary approach (see Table 6). The archaeobotanical data is derived from three slave quarter sites in Virginia that were excavated in the 1990s (see Table 8 and Appendices A and B).

The sites are Rich Neck Plantation in Williamsburg owned by members of the politically prominent Ludwell family (Franklin 1997, 2004; Mrozowski and Driscoll 1997; Edwards-Ingram 1997); Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest in central Virginia (Heath 1999; Heath and Bennett 2000); and Wilton Plantation, owned by members of the also socially well-known Randolph family, near Richmond (Higgins et al. 2000). Appendix A give details about the history and archaeology of the sites and Appendix B focuses on the archaeobotanical information.

The bulk of the archaeological data is discussed in Chapter Four that, in addition to focusing on plants, also examines the cultural landscape and objects. I review materials from sub-floor pits; many commonly called root cellars, found on African-American sites on the American mainland and suggest meanings for the occurrences of things defined as trash. I also discuss other factors that contributed to conditions that enslavers, usually from ethnocentric viewpoints,
identified as contributing to enslaved residents' illnesses or alleged cultural backwardness.

The discussion continues in Chapter Five and concludes with a summary of what I have accomplished in showing how African Americans' worldview of health and the concept of well-being extended beyond the search for cures of specific ailments to address the total lived experience of human beings. Thus the enslaved attempted to medicate the most widespread malaise of their world: slavery itself.
Figure 3: Map of Virginia showing the location of the three sites (illustrated by Heather Harvey, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation).
Chapter One

Overviews

Didn't have to ask Marsa or nothin'. Just go to Ant Sue an' tell her you want to git mated. She tell us to think 'bout it hard fo' two days, 'cause marryin' was sacred in de eyes of Jesus. Arter two days Mose an' I went back an' say we done thought 'bout it an' still want to git married. Den she called all de slaves arter tasks to pray fo' de union dat God was gonna make. Pray we stay together an' have lots of chillun an' none of 'em git sol' way from de parents. Den she lay a broomstick 'cross de sill of de house we gonna live in an' jine our hands together. Fo' we step over it she ast us once mo' if we was sho' we wanted to git married. 'Course we say yes. Den she say, "In de eyes of Jesus step into Holy Land of mat-de-money." When we step 'cross de broomstick, we was married. Was bad luck to tech de broomstick. Fo'ks always stepped high 'cause dey didn' want no spell cast on 'em—Ant Sue used to say whichever one teched de stick was gonna die first.

--Caroline Johnson Harris (Perdue et al. 1976:129)

“Folk” Medicine and Well-being Practices in the Diaspora

The above narrative, like Frances Kemble's account in the introduction of this dissertation, provides a telling perspective on the living and social world of enslavement, but more from the viewpoint of the enslaved. It contains several themes similar to those in Kemble's account. Prominent among these are the acknowledgement of a policing force or authority over the life of the enslaved, the equation of good luck with good health, concerns about the place of children, family life, moral and ethics, traditions from within the black community, the convergence of "official" practices with "traditional" ones, and the syncretic
nature of enslaved people’s belief and practices. In this chapter, I will continue to address these themes and their implications for understanding notions about a wholesome life and the factors impacting these goals. First, I will provide an overview of black folk medicine and well-being practices in the Diaspora, follow this up with a discussion of these themes within the context of Virginia, and close the chapter with a discussion on plants and their usage as introduced in all the proceedings subsections.

It is important to note from the above vignette, and the other examples that follow, that the enslaved valued having many children but feared being separated from their offspring. They believed in and worshiped a Christian God, but deemed other practices significant to well-being like protecting threshold of houses (the broomstick ceremony took place at the entrance of the future home of the couple), avoiding things that could bring bad luck, and seeking the unity of the community to sanction practices toward a wholesome life. Like whites, enslaved people believed in their marriages, although they were not recognized by law; however, they had a hard time getting many enslavers to understand the significance of black unions beyond the economics of slavery. While some enslavers acknowledged family relations and sought to keep members together, others, viewing enslaved offspring as no more than an increase in their capital, did not do so.

Enslaved parents and the community had to deal with loss of its members through death or sale. Although some children were given to enslavers’ relatives and friends as gifts, this separation still hurt the black community. Living and working conditions, including punishment, made death not a distant event and,
at times, when enslaved people were sold away, the results were as final as death. In fact, threats from enslavers in Virginia to sell people farther south worked terror among the enslaved. Formerly enslaved Virginians remembered those threats and sales. They also described how babies were left behind because sellers believed that new enslavers would see them as impediments to the productivity of mothers (Perdue et al. 1976:33, 71, 102).

That agony of separation from one’s children was excruciating is obvious in the outburst of a formerly enslaved Virginian woman as she confronted her enslaver: “Praise Gawd, praise Gawd! My little chile is gone to Jesus. That’s one chile of mine you never gonna sell.” The planter previously had sold this woman’s older daughter (Perdue et al 1976:322-323). The woman saw a safe haven for her child in death and welcomed that certainty rather than the pain of not knowing the whereabouts of a living relative.

Many black mothers believed in the power of prayers. In fact, prayer was a hallmark of enslaved people’s faith as they prayed for the health of loved ones, for other members of the enslaved community, and sometimes for “Massa” and “Missis” too. Prayers to escape punishment, for retributions of wrongs, for just punishment for their oppressors, and, above all, for freedom from the bondage of slavery, regularly were placed on the “altars” of Jesus (Perdue et al. 1976:62,93 ; Parks 2000:667-668). Prayers were offered in conjunction with other medicines and were also central to healing ceremonies, including burials. Enslaved people rendered prayers for health and well-being in ceremonies that required both the ingestion and the external application of medicinal plants, other foods, and materials.
From the recollections of formerly enslaved individuals, it was usually unwise to allow enslavers and other members of plantation management to know about secret prayer meetings (Perdue et al 1976:93, 196; Raboteau 1978:214-216). Therefore, the woodlands, fields, brush arbors, and the quarters became contested places. These “prayer grounds” were guarded by the enslaved as they sought to prevent plantation authority from policing these areas at crucial times of intercession. To ensure a “safe praying ground,” one popular custom among enslaved people was praying into an iron pot or to keep one (turned upside down) nearby to muffle the sounds of praying and “shouting.” This would have prevented plantation authority from knowing that a prayer meeting was in progress (Perdue et al 1976:93; 196, 230, 242; Raboteau 1978:215-216), use of the pot resulted in a confusion of sounds.

Figure 4: Metal pot fragments from the eighteenth-century Carter’s Grove slave quarter, near Williamsburg, Virginia. Enslaved people probably used similar pots in their secret prayer meetings. (The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation).

In spite of insecurity and exploitation, most parents prayerfully welcomed children and prepared themselves for the loss and heartache of possible
separation. Many of them used verbal appeals to enslavers to try to save loved ones from the auction block or other avenues of sale and separation. In conjunction to rendering prayers to a Christian God, the enslaved employed other medicinal and spiritual practices, many of which were resonant of African traditions, to ward off these evils. Children were made to wear protective charms, amulets, and special colored clothing. Some mothers took other steps like “passing off” their children as sickly or making themselves more useful and “less troublesome” to plantation authority to shore up some protection for their families. Further protective dimensions of health and well-being are elaborated in later chapters.

Motherhood, health care, and well-being practices of blacks in the African Diaspora utilized and revitalized African traditions and beliefs as well as syncretized others within the new societies. They drew on a wide umbrella of factors covering social, cultural, biological, and religious dimensions of life. Thus these beliefs and practices connected humans with spiritual beings as well as with nature from synchronic as well as diachronic perspectives.

To reiterate, my investigation is mainly about the socio-cultural aspects of medicine, health, and well-being. This point cannot be overemphasized because studies of medicine in slave societies are usually approached from perspectives that stress biological causes, cures, and institutions, as well as the socio-political nature of the practice. This is not the aim of this study for I am not concerned with discussing diseases, formal or official medicine, its specialists or practitioners, nor how this medicine was directed at the black population. My discussion does not compare white and black medicine to discuss the extent of
blacks' knowledge of western medicine. Neither do I provide a chronicle of the emergence of black physicians, midwives, and other practitioners and their activities in official medicine. There are already some excellent treatments of these areas (such as, Blanton 1931; Savitt 1978, 1982, 1989; Kiple 1988; Steckel 1988; Byrd and Clayton 2000; Fett 2002). I am interested in looking at how black people constructed and used social identities in the arena of medicine and well-being during slavery.

I consider medicine as the treatment and cure of illnesses, beliefs about illnesses, and attitudes and responsibilities toward the sick person (Bean 1981:48). Within a larger context of spiritual, physical, and cosmological health and well-being balance, my approach draws on Robert Grossinger's definition of medicine. In *Planet Medicine*, Grossinger writes, "medicine is the general inquiry into disease. It can involve the explanation of disease, the curing of disease or both" (Grossinger [1980] 1990:7). He treated healing as both a science, "skills of surgery and pharmacy," and as an art, "sympathy and intuition," which are not necessarily mutually exclusive approaches (Grossinger [1980]1990:8). Although I consider both perspectives in my study, my intention is not to explore "skills of surgery and pharmacy;" therefore, my examination falls more within the ambit of parallel construction of folk medicine as "art".

Loudell Snow described African-American folk medicine as:

A composite of the classical medicine of an earlier day, European folklore regarding natural world, rare African traits, and selected beliefs derived from modern scientific medicine. The whole is inextricably blended with tenets of fundamentalist Christianity, elements from the Voodoo religion of the West Indies, and the added spice of sympathetic magic. It is a coherent medical system...
and not a ragtag collection of isolated superstitions (quoted in Watson 1998:9).

Similarly, in an article in the *Jamaica Journal*, H.I.C. Lowe described Jamaican folk medicine comprehensively to cover not only plant remains but also “fresh air, sunlight, metallic and wooden objects, food, water, parts of animals, various chemical materials and compounds, faith healing, and obeah” (Lowe 1972:20). Lowe also noted that folk practices included “good medicine,” “bad medicine,” “preventive medicine,” and “curative medicine” (Lowe 1972:20).

Black people’s medicinal and well-being practices were proactively directed toward keeping the individual in good spirit, pure in thoughts and deeds, in sound strength, and in righting negative forces and actions. Overall, their approaches and practices revealed a great respect for nature, in which knowing and following signs from the time, the sun and moon, the weather, the environment, and animals were crucial. They also had to have the patience to wait for outcomes.

The principle of respect for nature is clear in midwifery. In the 1930s, black midwives spoke of their practice and boasted of their many years of experience, usually about forty to fifty years in the business. One woman related; “wen I goes on er baby case I jest let nature hev hits way.” She described giving teas to babies at birth, especially catnip tea (Rawick [1941] 1972, vol. vii:[64] 91). A 1930 publication told the story of Aunt Quintilla who related that the Lord had called her to this service in a vision. Her practice was based on “natural childbirth” as she said, “ Honey, I don’ do nuttin’ I jes’ lights my pipe en waits” (quoted in Postell [1951]1970:115). Advice about the right time to sweep houses
and yards, as well as when to plant, and the practice of waiting until the ninth day to know if a new born will stay or the dead will depart, all substantiate this principle and are discussed in Chapter Five.

People of African descent approached medicine as a double-sided process based on the belief that causes and cures were conceptual pairs (Raboteau 1978:14; Waters 1983:75). There was a thin line between what was considered good and evil. In fact, spiritual forces, just like humans, had the potential to harm or heal. Thus in medicinal practices, it was important to be aware of spiritual as well as natural causes of illness and health. In traditional African beliefs, magic and medicine were also closely related.

Albert Raboteau explained that this association was important “because illness and death are not due to “natural” causes alone but to “spiritual” causes as well” (Raboteau 1978:14). From his studies of folklore, Donald Waters found that blacks in nineteenth-century American South “paid particular attention to spiritual agencies” for “no one’s health was sufficiently treated until it included not only a calculus of symptoms, but also one of “signs” or superstitions concerning human health” (Waters 1986:75).

Black people saw illness as an invasion of the body that had to be cleansed or extracted. For instance, a formerly enslaved woman from Kentucky explained that sassafras “is good foh de stomach en cleans yer out good.” Likewise a poultice of Irish potatoes when placed on an aching tooth “takes de fever out of de tooth” Rawick [1941] 1972, vii:[63-64]90-91). Another prerequisite for good health was having “good blood.” John Anderson of Kentucky recalled that his mother believed in making her own medicine to treat her family. “She use to bile
down the roots from may-apple, snake root and blood root, and make her medicine. This was good for the blood and keep us from gettin’ sick” (Rawick [1941] 1972, vii:[18-19] 45-46). Hence, many plant remedies were used for cleansing and keeping the blood pure. Note how medicine is considered food. Chapter Four explores these interconnections between foods and medicines.

Illness as well as healing could result from things or forces entering, being near, or directed at the body. Many individuals believed in and practiced conjuration (Savitt 1978:174-180; Edwards-Ingram 1997:70-71; Fett 2002:84-108). Paul Escott has suggested that,

for many slaves the conjure man possessed a power over nature that was unfamiliar to whites. Through the ritualized use of certain substances and the casting of spells or repetition of incantations a person could gain protection from harm, obtain the favor of friends, or inflict illness on enemies (Escott 1979:105).

This field of medicinal rites incorporated materials including plants, animal parts, various objects, body waste, and soil. Recollections of formerly enslaved individuals described ingredients that were used in these rituals: hair and nail clippings, roots and herbs, scraps of clothing, nails, grave dirt, and animal parts (Raboteau 1978:278; Escott 1979:107; Mellon 1988:99).

Archaeologists at Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage plantation in Tennessee have uncovered tiny brass objects shaped like human fists. These objects have been interpreted as charms (Russell 1997:66-67). Enslaved people at this plantation most likely believed in “the power of a hand (a bag containing items relating to the object of the conjuration) or a spell” (Escott 1979:105). It is clear that the power of conjuration “was awesome to those who believed” (Escott 1979:105). Thus materials were made into charms to be worn on the body or
buried in pathways. When placed under a doorstep, a charm could “make all who came up the steps friendly and peaceable even if they should happen to be coming on some other mission” (Escott 1979:107).

Other archaeological evidence supports the contention that enslaved people enclosed varied materials together for medicinal purposes. A ritual kit that included a multiplicity of materials similar to documentary descriptions was uncovered in Annapolis, Maryland. The buried materials suggest that African-derived religious practices were enacted at this site during the eighteenth century. The materials found at the Charles Carroll House included animal bones, polished stones, pins, and quartz crystals. These items were found along with a bowl with a marking similar to an asterisk. The symbol painted in the interior suggests affinity to the cosmogram of the African cultural group called the Bakongo and others they have influenced (Thompson 1993:57-59). In Chapter Five, I provide more details about the cosmogram.

The information, above, shows how significant animals were to different medicinal practices. One formerly enslaved man of Maryland recalled that bone charms were important to blacks (Rawick [1941] 1972, viii:[4] 9). Other information about ritual practices has more precisely pinpointed a common animal that was used, namely the chicken. The chicken has a long historical association with rituals and symbolic life in West and Central Africa (MacDonald 1995:52) and, among the descendants of Africans in the Americas, its importance did not diminish. Evidence from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as well as later years confirmed that the whole bird, as well as the separated head, feathers, and claws were used in ceremonies like wakes and funerals and in
medicinal kits (Abrahams and Szwed 1983:197-198; Thompson 1983:134-135; Thompson 1990:176-177). Chicken soup was used as a remedy for illnesses. Folk medicinal tradition in Jamaica prescribed the use of chicken gizzards for stomach aches. The medication was to be taken as a thin soup made from dried chicken gizzards (Lowe 1972:23).

The example below about the chicken provides a different perspective about how black people have conceptualized their relationship with nature. A formerly enslaved man of Owens County, Kentucky told a story about his childhood.

I was born on the 16th day of June, 1860 on the ole poor house farm 'bout two miles from Owentown. My mother yousta tell me I'd be a sleepy head. I didn't know what she meant by that so finally one day, after I got to be a great big boy, I asked her what she meant.

Well, she says, Chickens that is hatched in June jess stand 'round in the hot sun an' sleep themselves to death. So, as you was born in June, you'll jess be a sleepy head (Rawick [1941] 1972, vii:[25] 52).

The chicken was important to enslaved people in other ways, such as in commercial endeavors and in diets. Earlier, Frances Kemble's reference to chickens foraging in and around enslaved dwellings also points to the ubiquitous association of these birds to black people. The topic of chickens in commerce and diet continues in Chapter Three.

Enslaved people had great faith in herbal remedies (Escott 1979:108-109; Edwards Ingram 2001b:40-45; Fett 2002:60-83). In fact, some blacks considered these remedies more efficacious than white doctors' medicine. Black healers were said to have cured patients with root medicines when the white doctors had given up on the recovery of the patients (Perdue 1972:310). Plants in teas, tonics, and in
other medical applications like baths, ointments, and salves were regularly used to prevent illnesses and to enact cures (see Chapter Four for a deeper discussion of medicinal plants). Information about plant remedies usually came from the elderly enslaved people and Africa (Escott 1979:107-110). A formerly enslaved woman recalled that her mother taught her "a lot of doctorin' what she larnt from old folkse from Africy, and some de Indians larnt her... and dey allus worked for Mammy and for me, too" (Mellon 1988:94).

Whites in different slave societies condoned as well as censored the medicinal practices of the enslaved (Hening 1819, vi:105; VMHB 1924, xxxii:229-230; Price and Price 1988:581-584; Fett 2002:159-168). When they patronized this body of knowledge, they harnessed it in ways that mainly appeared to profit black individuals. Take the case of Grammy Qwacy in Suriname. The Dutch found a valuable resource in this black man. Qwacy was known as a healer as well as a conjurer (Price and Price 1988:581-584). He was called upon to solve crimes, buttress plantation authority, and to enhance the fighting power (white and black) of the colony against the maroons. The maroons were enslaved Africans and their descendants who had escaped from the plantations and continued to wage a war for their freedom from the forested interior of the colony. Qwacy, for instance having got the name of a Looocoman, or Sorcerer among the vuglar Slaves, no Crime of any Consequence is Committed at the Plantations but Graman Quacy /which Signifies Greatman Qwacy/ is Sent for to Discover the Perpetrator, & Which he so very Seldom misses by their Faith in his Conjurations, & looking them Steadily in the Face, that he has not only often Prevented further mischief to their masters, but Come home with very Capital rewards to himself — The Corps of Rangers & all fighting free negroes are next under his Command, to Whom by Selling his Obias or Amulets to make them invulnerable, /they under the Power of this Superstition fearing no danger & fighting
like bull dogs/ he not only has done a Deal of Good to the Colony
but fill'd his Pockets with no inconsiderable Profits Also, while his
Person his Adored and Respected like a God (Price and Price
1988:582).

Qwacy reaped many rewards, including monetary ones, for his activities.

He was also known for,

the Valuable Root known Under the name of Qwacy Bitter of
Which this man Was Absolutely the first Discoverer in 1730, &
Which Notwithstanding its being less in Repute in England than
formerly is Highly Esteem’d in many other Parts of the World for its
Efficacy in strength’ning the stomach, Restoring the Appetite &c.

Qwacy commanded respect from many blacks and whites alike. The
maroons, however, saw him as traitor (Price 1983:153-159). Some benefits that
black midwives and nurses accrued in attending to enslaved people as part of
their duties could be viewed similarly, namely, as opportunities in which blacks
profited widely (Fitzpatrick 1931-44, xxxiii: 469). A careful reading of these
situations, however, would show that in the overall scheme of things, whites
gained the most from these services: these blacks were helping to ensure viable
enslaved labor forces and societies.

Some blacks viewed the conjuring aspects of medicine among the enslaved
community negatively. For instance, they linked conjure to blacks’ cultural
ignorance or underdevelopment and pointed out that Africans and Caribbean
people were the main ones engaged in the religio-magical practices sometimes
called hoodoo, conjuring, root-work, obeah, and voodoo (Escott 1979:107-110;
Mellon 1988:94). Yet, even the skeptics of conjuring and other related practices
that were usually placed on the harmful/evil side of the medicinal chart shared in
this knowledge and identified it as part of their culture. Apparently these skeptics
were not taking any chance on being handicapped by lack of knowledge. Here it is useful to quote Raboteau, who has insightfully pointed out that:

Conjure could, without contradiction, exist side by side with Christianity in the same individual and in the same community because, for the slaves, conjure answered purposes which Christianity did not and Christianity answered purposes which conjure did not (Raboteau 1978:288).

Black people's faith, as seen from preceding examples, was also based on the belief in a Christian God. It is believed that some Africans before their forced migration to the Americas accepted Christianity and Islamic doctrines, without the displacement of other indigenous practices (Thornton 1998:421-434; Pollitzer 1999:29). In the American South, the Bible and Christianity played critical roles in religious well-being and faith healing during and after slavery (Raboteau 1978; Gundaker 2000; Parks 2000). Many enslaved people probably subscribed to the belief that the way to health included a broadly-based knowledge of causes and cures of illnesses.

The Virginia Situation

Like their counterparts in other New World slave societies, black Virginians considered several things as requisites for health care and well-being. Most notable among these were herbal remedies used within or outside the body or within the social landscape. Other practices included the use of powerful objects, mortuary rites, pharmaceutical materials, breastfeeding and other health care practices (Barton 1804:52-53; Perdue et al 1976:248-249; Sobel 1987:95-99, 214-225; Atkins 1994:84-85).
Some practices were linked to vitality and procreation. For example, archaeologists studying the remains of domestic sites for enslaved people at George Washington's Mount Vernon plantation have interpreted animal bones including a highly polished raccoon baculum (with one end encircled with an incised cut) and a modified owl's bone, as relating to rituals of fertility (Atkins 1994:84-85). Other evidence substantiates that enslaved people in Virginia buried ritual materials in the landscape (Perdue et al. 1976:263; Deetz 1993:145). But some materials were common everyday items and therefore their use would have been no cause for alarm. Above all, enslaved people's practices drew on a holistic and multi-faceted conception of medicine and paths to well-being. Exploring how this definition and meaning of medicine was applied throws more light on resources and networking among people in the enslaved society of Virginia.

Like other enslavers in such places as Suriname, some whites in Virginia acknowledged the medical knowledge and services of their enslaved people. Yet, they treated this knowledge as potentially detrimental to slave society. This was in contrast to some blacks' views of seeing the knowledge as "good medicine" against slavery for it had possibilities to weaken whites' negative perceptions and inferior treatment of blacks. For whites, black "official" knowledge had to be controlled and recognition as well as compensation regulated. Therefore laws were passed to curtail blacks' medicinal practices. For instance, an Act of October 1748 ruled:

And whereas many negroes, under the pretence of practising physic, have prepared and exhibited poisonous medicines, by which many persons have been murdered, and others have languished
under long and tedious indispositions, and it will be difficult to
detect such pernicious and dangerous practices, if they should be
permitted to exhibit any sort of medicine, *Be it therefore further
enacted, the authority aforesaid*, That if any negro, or other slave,
shall prepare, exhibit, or administer any medicine whatsoever, he,
or she so offending, shall be adjudged guilty of felony, and suffer
death without benefit of clergy (Hening 1819, vi:105).

The law, however, made provisions for practices that were believed done
“in good faith” (for African Americans, that meant multiple uses of plants and
other substances) and with the blessings of the legal owners of the enslaved
individuals. Some whites wanted to believe that blacks benefited from slavery
and, therefore, would be interested in its well-being rather than its demise (John
1999:44-46). Thus colonial authority ensured that they could benefit from
medicine that they had sanctioned.

Even skeptical enslavers (at times, the same individuals as the colonial
authority) did not wish to lose any opportunity to capitalize on their major
resource: their enslaved people (Hening 1819, vi:105; Blanton 1931:173; Sobel
1987:99; P. Morgan 1998:625). George Washington wrote to one of his managers,
William Pierce, in 1794 (Fitzpatrick 1931-44, xxxiii:468-469).

> When I was at home, an application was made to me by Kate at
Muddy hole (through her husband Will) to lay the Negro Women
(as a Grany) on my estate; intimating that she was full as well
qualified for this purpose as those into whose hands it was
entrusted and to whom I was paying twelve or £15 a year; and why
she should not be so I know not; but wish you to cause some
enquiry to be made into this matter, and commit this business to
her, if thereupon you shall be satisfied of her qualifications. This
service, formerly, was always performed by a Negro woman
belonging to the estate, but latterly, until now, none seemed
disposed to undertake it (Fitzpatrick 1931-44, xxxiii:469).

> Here we see an enslaved woman, Kate, confronting her enslaver and other
members of the plantation management team, forcing them to consider the
implications that she, like the former black midwife, both had useful knowledge and skills, and moreover, whites needed them. The many ways enslaved women challenged their enslavers are examined further in Chapter Two and Three. Obviously, both these midwives and their enslavers had an interest in black motherhood. At the same time, Kate was applying for paid work. She was seeking compensation and apparently this was seen as advantageous to her and her husband, Will, in searching for their ideals in life. Having money and its ability to buy things and services were implicit in this transaction. Moreover, plantation management was acknowledging the authority of the black male in his household and black marriage, although the institution was not legalized in the society.

Freedom was a major ideal for the enslaved and medicinal knowledge when accepted by the officials of slave societies was one means of attaining this goal. In conceding that blacks were capable of caring for themselves "successfully" without whites' endorsement and guidance, Governor William Gooch granted an enslaved man his freedom in 1729 when the man revealed the roots and barks that could cure venereal diseases (VMBH 1924, xxxii:28, 229-230; Sobel 1987:99; P. Morgan 1998:625). Gooch explained in a correspondence to England:

I have sent over by this Fleet a Box full of a Root and Barks, which in equal quantities being made into a Decoction, will, in this Country, cure the most inveterate veneral Disease, in order for the Phisitians to make a tryal of it in England; but in all likelihood the difference of Climate will make a difference in its Operation, and here only mankind will be the better for what has been a Secrett in the hands of a Negro, for many years in this Country where he practiced with success, until I thought it worthy my endeavours to get the Discovery from him. Next to the Service I expect from it, I wish it may be an encouragement to one of the travelling Phisitians.

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to take a Tour into America, where he'll profit much more than a jaunt to France & Italy (VMBH 1924, xxxii:229-230).

Some enslaved people became famous as healers and helped both whites and blacks. Eighteenth-century planter Robert Carter of Nomini Hall had an enslaved coachman, called "Brother Tom," who was renowned as a doctor. Brother Tom was borrowed by neighboring planters to treat their enslaved people (Blanton 1931). One request gave an insight into the popularity of Brother Tom's practice (and the compensation given to Robert Carter):

The black people at this place hath more faith in him as a doctor than any white doctor; and as I wrote to you in a former letter I cannot expect you to lose your man's time, etc., for nothing, but am quite willing to pay for same (Blanton 1931:173).

Some practitioners were tried in court cases, especially for charges of poisoning, but were acquitted, for apparently most of the medicinal practices were enacted without malice. Historian Philip Morgan described a case in which an enslaved woman administered medicines to help with another enslaved woman's pregnancy. Other cases recorded the efforts of enslaved women who had sought to influence their legal owners' affection towards them (P. Morgan 1998:624). Here medicinal practices were used as remedies against negative affection. Thus, while acknowledging the potential danger to whites posed by enslaved people's medicine, Virginians condoned it (Blanton 1931:173; Perdue et al. 1976:20-121; Sobel 1987:99; P. Morgan 1998:625).

In practices directed toward the well-being of oneself, the individual is seen as less self-serving than in the case of Sambo allegedly poisoning Tom. On September 28, 1761, Colonel James Gordon of Virginia took John Norris's enslaved man Tom for a miller and later, found that he liked Tom "very well"
(Gordon 1903:223-224). Apparently not all of Gordon’s enslaved people thought the same of Tom, for twelve days later the colonel went to the mill and found Tom “very unwell.” Tom was “afraid that Sambo has poisoned him.” Tom may have been given the position that Sambo had wanted for himself (Gordon 1903:224).

Some of the activities of blacks may have helped to discredit their folk medicine. Another case to support this point is the trial of Ben, a “Cungerer.” In 1791, some magistrates found the testimony of Ben, an enslaved Virginian, faulty. Ben had testified against a fellow “brother” charged with arson. One magistrate described Ben “to be a very ill-disposed Fellow, pretending to be a Cungerer & forting-teller” (Palmer and McRae [1885] 1968:333-334).

Some blacks may not have considered these individuals to be deviants for the syncretic nature of folk medicine permitted healing and harming to be consistently addressed by both healers and conjurers. Remember Aunt Sue at Caroline’s wedding in the opening vignette of this chapter. She creolized and revitalized beliefs of Christianity with those of different traditions forecasting about health, good luck, and overall well-being. Also recall Albert Raboteau’s description of the way blacks envisioned the relationship between conjuration and Christianity (Raboteau 1978:288). The following example also supports this convergence of different beliefs and practices. A black Virginian, Melviny Brown, admitted in an interview in 1940 that her beliefs were multi-faceted.

Yes’m, I sho is er conjure ’oman, an’ I tell you how I come ter be one. It’s a spirit in me that tells, a spirit from de Lawd — an’ I tricks in de name o’ de Lawd. There used ter be er ol’ voodoo woman who lived nex’ my mammy’s cabin. She tol’ me how ter trick arter I’d been a-borned wid de veil on my face. Youse jes’ have ter be a-borned dat away ter git de spirit o’ trikin’ (ALFC 1940-41).
The texts of slave society in Virginia detailed the relationship between laws and customs. These mainly enslaver-generated documents described "accepted or permitted" activities of the enslaved and recorded some censored ones. The practice of advertising enslaved individuals as "pretending" or "practicing" doctors illustrates a discrepancy between the laws and social customs in the society. Apparently, whites and blacks alike knew these black "doctors." The following advertisement for the return of a runaway from Virginia is an example:

RAN away, about the First Day of June, last from the Subscriber, living on Chickahominy River, James City County. A negro Man, short and well-set, aged between 30 and 40 Years, but looks younger, having no Beard, his smooth-fac'd, and has some Scares on his Temples, being the Marks of his Country; talks pretty good English; is a cunning, subtle Fellow, and pretends to be a Doctor. It is likely, as he has a great Acquaintance, he may have procur'd a false Pass. Whoever brings him to me at my House aforesaid, shall have Two Pistoles Reward, besides what the Law allows.


While many managers may have cared when enslaved laborers were ill, they always worried about the loss of labor time (Blanton 1931:167-169). George Washington wrote to William Pierce, in May 1794, about reported illnesses (Fitzpatrick 1931-1940, xxxiii:365, 369). The letter suggests that Washington believed that his enslaved people were shirking their duties. Moreover, he implied that they were responsible for their inability to work because they had been attending to their own affairs, by "night walking" and "other practices." Washington wrote:

I find by the Reports that Sam is, in a manner, always returned Sick; Doll at the Ferry, and several of the Spinners very frequently so, for a week at a stretch; Ditcher Charles often laid up with lameness. I never wish my people to work when they are really sick, or unfit for it; on the contrary, that all necessary care should be
taken of them when they are so; but if you do not examine into their complaints, they will lay by when no more ails them, than ails those who stick to their business, and are not complaining, from the fatigue and drowsiness which they feel as the effect of night walking, and other practices which unfit them for the duties of the day (Fitzpatrick 1931-1944, xxxiii:369).

Many enslaved people's activities, when they were not working for their enslavers, included visiting family members and taking care of children and the sick.

Advertisements for the return of runaway enslaved individuals also reveal the society's preoccupation with the need for reliable laborers as well as the injuries that resulted from harsh punishments meted out to these unpaid laborers. For instance, a 1739 advertisement noted an enslaved man's injuries, apparently inflicted as punishment:

RAN away from the Subscriber at Bowler's Ferry in Richmond County, on the Seventeenth of last April, a Negro Man Slave, named Harry; he is a lusty, well-made Fellow, his burnt in the Hand, and has a Piece of one of his Ears cut off: He had on, when he went away, a Grey Manks Cloth Wastecoat and Breeches, and a Canvas Shirt. Whoever takes up the said Slave, and secures him so that I may have him again, shall have a Pistole Reward, besides what the Law allows, paid by

Edgcomb Suggit (quoted in Windley 1983:8).

In that same year, another advertisement described the punishment an enslaved fellow received as he sought to change his identity to that of a free man. His advertiser noted that:

He likewise made his Escape on Monday Night last, from Col. Burwell's, who took him from on board Flamborough Man of War, Capt. Pierse, Commander, where he had conceal'd himself, with Intent to escape to New-York. His Back, I believe, for some time, will discover the Stripes he receiv'd on board the Man of War...

William Drummond (quoted in Windley 1983:9).
Enslaved people in Virginia did not accept negative depictions of their lifeways in health and medicine. While some blacks engaged in separate practices to nurture themselves and to redefine negative characterizations, other blacks affirmed identities in social relations with whites. Some blacks who gained recognition within the official system as healers, midwives, and nurses could be considered in this category (Grimé 1979:67; Perdue et al. 1976:120-121; Sobel 1987:99; P. Morgan 1998:625). Medicines and materials were often part of larger power struggles and negotiations of social positions.

**Plants and their Usage**

Studies of black people's medicinal practices have described geographic and temporal parallels and continuities in the use of plants to prevent and cure illnesses and other maladies (Mitchell 1978; Grimé 1979; Savitt 1978; Groover and Baumann 1996). Some edited volumes took a Diasporic perspective and included studies from Africa, Caribbean, and the United States (Grimé 1979; Watson 1998). My analysis of historical plant use draws on William Grimé's (1979) encyclopedic work on plants used by African and African-descended populations in the African Diaspora. Grimé surveyed early works and observations by travelers, planters, historians, botanists, and other writers in different areas of the Diaspora. I combed this work for references to Virginia and also used it to learn about other American mainland colonies and Caribbean islands for comparative purposes.

Finding information about what enslaved people used for medicines is a difficult task, especially for the early years of slavery. As seen earlier, some whites
acknowledged the potential good of this area of the enslaved individual's skill while others like Thomas Jefferson, who owned up to two hundred enslaved workers during his lifetime (Stanton 1996:13), had little patience for such practices among his people. He was concerned about "the ill-effects of the prescriptions of black doctors" and usually labeled them as poisons (Stanton 1996:43). Attitudes like this may have also decreased the likelihood of information being recorded about the practices enslaved people at Monticello and Poplar Forest used among themselves.

Yet, Virginian planters like Thomas Jefferson, Landon Carter, and William Byrd II maintained avid interests in medicinal matters, particularly plant remedies (Blanton 1931:178-200). For example, in his Notes on the State of Virginia, Thomas Jefferson identified twenty-one plants known for their medicinal value (Peden 1982:38). Plants like senna, Jamestown ("Jimson") weed, and Virginia snakeroot, which Jefferson listed, also appear in ethnohistorical accounts of the folk medicine of people of African descent (Grimé 1979:75; Waters 1983:215; Fontenot 1994:138). In 1708, William Bryd II described Jamestown weed as a poisonous plant if ingested but noted that the leaves and the root made a good poultice for burns. He also commended the Jerusalem oak as an effective worming medicine (Tinling 1977:266).

In spite of the difficulty of finding out about medicinal materials among enslaved people, they remain central to my discussion of cultural practices and the pursuit of health and well-being. Some plant remedies prescribed by whites may have been adopted and used by the enslaved segment of the population. However, there are some clear instances when both travelers and white residents
indicated that certain plants were used by blacks, implying the customs may have been restricted to this community (Grime 1979:109; Joyner 1984:95-96). For example, when a nineteenth-century botanist saw African Americans in Norfolk, Virginia using dogwood twigs as toothbrushes (Grime 1979:109), he may have recorded this observation because he found it unusual. Perhaps the custom was not a white Virginian one. Another example, this time from South Carolina, substantiates this point. In 1851, a planter alluded to the enslaved community's preference for a particular staple for “there is no vegetable of which negroes are more fond than of the common field pea.... They are very nutritious, and if cooked perfectly done, and well seasoned with red pepper, are quite healthy” (quoted in Joyner 1984:95-96).

Native Americans may have influenced Afro-Virginian medicinal practices because members of this population lived as servants or as enslaved people, among blacks and whites in households and on plantations (Davis 1980:13; McGhan 1982:873-874; Haun 1995, viii:107). Many formerly enslaved Virginians, when interviewed during the 1930s and 1940s, claimed to be related to Indians (Perdue et al 1976:90, 91, 130, 143). Accounts of Native American medicine are similar to enslaved people's practices (Mitchell 1978; Berkeley and Berkeley 1965:24-25). Incidents of Native Americans treating enslaved people probably were more common in Virginia than recorded. The Reverend John Clayton, a botanist, related how a Native American used herbal remedies to help an enslaved man belonging to Nicholas Spencer, the Secretary of State and later acting governor. The man was freed from pain in one eye, that was blind, and had his sight restored in the other. The Native American was paid two quarts of rum.
for his services. Several white doctors who had tried to treat the man had failed (Berkeley and Berkeley 1965:24-25).

In keeping with the focus on motherhood and childcare, I find the multi-level approach of Euro-American Martha Ballard useful as it resonates with practices of people of African descent. Between 1785 and 1812, this New England midwife of Hallowell, Maine, performed 816 deliveries and recorded these and other daily events in a diary. Her skills included making salves, teas, pills, and ointments. Although Ballard bought and used imported medications, herbal remedies were central to her practice in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Ulrich 1991:49-50).

Ballard used plants in ways that parallel the practices of people of African descent. The latter administered plants internally as teas and other mixtures as well as used them externally, including in baths or in wrapped charms and medicinal kits (Perdue et al. 1976; Mitchell 1978; Raboteau 1978; Grimé 1979; Waters 1983; Laguerre 1987). Like black people, Ballard dispensed “herbs internally as teas, decoctions, syrups, pills, clisters, vapors, and smoke and externally in poultices, plasters, blisters, cataplasms, baths, ointments, and salves” (Ulrich 1991:50).

I believed that through interactions in their own society with practitioners like Ballard, some enslaved Virginians may have acquired medical knowledge about plant use and other materials. In an interesting case from Maryland, a formerly enslaved man remembered that his mother learned about plants and making medicine from a homeopathic doctor. She used this knowledge commercially for herself among the black population. More interestingly this

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woman practiced other forms of medicine including wrapping and tying things like particular shaped stones and roots to cure her patients’ problems. This woman was said to have cured an enslaved man whom the homeopathic doctor could not cure. Here we have another example of black healers being presented as having more powerful medicine than white doctors ((Rawick [1941] 1972, viii:[1-3] 14-16).

Enslaved people's plant knowledge was likely influenced by “official practice” when enslavers assigned them nursing roles for both blacks and whites. Household servants, including cooks and nursemaids, may have been particularly positioned to gain knowledge in this manner. Perhaps the most important way that the enslaved population acquired knowledge of white medicine, which often consisted of folk remedies incorporating plants and their products, was when whites treated them for illnesses.

Baily Cunningham of Virginia recalled that his mistress had three medicines that were considered the panacea for all illnesses (Perdue et al. 1976:80-83).

One was vinegar nail, one rosin pills and the other was tar. When we had aches or pains in the stomach or the back she would make us drink 'vinegar nail' which was made by getting about a pound square cut iron nails and put them in a jug with lot of vinegar, then at night we had to take rosin pills. These pills were made of raw pine rosin. When we had the tooth ache or the ear ache she would fill the tooth or ear full of tar. We never had a doctor (Perdue et al 1976:82-83).

From the seventeenth century, mainstream medicine in Virginia was influenced by ancient Greek and Roman concepts on the humoral system (Blanton 1930:12-13; Savitt 1990:11). These concepts sought to replace
supernatural ideas about healing and diseases, for, from the earliest times, medicine has been associated with religion. Greek and Roman scientific medicine focused on the principle of harmony and how proportions of the universe macrocosm were reflected in the microcosm of the human organism. According to these beliefs, the human body was formed from the union of the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water which were considered the roots of all things. Therefore, these elements along with qualities of hot, dry, moist, and cold (also associated with the seasons) were linked to basic substances in the body including yellow and black bile, blood, and phlegm. The balance and harmony of the humours were keys to good health and external signs like fever, boils, and diarrhea were seen as means of purging and nature's way of restoring any imbalance (Blanton 1930:12-13; Savitt 1990:11; Lewis 1996:22-29). Consequently diagnosis and treatment were worked out through purges, laxatives, and bloodletting.

Bloodletting was commonly practiced on Virginians, free and enslaved (Blanton 1930:140; Savitt 1990:34; Walsh 1997:176). This was one of the main procedures that President George Washington's doctors used in treating his last illness in 1799 (Savitt 1990:34-35) and "by one calculation, Washington lost ninety-six ounces (three quarts) of blood, or about half of his blood volume" (Savitt 1990:35). This extensive blood loss may have contributed to his death. In the 1640s, Dr. John Severne performed "cupping" on Mr. Walker's boy who was ill; probably due to a whipping he had received eight days earlier (Blanton 1930:140). In 1736, a doctor was paid for "bleeding 26 negroes" at slave quarters near Williamsburg (Walsh 1997:176).
While it is unclear whether enslaved people practiced bloodletting among themselves, this method of treatment was likely known by some Africans. Olaudah Equiano, who was captured at an early age and enslaved in the Americas, recalled that magicians or doctors in his West African village had practiced bleeding by using the cupping method and were able to cure illnesses (Walsh 1997:178; Gates 1987:21). Bloodletting procedures in the American colony and in Europe included venesection (cutting into a vein), wetcupping (using a scarifier to make multiple incisions and using a cup to catch the blood), dry cupping (similar to wetcupping but done without causing scarifications and with more focus on the afflicted areas) and leeching (attaching leeches to the body to suck the blood). Todd Savitt (1990:39-40) described all these procedures in detail.

The focus on the blood as the key to good health was shared by both black and white Virginians. As mentioned earlier, black people have stressed the importance of the purity of one’s blood in health and well-being. A formerly enslaved worker described the healing of sores of enslaved people who had endured whippings. He accredited saltwater drenches and the idea that the victims had “pure and strong” blood as responsible for their recovery (Perdue et al. 1976:255-256). Using plant remedies was one way to achieve this goal. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, John Lee, an African-American folk healer of South Carolina, described medicinal plant remedies as cures for problems relating to the blood. Illnesses were attributed to problems with the blood due to imbalances in the binary qualities relating to “good/bad (blood purity), fast/slow (circulation), high/low (quantity and location), hot/cold (temperature) and
thick/thin (viscosity)” (Payne-Jackson 1993:21). Note the similarities of Lee’s outline with the humoral system. Belief about the blood was probably also linked to the Black Christianity belief in the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus to wash sins away and make one pure and holy.

In contemporary Jamaica, plant remedies are linked to the purification of the blood, too, and their names are strongly suggestive of their curative power. Plants called leaf-of-life (*Bryophyllum pinnatum*), sinkle-bible (*Aloe vera*), jack-in-the bush (*Eupatorium odoratum*), cerasee (*Momordica charantia*), and love bush (*Cuscuta americana*), as well as various mints are included in this group (Lowe 1972:22; Rhona Vassell, personal communication, 1999-2003; Wilbert Edwards, personal communication, 1999-2003). Some remedies are believed to have an immediate effect upon digestion. For instance, on ingestion, the clear liquid from the coconut, commonly called “coconut water,” has been described as “going straight to the heart.” It is believed to be a good tonic (Rhona Vassell, personal communication, 1999-2003).

Taking bitters to promote health and well-being was a highly recommended practice among blacks during and after slavery. A formerly enslaved Virginian, May Satterfield, told her interviewer that she used to know “ev’y weed and root in de woods. My grandma tole ’em to me” (Perdue et al. 1976:246). She related the ingredients in a tonic for good luck, which she considered an aspect of good health. This supports the contention that good health and good luck was intertwined in blacks’ worldview. Recall the earlier description of the “jumping the broom” marriage ceremony of Caroline where touching the broomstick would have resulted in spells and bad luck that would
have led eventual to death. Like Aunt Sue’s warning to Caroline, May Satterfield’s prescription, if followed, was a guarantee of good luck and health.

Ef you wants to have good luck, git some rat veins, wil’ cherry blossom, an’ bile ‘em togedder wid whiskey an’ make bitters. Put de bitters in a demijohn an’ keep it in a dark place. Ev’y now an’ den take yo’self a good slug o’ dem bitters — ’bout dat much in a glass an’ you ain’t never gonna be sick a day in yo’ life (Perdue et al. 1976:246).

Lillian Clarke, another formerly enslaved Virginian, had her recipe for a tonic recorded (Perdue et al. 1976:72-73). She recounted how it was made with ingredients of rats vein herb, heartleaf or crowfoot leaf, comfrey or burdock leaf, wild cherry bark or horehound, and 2-3 gallons of water. All this was boiled down to a quart and, “1 pound brown sugar, 1/2 pint gin” were added to the mixture and the tonic was preserved in a bottle. Clarke recommended to “take wine glass full 3 times a day. Dis cures de vilest kind of a cough or cold” (Perdue et al. 1976:73). Strength, especially having a strong back, was important to health. She also prescribed worm seed tea for women “whose backs need to be strong” but equally so for men too (Perdue et al. 1972:73).

Apparently root cellars were good storage places for medicines that needed to age or to be preserved. Enslaved people may have found it worthwhile to store these medicinal materials in pits during the warm seasons to prevent the bottles from exploding. These pits also were ideal bins to store other medicinal materials, including ones needed for conjuring. One enslaved woman in Missouri used a root cellar for a similar purpose.

Lin, the Negro cook in my grandfather’s home, had dug out a hole, lined and roofed it with poles and dirt, and in it kept her ‘roots and arbs,’ as she called them, along with various trinkets and some
mysterious powders believed to be effective in working charms and conjuring (quoted in Groover and Baumann 1996:29).

In Jamaica today, the parts, including the bark, leaves, and fruits of large trees like the breadfruit (*Artocarpus altilis*), tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*), soursop (*Annona muricata*), and the banana (*Musa* sp.), are used to treat various illnesses. The tamarind branches are used in treating measles. Some plants are shared during illnesses, while the powers of some plants are only effective if they are acquired from yard areas without permission. Other plants are available for purchase in the markets. Many of these plants are boiled in water until the ensuing substance is considered strong enough, and then it is used for baths. “Bush teas” brewed from mints and the leaves of different trees and herbs are daily morning fare and ever-present remedies used at the first signs of an illness (Rhona Vassell, personal communication, 1999-2003; Wilbert Edwards, personal communication, 1999-2003).

This preliminary discussion shows that throughout the centuries, descendants of Africans in the Americas have cultivated and gathered plants for dietary and medicinal needs. The discussion continues in Chapter Four. The varied nature and the proactive quality of blacks’ lifeways justify the approaches and methodologies used in this work because slavery and its aftermath have profoundly obstructed their pursuit for a wholesome life.
Chapter Two

The Interplay of Race and Gender in Virginia

Issues of race do not exist apart from or even alongside gender, class, and sexual norms; rather, these issues are articulated through one another.

-- Anne Stavney, 1998:34

She is a mother because motherhood was virtually unavoidable under slavery; she is outraged because of the intimacy of her oppression.

-- Joanne Braxton, 1989:19

The Bases of Social Differentiation

This chapter explores motherhood and health care within the context of race and gender. The focus is on historical processes that contributed to the social structure of the Virginia slave-based society. Whites were not a monolithic group. Hence, the emphasis to understand the role of gender and particularly the interactions between male enslavers and blacks in general and elite white women and enslaved women.

Virginia's version of slavery emerged in the seventeenth century when the social order started to change from impermanent servitude to a slave-based society where (mainly) whites subjugated blacks and extracted their labor to benefit a white-ruled society (P. Morgan 1998:1-23). Scholars have generally agreed that the arrival of the Africans in 1619 heralded the slow yet, steady arrival of other Africans and the birth of their descendants until in the 1660s when the
number started accelerating greatly. During the era of the Atlantic slave trade, Africans were captured from the coastal and inland areas of West and Central Africa, along an area from Senegambia to Angola and taken to the Americas (Holloway 1990:4). Most Africans in Virginia came from the Bight of Biafra, the Gold Coast, and Angola but members of the “Igbo, Tiv, Kongo, Fante, Asante, Ibibio, Fon, and others” were also imported (Sobel 1987:5). However, Senegambia and the Bight of Biafra represented the two main areas of origins of Africans arriving in the Chesapeake in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Angola became an important supplier for the years covering the 1730s to 1772 with about fifty percent of the Africans originating from there during 1760-1772 (P. Morgan, 1998:63, Table 11).

Using data like the above, scholars have stressed the cultural heterogeneity of Africans, but they have still supported arguments for compatible cultures. Cultural similarities have fostered levels of retentions and continuities within a wide sea of change. In addition, writers have identified groups from distinct cultural areas who had tremendous impact on American New World cultures as well as particular practices that were meaningful in cultural transformations (Thompson 1983, 1990, 1993; Sobel 1987:5-6; Holloway 1990: ix-xxi, 1-18).

In 1649, there were about three hundred blacks in Virginia (McCartney 1997:477). They were not the main labor force until after the 1680s for whites relied more on white indentured laborers (E. Morgan 1975:306-308). The high mortality rate among Africans and English workers discouraged planters from purchasing blacks who cost roughly twice as much as indentured servants. These factors were viewed differently when life expectancy rose by the 1660s (E.
Morgan 1975:297-301). The use of Native American laborers was not considered feasible, although a few were still numbered among the labor force of white Virginians (Davis 1980:13; Haun 1995, viii:107).

A dwindling supply of white servants contributed to a growing reliance on black laborers. Edmund Morgan explained,

The substitution of slaves for servants probably increased the productivity and almost certainly increased the profitability of the plantation system. But slavery required new methods of disciplining the labor force, methods that were linked to racial contempt (E. Morgan 1975:316).

For many white Virginians, championing black enslavement was not an overnight decision but rather was gradually seen and instituted as the answer to taxing labor and other social problems (Jordon 1968; E. Morgan 1975). In writing about the formative years of slavery in Virginia, Winthrop Jordon noted,

that those early years were crucial ones is obvious, it was then that the cycle of Negro debasement began; once the Negro became fully the slave it is not hard to see why white men looked down upon him (Jordon 1968:44).

Although blacks were spread among different plantations and households in the early years of the seventeenth century in Virginia, the 1625 census of the colony indicates that some Africans shared residences with their fellow country people. Of the twenty-three black servants or enslaved persons, fifteen were living in two households while the remaining eight were living in five other households. The census accounted for a total of eleven men, ten women, and two children (Hecht 1973:77-78).

The twenty-three Africans in the census resided in households in Tidewater Virginia (McCartney 2003:36). Eight were living in Governor Sir
George Yeardley’s household at Jamestown, while seven resided at Abraham Piersey’s Flowerdew Plantation in Prince George County. These Africans may have formed family units with male and female sexual partners. At Piersey’s plantation, there was one child and he or she was most likely the offspring of one or two of the six adults listed. At Captain William Tucker’s place in Elizabeth City, two Africans, Antoney and Isabell, had a child called William by 1625 (McCartney 2003:36).

Table I.
The Census of 1625: Servants and Slaves

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Muster</th>
<th>Total No. of Servants</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Piersey</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Yeardley</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. Tucker</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. Pierce</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Bennett</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. West</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. Kingsmill</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>133</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hecht 1973: 78. Table VII: Distribution of Negro Servants or Slaves in Virginia, 1625.

Planters in the early development of the colony may not have welcomed the reproduction of black women. Enslavers, needing the labor of women, perhaps abhorred interruptions caused by black pregnancies and childcare (Craven 1971:101). Mechel Sobel supported this view as she argued that “at the outset, slave children were probably a burden and not welcomed in the work-oriented and hard-pressed community” (Sobel 1987:161). Even in the early years,
some enslaved Virginians probably had some degree of stability in family life. In 1659, seven blacks were listed at Mary Ewen’s place, a plantation in Surry County, across from Jamestown, Virginia, and apparently they formed at least two generations:

Michaell A negroe Man
Katherine A negroe woman ) The children of the
Rebecca? About 20 yeares old ) of the sd, Michaell
Francis about 18? yeares old ) & Katherine
Amos about 7 yeares old
Susanna about 5? yeares old

By January 1660, Michaell had died. One English servant, Samuell Maybant(?) was also listed in the estate appraisement (Haun 1986, i:91-92). Despite views about the practicality of black motherhood and childcare, they were realities white Virginians contended with from the early years of settlement.

Communication across racial lines perhaps was helped by the practice of bringing in enslaved blacks from Barbados. These individuals probably had some knowledge of the English language to facilitate interactions (E. Morgan 1975:327). Early Africans probably pooled their resources or worked in association with whites in motherhood and childcare. The census of 1625 shows two or more black males and females in at least two households. At least one black child was from one of these households. Some Africans probably had no desire to reproduce in a foreign country where they were uncertain of their status and future. Such factors should be considered in understanding black motherhood and childcare in the seventeenth century.

Whites legislated to control and degrade blacks and, by so doing, elevate the status of whites from the poorest and lowest classes. Morgan declared that it
became a matter of public policy in colonial Virginia to depict blacks as racially and socially inferior (E. Morgan 1975:330-331). Nevertheless, racial relations between blacks and whites were more flexible at this time than in later years. From his study of seventeenth-century Virginia, L. Daniel Mouer has suggested that interactions among Europeans, Indians, and Africans were more fluid during this time. Apparently the “clear relations of domination that would characterize later culture history in Virginia” was not evident (Mouer 1993:112).

Cooperation among different groups on early Virginian tobacco plantations has been inferred from artifacts from that period. Mouer discussed the formation of creole cultures derived from intercultural interactions. He analyzed data including locally-produced clay tobacco pipes known as Chesapeake pipes, and coarse earthenware called colonoware to support his thesis. Colonoware is frequently recovered from African-American sites particularly in Virginia and South Carolina (Ferguson 1992:125-146). It is mainly found in the forms of utilitarian pots, basins, and jars.

In speaking of pots and pipes, Mouer has argued,

That designs, functions and forms of colonoware pottery and Chesapeake pipes share elements from Indian, English, and African origins suggests that these elements were selected from among a large universe of designs and forms, and that it was the set of shared elements which came to characterize creole folk traditions in the Chesapeake. This is not simply acculturation. The mingling of European, African, and Indian peoples of diverse origins in the plantation quarters and trading networks of the colonial Chesapeake provided the social contexts for the development of creole cultures and these clearly creolized artifacts (Mouer 1996:146).
In his study of Chesapeake pipes dating from the 1630s to 1730s, Matthew Emerson also stressed interactive and intercultural craft production, assigning African influences to the decorations on the pipes, particularly to African motifs associated with rituals (Emerson 1999:61). The pipe in Figure 5 was found at the Rich Neck plantation in contexts dating to the seventeenth century. It displays a cross enclosed in a circle. See Chapter Four for a discussion of the significance of the cross mark. Many of the pipes were found at Flowerdew Hundred plantation, where some of the earliest blacks lived and worked. These materials may have been important to the well-being of Virginia’s Africans and early African-American residents.

Land records show that some early Africans were able to own lands (Foley 1990:69, 85). A court record of Accomack-Northampton, Virginia gives another insight into the nature of early relationships between whites and blacks. In 1645, Edwyn Conoway Clarke reported on an agreement between Captain Taylor and Anthony “a negro.” Taylor had gone to the quartering house for Anthony.
This deponent coming forth of the dwelling house did see Capt. Taylor and Anthony the negro going into the Corne Feild And when they return’d from the said Corne Feild the said Negro told this deponent saying now Mr. Taylor and I have devided our Corne And I am very glad of it now I know myne owne, hee finds fault with mee that I doe not worke but now I know myne owne ground I will worke when I please and play when I please, And the said Capt. Taylor asked the said Negro saying are you content with what you have And the negro answered saying I am very well content with what I have or to that effect, And further not (Ames 1973:457).

Apparently, here at least blacks and whites interacted with some level of equality.

In the second half of the seventeenth century, the social positions of whites of the middling and lower ranks of the society were elevated over those of blacks as whites promoted pride of race among themselves. In April 1669, a presumably indentured white servant, Hannah Warwick, had her case extenuated when she informed the court that a black overseer was her supervisor (Mcllwaine 1979:513). In 1681, some working class white men informed Frank, an enslaved man, that “they were not company for negroes.” Enslaved Frank had been sent by his mistress to negotiate a business transaction with these two men (Bruce 1968:138). Also instructive is the action of William Byrd I, who sent away his daughter to be schooled in England in 1684. He justified his decision on his observation that “she could learn nothing here in a great family of negroes” (Bruce 1968:152).

The cultural landscape, that is, the buildings, roadways, fields, and other human modifications to the natural landscape, provides evidence of social and power relations for different groups in Virginia during slavery. Carter Hudgins has insightfully noted that:

Virginians often took their bearings from material things - - from houses and fields, from yards and table settings. They did so
because in their world houses and fields, and the folks who lived in and tended them, were read as tangible evidence of success and failure, of ties to friends and the community, and of membership in the local social network or a wider social net, or both or neither (Hudgins 1990:59).

Therefore, changes in the landscape were also instructive about these relationships.

From the seventeenth century, but increasingly so during the eighteenth century, the mansion houses of the wealthiest Virginia planters were usually built of brick and were architecturally grand structures. They were set in planned landscapes with manicured lawns and gardens and had brick or wooden outbuildings or dependencies (Upton 1990; Hudgins 1990; Luccketti 1990; Kelso 1990; Pogue 1994). Another of Hudgins' adept descriptions of Tidewater Virginia is equally valuable towards an understanding of race and class relations in these years.

Yet however fitting the Tidewater's mansions are as symbol for the success of the elite, they are also symbolic of the decline of the economic and political fortunes of almost everybody else. While wealthy planters scattered brick mansions throughout the Tidewater, they reaped fortunes with the labor of unfree black men and women; lifelong tenancy became a greater and greater likelihood for many of the colony's free whites, and the chances that men who arrived in the colony as indentured servants might rise to modest affluence dwindled (Hudgins 1990:64).

The homes of less wealthy planters were built on a smaller scale of those of the elites but followed a similar layout. Enslaved laborers and poor whites, however, had houses that were alike in many respects, usually wooden buildings with sometimes only one or two rooms and with lofts (Sobel 1987:100).

Enslavers separated buildings, activities, and themselves spatially from their laborers. The various forms of accommodation within, around, and at a
distance from enslavers’ houses were explicit statements of the social, economic, and political divisions in the society. Some of these structures sheltered activities conducted by enslaved workers. Locating the living and working areas for laborers outside the main house threw black and white workers together, but, unlike the early years of the seventeenth century, the hierarchical relationship and racial differences were read differently, resulting in increased tensions between these groups. The laws that entrenched black enslavement elevated the social condition of white laborers, even if their living conditions remained similar to those of enslaved people.

Archaeological studies have indicated that this change in social relations and its impact on the well-being of the enslaved can also be inferred from colonoware. It was around the latter half of the seventeenth century that enslaved people were lodged in separate quarters and probably had to contribute more to their material well-being. They may have created colonoware to fulfill the need for cooking, serving, and storage vessels, as they no longer had access to the main house supplies (Deetz 1993:88-90). As archaeologists have only been able to study slave quarters that date from the 1670s and later, this assertion may be difficult to test for some time (Edwards-Ingram 2001a).

Other developments accelerated the processes of social tension, cultural struggle, and the increased disparity between rich and poor in the society. For example, agricultural production intensified and diversified, life expectancy increased, more towns were developed, more “professionally trained” doctors became available, and more of the enslaved were Virginian born. All these factors impacted too on enslaved people’s health and medicinal practices.
Race relations came to be manifested as racism in Virginia as whites used racist ideology and practices to “naturalize and rationalize” the enslavement of blacks (E. Morgan 1975; Epperson 1990, 1997; Berlin 1998). Terrence Epperson argues that racism includes practices of exclusion and incorporation (Epperson 1990). For instance, at main house complexes, enslaved people were included within work and even social activities but, at the same time, they were rendered “invisible” by enslavers’ practices of denying them specific areas of their own. As “invisible people,” the enslaved gained information that they could use to help themselves and others at the quarters.

These and other examples expose the “volatility of the experiences which collectively defined race” (Berlin 1998:1) in colonial Virginia. Ira Berlin characterized race as “the product of history” and noted that “it only exists on the contested social terrain in which men and women struggle to control their destinies” (Berlin 1998:1). Race can be viewed as an institution as well as an instituted ideology (Fields 1982; Epperson 1997; John 1999). Ideologies founded on the superiority of whites and the inferiority of blacks, in different forms and under a variety of conditions, governed social interactions in slave societies (John 1999).

Ira Berlin has suggested that nature of racial relations in slavery contributed to the intense interference of enslavers as they concerned themselves with the most intimate parts of the lives of the enslaved. He referred to these practices as the “domestication of domination” (Berlin 1998:99). This intense interference in the life of the enslaved was evident in health care. In 1739, Virginia planter William Drummond was most explicit in broadcasting the illness
of his enslaved man, Natt. This, probably, was not a complaint that Natt would have aired. Drummond’s advertisement shows how enslavers invaded privacy and made public intimate details about enslaved people.

RAN away, from the Subscriber, of James-City County, on Sunday the 17th Instant, a pale Complexion’d Mulatto Fellow, nam’d Natt, with strait Hair, about 2 or 3 Inches long. He is a thick, well-set Fellow, about 26 Years old; has several Black Moles on his Face, a full Mouth, Black Teeth, small Forehead, and broad Feet. He has lately had the foul Disease, the Ulcers on his Scrotum and Penis are not yet perfectly heal’d....(quoted in Windley 1983:9).

This description of Natt’s illness suggests that, when captured, runaways were subjected to detailed examinations to ascertain their identity. Undoubtedly, these practices were also meant to teach humiliation and subjugation. The attitude of whites towards the privacy of their enslaved black people can be read in other social actions. In the eighteenth century, Landon Carter gave his enslaved people the harsh drug of rattlesnake powder (*Polygala senega*) for “bilious fever” (Greene 1965, i:130-131; Erichsen-Brown 1989:359-362). He observed that the drug worked well but had some side effects. Some of Carter’s priorities are alluded to in his declaration: “I wish my own fears did not prevent my giving it to my Children” (Greene 1965, i:131).

Beverley John has argued that racial meanings and roles were based on material and non-material realities. He found that, “racial meaning were constructed by the dominant group in its own material interest and interpreted by the enslaved as an obstacle to their survival” (John 1999:50). It was inevitable that these different perceptions of racial meanings and roles would have resulted in the conflicts, negotiations, and accommodations evident in medicinal practices and motherhood, for these were among the key areas in which enslaved Africans

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and African Americans negotiated, established, and changed their places in social relations. While enslavers had considerable power over their enslaved people, these people were never powerless but through overt and covert practices built a life for themselves and prepared their children for adulthood.

In the area of health care, but far too infrequently, the payoffs for capitalizing on “black power” were enormous; for example, one could achieve freedom as well as compensation (Grimé 1979:67; Sobel 1987:99; P. Morgan 1998:625). In 1729, Virginia Lt. Governor William Gooch purchased James Pawpaw (Papaw), an old enslaved man of New Kent County, from Francis Littlepage. Pawpaw earned his freedom after he revealed the roots and barks that could cure yaws, a form of venereal disease. The Governor wanted Pawpaw to remain in contact with him for he wanted to learn about Pawpaw’s other “secrets” for expelling poisons and cures for other diseases. The colony offered Pawpaw an annual pension of twenty pounds if he would comply (Sobel 1987:99; P. Morgan 1998:625).

A somewhat similar case, from South Carolina, involved Old Caesar, an enslaved African, freed in 1749 and given a one hundred-pound annuity for revealing his cures for poisons and rattlesnake bites. The cure was mainly based on plantain roots and wild horehound (P. Morgan 1998:625). It is noted in J.U. and C.G. Lloyd, *Bulletin of the Lloyd Library of Botany, Pharmacy and Materia Medica*, (1903:462) that a Dr. Withering has found horehound to be “a favourite medicine with the ancients in obstructions of the viscera.—In large doses it loosens the belly. He says, that it is the principal ingredient in the Negro Cæsar’s
Figure 6: Eighteenth-century map of Williamsburg and environs, drawn by Nicholas Desandrouin. The Ludwell property (the Rich Neck plantation) is shown close to the main road leading from Williamsburg to nearby Jamestown (Rochambeau Collection, Library of Congress).

remedy for vegetable poisons.” He was probably referring to this enslaved man of South Carolina.

In 1792, a seventy-two year old man was cured of a kidney stone with a medication of “the expelled juice of red onions, and horsemint.” The cure was attributed to a black Virginian man who gained his freedom on revealing this remedy (Grimé 1979:67). At the lower end on the return scale, medical knowledge was a means to achieve some degree of autonomy and identity in caring for oneself, family, and community.

Urban areas like Williamsburg, the eighteenth century capital of Virginia, had several white doctors. In addition to this group of medical practitioners, midwives, apothecaries, and merchants prescribed and dispensed medicines
Some trades people (including barbers and blacksmiths) and professionals (like lawyers and religious ministers) administered and practiced medicine. Medical practitioners probably influenced enslaved people's knowledge of medicine. These laborers may have learned tidbits about the medical trade merely because of proximity.

Enslaved people in Williamsburg would have lived and interacted with their counterparts, both free and enslaved. By 1775, the population of Williamsburg was about 52% black and 48% white (Table 2). During the 1760s, there was likely a similar ratio. Many enslaved individuals who lived in Williamsburg were domestics and females outnumbered males. Some of these individuals were legally owned by doctors and may have acquired some knowledge about medicine (see Table 3).

In the area of midwifery, male medicinal practitioners advertised that they were available to serve (Blanton 1931:23). This area, from the seventeenth century, remained largely in the preserve of females and doctors were usually called in for difficult cases (Blanton 1931:22). Like the stories formerly enslaved women related about their practices of "letting nature has its course" during childbirth, apparently white midwives in colonial Virginia also waited and refrained from examining patients before the delivery of the baby. Doctors, on the other hand, were considered very quick to perform such examinations.

Historian Lorena Walsh found that local midwives in the Williamsburg area, from the 1740s to the 1770s, included Catherine Blaikley, Ann Fortune, Mary Clarke, Mrs Slater, and Granny Lester (or Lister). Fortune, Clarke, Slater,
Table 2.
Population of Williamsburg in the Late Eighteenth Century

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>894</td>
<td>986</td>
<td>1,880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>52.4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 3.
Doctors and Their Enslaved People in Williamsburg

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Owner</th>
<th>Slaves</th>
<th>Tithable Slaves</th>
<th>Slaves Under 16 Years Old</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Phi Barraud</td>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. James Carter</td>
<td>George, Jack-Beaver, Mary, Nanny, Phillis [,] Letty</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. William Carter</td>
<td>Tom, Sam, Agga, Billy, Judith, John, Ned</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. John Galt</td>
<td>Sam, Harry, Jenny, Rachel, Betty Lewis, Suckty, Polly, Jack, Billy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. John Segueyra</td>
<td>Cain, Sally</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: “A List of Taxable Articles in the City of Williamsburg Taken by Robert Nicolson for the Year 1783 Under the Revenue Act” (McGhan 1983:370-379).

Note: In Virginia during the colonial era, “the term “tithable” referred to a person who paid (or for whom someone else paid) one of the taxes imposed by the General Assembly... a poll tax or capitation tax was assessed on free white males, African American slaves, and Native American servants (both male and female), all age sixteen or older.” (The Library of Virginia, 2001).

and Lester presided at the birth of numerous black babies at Kingsmill and Carter’s Grove plantations not far from Williamsburg (Walsh 1997:174). Catherine Blaikley, who died in 1771 at the age of sixty six, was praised for being “an eminent midwife” who administered at the birth of several hundreds children.
(Blanton 1931:24; Walsh 1997:174). While Blaikley, Lester, and Slater were identified as white, "Fortune and Clarke cannot be further identified" (Walsh 1997:174). A free black midwife, Betty Armfield (or Amphill) was a tenant at Carter's Grove from about the 1780s to about 1813. She probably influenced midwifery and child caring practices among enslaved people at this plantation (Walsh 1997:175).

By the middle of the eighteenth century, male medicinal practitioners like George Gilmer, Jr. and Andrew Anderson of Williamsburg were advertising to serve in the "art of midwifery" (Blanton 1931:23). Apparently the female midwives were not pleased with this invasion and protested in the local paper. They denounced the practice of male midwives and blamed it for increased incidents of adulteries. Furthermore, these women vouched that female midwives were safer because they trusted to nature rather than forceps (Blanton 1931:23). Enslaved female midwives probably operated more openly on plantations rather than in towns for seemingly there are more references to their work in rural areas (Blanton 1931:24; Greene 1965, i:306, 514; Gundersen 1986:366).

The conditions of health care and the qualifications, competencies, and availability of doctors were significant factors that contributed to or prevented interactions in medicine (Blanton 1931:207-219). Finances may also have played a main part in decisions to use doctors. The high cost to employ the service of both medical practitioners and their prescribed medicines probably discouraged enslavers from using them to help enslaved people. A 1736 Act in Virginia legislated against the high cost of these practitioners' visits and medicines. The Act sought to regulate pricing by listing the rates surgeons, apothecaries, and
their apprentices were allowed to charge (Hening 1819, iv:509-10). Thus, in many rural areas, whites treated themselves, their families, guests, and their enslaved people. Planters spent considerable time dispensing and recommending different medicines, including herbal remedies. Fever, dysentery, and pains were common complaints upon which they administered or recommended medicines to treat their enslaved people (Blanton 1931:167-169).

In May 1704, one Middlesex County planter, Edwin Thacker, documented his expectations about how his estate should be managed after his demise. Apparently an enslaved man, mentioned in his management plan, was a doctor. Perhaps his medical knowledge and practice made him an appropriate candidate for the position. Thacker informed his inheritors that:

It is my will that in case my Executors finds Docter Jack or any of the negro men belonging to my said two sons to be trusty that they be Employed to Look after the rest of the said Negroes as my Executors shall see fitt allowing them provisions Equall to an overseer (viz i) halfe a middleing beebe one barrow Hogg for bacon and one small hogg for Pork and such other things as my Executors shall think reasonable for a trusty negro not allowing any of the negroes to keep any stock of their own (Thacker 1704).

Thus whites relegated higher social rankings to some enslaved people based on their medical knowledge and, at times, backed these with material benefits. Some enslavers provided more than the usual rations of food (mainly corn and meat) and had doctors attended their ill people (Fitzpatrick 1931-44, xxxvii:213-214; Farish 1957:38; Walsh 1997:179). Other enslavers actively dispensed medicines, at times, as mass treatment to ward off epidemics (Blanton 1931:168-169, 196-197; Greene 1965, i:130-131; E. Morgan 1975:318; Savitt 1978:150).
If knowledge was not readily exchanged, time, on the other hand, was a resource that was openly shared between blacks and whites to promote health and well-being. Some planters visited ill workers while members of the enslaved population helped take care of whites confined to bed. Virginia planter William Bryd II regularly visited his sick people. During one epidemic in 1711, he recorded:

I spent most of my time in looking after my sick .... My sick people were some worse and some well enough to go home to the quarters.... In the afternoon I did nothing but mind them.... At night I look over all my people.... I tended them diligently and went to the quarters to see the negroes there and gave the necessary orders about them.... I visited my people again (quoted in Mullin [1972] 1981:23).

Enslaved people did not benefit from some hours enslavers spent with them. In nearby North Carolina, one enslaver was sentenced to death for the murder of an enslaved female whom he exploited and oppressed even in motherhood.

Through a period of four months, including the latter stages of pregnancy, delivery, and recent recovery therefrom ... he beat her with clubs, iron chains, and other deadly weapons, time after time; burnt her; inflicted stripes over and often, with scourges, which literally excoriated her whole body; forced her to work in inclement seasons, without being duly clad; provided for her insufficient food; exacted labor beyond her strength, wantonly beat her because she could not comply with his requisitions. These enormities, beside others too disgusting to be particularly designated, the prisoner, without his heart once relenting, practiced ... even up to the last hours of his victim's existence (quoted in Genovese [1974] 1976:72).

Black women spent time nursing whites during and after slavery. Polly Valentine, a formerly enslaved nanny to Nathaniel Beverley Tucker's children in Williamsburg, Virginia, returned to the city to nurse her former enslaver when she learned that the mistress was ill (Edwards 1990:40). Her return suggests that
Valentine did not wish to appear as ungrateful for what her former enslavers had given her. Archaeological work has uncovered the remains of a pier-supported house they had built for her (Edwards 1990).

While planters called doctors to visit their plantations to treat the sick, they also recognized their enslaved residents' medicinal skills in midwifery and other areas. They depended on these skills to help their enslaved population to stay healthy (Blanton 1931:173). The widespread practice of "private doctoring" in rural areas discouraged trained doctors from settling in these places. This probably helped the popularity of African-American medicine. In 1760, Colonel James Gordon found that he had offended a white doctor. He wrote in his diary that Dr. Robertson "came & agreed to attend to Mr. C. as a surgeon, he had been somewhat displeased for employing a negro doctor before him" (quoted in Blanton 1931:173). Whites and blacks interacted on various planes in health care and medicinal practices, but these encounters show that different notions and goals motivated these two groups of people.

Some enslavers were ambivalent about slavery but were unwilling to free enslaved persons. In 1803, Robert Carter of Shirley Plantation in Tidewater Virginia, described his dilemma as a slaveholder to his children.

Be humane to your slaves, and dependents. Tho it has ever been a wish near my heart to have avoided entailing the miseries of slavery upon my children yet from circumstances which I could not entirely control it seems likely that you are to inherit this misfortune. Partial emancipation as it has been conducted in this state has certainly been attended with inconveniences to society, in a variety of respects, but the circumstance which has tended most to suspend my determination on this subject, is, that a freed man in this state, is often placed in a situation less desirable by emancipation, than by holding him in slavery, under humane treatment (Carter 1803).
Historian Eugene Genovese described the predicament of Carter, and others like him, as fostering an ideology of slavery that depicted it as “a duty and a burden” (Genovese [1974] 1976:75-86). He argued that this ideology was rooted in social relationships; further it was self-serving and pro-slavery even though the enslaver seemed on the surface to protest against the burden — on himself. Robert L. Dabney of Virginia wrote “it seems to me, there could be no greater curse inflicted on us than to be compelled to manage a parcel of Negroes” (quoted in Genovese [1974] 1976:80). Some enslavers believed that it was their Christian duty to help the enslaved for these people were incapable of taking care of themselves (Genovese [1974] 1976). The enslaved population, in return, was required to give their labor to their protectors and providers — their enslavers. Thus enslavers justified the oppression and exploitation of blacks. Enslaved people, however, did not wholly accept messages of enslavers’ economic and social superiority and suggestions about black inferiority. They promoted their health and well-being by influencing social practices and challenging the authority implicit in the social structure.

**Motherhood and Childcare**

DESPITE THEIR INTIMATE CONTACTS WITH NEGROES, THE American colonists generally made little conscious effort to assess the nature of the people they enslaved and took to bed. They felt no pressing need for assessment because both the Negro and slavery were, by and large, self-explanatory. Negroes were people from Africa bought for the purpose of performing labor. What fact could be more obvious and natural, less demanding of explanation? --Jordon 1968:179.

Contradictions were deeply embedded in the social relationships of slave society and whites predominantly created them; for example, “they defined blacks as savage, then entrusted them with their children” (John 1999:46). White
children, however, failed to understand the message of “black inferiority” and constantly sought the companionship of black children and adults. They frequented places like the stables, work buildings, slave quarters and areas that were considered the domains of the enslaved (Tinling 1977:682; Sobel 1987:137). Black cultural practices influenced the lifeways of whites from childhood and on purpose. If white children could be ‘civilized’ while young through the efforts of their care givers, they might in turn grow up to be more easily influenced by blacks’ requests and to offer the reciprocity owed back to the caregiver.

Denials were as universal as contradictions. They were inherent in whites’ devaluation of blacks as inferior people in interracial interactions; historian Beverly John has described these relationships as “amplified interdependency” (John 1999:46). Eugene Genovese’s classic, Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made ([1974] 1976), discusses dependent relations in slavery. One might disagree with some of the tenets of his arguments, such as his view of Atlantic slavery as a class system or how he concluded that the resistance of the individual defused the collective resistance of the group. However, other observations have stood the test of time. For instance, his insistence that the master-slave relationship is the major unit for analysis for plantation communities is still valid (Johnson 2001:1). Genovese defined the main features of the relationship between blacks and whites during slavery as:

Cruel, unjust, exploitative, oppressive, slavery bound two peoples together in bitter antagonism while creating an organic relationship so complex and ambivalent that neither could express the simplest human feelings without reference to the other (Genovese [1974] 1976:3).
He also argued that the master/slave relationship was a particular form of class relation and further that it was paternalistic. Since “it grew out of the necessity to discipline and morally justify a system of exploitation. It did encourage kindness and affection, but it simultaneously encouraged cruelty and hatred” (Genovese [1974] 1976:4).

Here the racist practice that viewed enslaved people as perpetual children becomes especially important. From this perspective, childcare has tremendous implications for understanding the nature of race and social relations in slave society. The ideology and practice of slavery depicted blacks as a childlike people incapable of taking care of themselves or their children. Many experiences of the enslaved were the outcomes of enslavers’ tendency to view and treat them as dependent children. Whites sought to homogenize blacks, sometimes making no distinction between parents and children. In fact, children were treated as small adults and given hard field labor (Perdue et al. 1976:292). Parents witnessed the degradation of children and vice versa. For example, the entire enslaved community suffered because of the rape of the females and it shared the males’ anguish over their inability to protect their women and children, much less themselves (Fox-Genovese 1988:192-194).

This anguish is evident in a letter from a self-emancipated Henry Bibb from Detroit in 1844 to William Gatewood (Blassingame 1977:48-49). Bibb wrote,

To be compelled to stand by and see you whip and slash my wife without mercy, when I could afford her no protection, not even by offering myself to suffer the lash in her place, was more than I felt it to be the duty of a slave husband to endure, while the way was open to Canada. My infant child was also frequently flogged by Mrs.
Gatewood, for crying, until its skin was bruised literally purple. This kind of treatment was what drove me from home and family, to seek a better home for them.

However, he was willing to continue the healing process that began when he escaped to freedom. Bibb continued,

But I am willing to forget the past. I should be pleased to hear from you again, on the reception of this, and should also be very happy to correspond with you often, if it should be agreeable to yourself. I subscribe myself a friend to the oppressed, and Liberty forever.

HENRY BIBB (quoted in Blassingame 1977:49).

Among the practices of infantilism were the frequent whippings enslaved adults were forced to endure. Enslaved people stifled their feelings of shame and modesty as they were stripped naked for punishment (Perdue et al. 1976:150, 157). Other formerly enslaved individuals recalled that some of their fellow sufferers were beaten so often that they no longer had any of their original skin (Perdue et al. 1976:161, 162). Whipping is discussed again in Chapter Four where it is linked to the symbolic use of plants and in Chapter Five as an injury needing medication.

Whites represented adult blacks as infants and inferiors in cartouches, paintings, and prints. For instance, the cartouche on a series of maps of Virginia and Maryland by Joshua Fry and Peter Jefferson depicted blacks as diminutive figures in diaper-like clothing (Sobel 1987:92-93). Even when richly dressed, blacks were portrayed in ways intended to boost white's symbols of wealth. In John Hesselius' 1761 painting of Charles Calvert, grandson of the fifth Lord Baltimore, a black servant boy is shown most sumptuously attired like his white companion (Yentsch 1994:287). However, it is important to note that while Calvert is standing, the black boy is kneeling.
White Virginians had definite conceptions about the work and place of white women and these were different from the ones that were reserved for blacks. The laws of Virginia allowed for black women to be counted as taxable individuals while white women were exempted (Hening 1819, iii:258-259). In 1658, Thomas Andrew and Robert Stanton of Surry County agreed to an indenture to apprentice Andrew's daughter to Stanton and his wife Mary. Ann Andrews was to serve for five years:

In such service as Stanton & wife shall employ her as fit for a woman and no other... and to find Ann meat and drink, apparell and lodging and teach her, or cause her to be taught to read, and instructed in the Christian religion and to sew and other things as women should know (Davis 1980:28).

In her monumental work on white and black women in slavery, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has argued that enslavers could violate their enslaved people's ideas about gender relations:

Black women could be set to work considered unfit for white women. Slave women could be separated from their children and husbands and could be subject to a sexual violation that would have offended the honor and evoked the murderous retaliation of the husbands and fathers of white women. Violations of the norm painfully reminded slaves that they did not enjoy the full status of their gender, that they could not count on the "protection"—however constraining and sometimes hypocritical — that surrounded white women (Fox-Genovese 1988:193-194).

In *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*, Hazel V. Carby wrote, "within the economic, political, and social system of slavery, women were at the nexus of its reproduction" (Carby 1987:24). She argued that the children of black women were property, the capital of the South. The children of white women inherited this capital (Carby 1987:24-25,31). At times, "this capital" was a family member. For as Susanne Lebsock has
noted, "of all of slavery's bizarre cruelties, this was among the worst: Some slave children were half brothers and half sisters of the all-white children who would one day inherit them" (Lebsock 1987:75).

Elite planters and enslavers passed laws that differentiated the children of white women from those of enslaved black women. In 1662, Virginia legislators decided that the children of enslaved women should inherit the enslaved status of their mothers as outlined below,

WHEREAS some doubts have arrisen whether children got by any Englishman upon a negro woman should be slave or free, Be it therefore enacted and declared by this present grand assembly, that all children borne in this country shalbe held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother (Hening 1819, II:170).

This statute profoundly influenced perceptions about motherhood for black enslaved women and white. Opposing concepts of motherhood underlay and reinforced the hierarchical relationship of black women and white women. Enslaved women as "laborers and breeders" were linked to "illicit sexuality," while the "purity" of white women as well as the attainment of motherhood were glorified within varying degrees throughout the years of slavery (Lebsock 1987:75; Carby 1987:23-32). Carby insisted that social and racial practices during slavery impeded the sisterhood of white women and black women. She described the complex social structure in which these women interacted.

The barriers to the establishment of the bonding of sisterhood were built in the space between the different economic, political, and social positions that black women and white women occupied in the social formation of slavery. Their hierarchical relationship was determined through a racial, not gendered, categorization (Carby 1987:55).
Eugene Genovese noted that to enhance the separation between black women and white women “black women were referred to, in the old days [slavery time] not merely as “girls” (or even “women,” in sharp contradistinction to “ladies”), but less ambiguously as “wenches” ” (Genovese [1974] 1976:117).

Based on notions of racial supremacy, white women were placed in positions of power over black women. Enslaved black women may have interacted frequently with white women who were mistresses, planters’ daughters, and overseers’ wives, rather than heads of households. Nevertheless, the social positions of white women were buttressed by economic power. Some white women, with whom enslaved blacks contended, were themselves enslavers. These positions provided white women with opportunities to exert tremendous influence in the lives of black women such as administering punishments, bequeathing their children to other whites, and even granting them freedom (Lebsock 1987:76; Anzillot 1997:262-263).

White men subordinated women, both white and black. But the laws and racial practices did not see these women as equal. White women did not seek any significant alignment or comradeship with black women and any disenchantment they harbored about white male dominance was not seen as any great threat to the social hierarchy of plantation society. In fact, some white women worked to uphold this hierarchy even when they had the economic base to challenge it (Anzilotti 1997:239-268). For instance, they worked to ensure that their sons gained places of prominence in estate transactions and inheritance. Elevating white women racially and legally over blacks helped to resolve some of the
contradictions in the social relations between women in their subordination to white men (Carby 1987:31).

It is evident from this discussion that it is important to consider diversity among women and not to assume any monolithic affiliation based on gender (Cook 1997). Lauren Cook argues that gender is a “meaningful element of human cognition and interaction” and that it is realized in “operation and action, rather than in stasis” (Cook 1997:23). For Cook, gender is a social, rather than an anatomical phenomenon, and a distinction must be made between the physical reality of sexual difference and the social reality of gender. The substantial anatomical and physiological differences between men and women leave a strong temptation to take them as a baseline for social differences (Cook 1997:23-24).

While gender is basic to understanding plantation society, Beverly John found that in some ways it was defined and used differently for blacks.

Black exploitation was not gender specific. Neither black men nor women were afforded the social or physiological distinctions usually made regarding gender. Both men and women were laborers, and women were ranked in relationship to men, not as a category to themselves (John 1999:43).

There is no denial that gender was considered in sexual and reproductive matters. John, for instance, claimed that enslaved black women’s exploitation was far worse than that of their male counterparts. In fact, he described it as twofold for these women were “productive as laborers and procreators, which ensured an ongoing labor force” (John 1999:44).

was an event that was shared among women. Both black women and white women were midwives and attended the deliveries of children of either race (Blanton 1931:173-175; Savitt 1978:182-183; Walsh 1987:132, 173, 175).

Doctors were also called to serve in this area. Landon Carter, for example, paid doctors for extreme cases but relied heavily on his enslaved people to assist themselves (Greene 1965, i:306, 514). Joan R. Gundersen explained, “the physical act of giving birth may have been one of the most significant ways in which black and white women served each other in a single community” (Gundersen 1986:367). She also alluded to negative gains by suggesting that this participation might have caused some black women to “abandon some of their African traditions” (Gundersen 1986:360). Gundersen, however, failed to identify these traditions. Nevertheless, her suggestion sounds plausible based on “folk traditions” recorded for formerly enslaved people (see Chapter Five).

Black fathers had strong interests in the health and well-being of black mothers and children from the early years of Virginia’s colonization. Enslavement, however, worked to make fathers less significant by recognizing the mother-child relation as the main economic and legal relationship that was important to the society. As enslaved people exerted their humanity, the contradictions in the social relations of slavery overrode these economic and legal factors, often making black fathers recognizably as important as black mothers.

According to a York County, Williamsburg document, a black servant named Mihill Gowen was to be freed by his legal master Christopher Stafford’s will (York County 1657-1782). In carrying out the provisions of the will, Stafford’s sister Amy Barnhouse also freed Gowen’s son William. Barnhouse did not free
William’s mother, Prosta, whom she legally owned. However, she noted that several good causes and considerations prompted her decision to free young William. Evidently, Gowen had shown that he cared for his son. One wonders about the conditions that caused Barnhouse to keep Prosta as an enslaved person and how this decision impacted the life of Gowen and baby William. She may simply have been too valuable a worker and producer of more enslaved capital for her enslaver. It is possible that Prosta was instrumental in securing the freedom of her husband and son. She may have sacrificed her own chance of liberty to ensure that her son gained freedom.

Enslaved women may have worked harder in the pursuit of freedom for their families than historical documents have revealed. Perhaps Ann Ashby, the wife of Matthew Ashby, a free black man in eighteenth-century Williamsburg, assisted her husband in her own purchase and in the freedom of their two children, John and Mary. Ashby used the legal system to keep his family together. On November 27, 1769, the court recorded:

On the Petition of Matthew Ashby, a free Mulatto setting forth that he had two Children by his present Wife Ann Ashby, while she was a Slave to Samuel Spurr, that he bought her and the two Children of the said Spurr for one hundred and fifty pounds, that he has now two Children alive by her John and Mary, that she has been a faithful and diligent Wife ever since marriage, and praying that he may be permitted to set her and his Children free; the Board being satisfied therein, were of opinion, that the said Ann, John and Mary were deserving of their freedom, and it was order’d that the said Matthew Ashby have leave to Manumit and set them free (Hillman 1966:334-335).

In his will of April 15, 1771, Matthew Ashby provided for his family’s well-being.
In the name of God Amen. Matthew Ashby being sick of body but of sound sense & memory do make and ordain this my last will & testament in manner following. I resign my soul to God trusting in the merits & mediation of my dear Redeemer Jesus Christ for the pardon of all my sins & as to my worldly goods which it has pleased God to bless me with I give & bequeath the whole after my funeral expenses & just debts are paid to my good friend John Blair, esqr. In trust for the maintenance & support of my loving wife Ann Ashby & for her education and maintenance of my two children John and Mary Ashby in a good christian way with the approbation of my said trustee to whom I hereby appoint my exr. Of this my will. IN WITNESS whereof I here unto set my hand & seal this 25th day of November 1769 in Williamsburg.

Matt. Ashby
X his mark.

(York County 1657-1782)

A nineteenth-century narrative about slavery in North Carolina also illustrates a black father's fight to be significant to his children. In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Linda Brent described her brother's struggle in trying to obey both his father and his mistress who had called for him. Her brother went to the mistress much to the disapproval of his father. She noted her father's outburst in reproving his son, "You are my child,... and when I call you, you should come immediately, if you have to pass through fire and water" (Yellin 1987:9).

The separation of children from mothers through sales and as gifts was a risk that enslaved mothers had to seek to ameliorate, but they may have been powerless to affect these transactions. It would be interesting to know how the mother of the infant, described below, dealt with her case. In August 1824, H. Dulaney sold an infant to John F. Brown of Culpeper County in what might have been "an unusual" transaction. Dulaney received thirty dollars from Brown for a one-month old boy named John. The child, however, was to stay with the mother
until he was weaned. In addition, Brown was to pay for boarding and clothing the child (Brown Family 1824). Perhaps the child's name is a clue to who had fathered him — John F. Brown, his purchaser, may have been his father. The mother was not sold along with her child.

In African-American literature, the theme of love and loss takes central place. For example, in the acclaimed novel Beloved, Toni Morrison detailed the perils of love in the life of an enslaved person, particularly the enslaved woman. After gaining freedom, loving was still perilous for many African Americans. Beloved documented the love of family, self-help, and the assistance of sympathetic others — including whites — in blacks' searches for freedom and autonomy. The matriarch of the story, grandmother Baby Suggs, gained her freedom when her son, Halle, purchased her. Halle had hired out himself to pay for her freedom. He was her "eighth and last child," the only one "she was able to keep the longest. Twenty years" (Morrison 1987:23).

Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn't run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized (Morrison 1987:23).

In spite of the separation of families through sales and other exploitations, some enslaved children knew both parents (Genovese [1974] 1976:482-501). In addition, the extended families of related and unrelated individuals played central roles in enslaved communities. Both enslaved people and their enslavers worked to keep black families together, perhaps not always based on the same assumptions about family. Thus, by continuing to explore the intricacies of race relations as lived experiences we can understand more clearly how they impacted the health and well-being of African Americans.
**Enslaved Women: Reproduction and Production**

Slavery severely tested the link between parent and child but never broke it.


The Negroes are not only increased by fresh supplies from Africa and the West India Islands, but also are very prolific among themselves; and they that are born there talk good English, and affect our language, habits, and customs.


The exploitation of enslaved women epitomized one of the principal atrocities of slavery for “as laborers and producers of children for the market, slave women were objects of sexual desire as well as profitable commodities” (Braxton 1989:20). Historians have generally agreed that enslaved people on the North American mainland, unlike other enslaved populations, were able to have more births than deaths, thus increasing their numbers naturally and allowing enslavers to depend on American-born blacks as workers (Menard 1977:387-390; Kulikoff 1977:391; Berlin 1998:127-128). Although Africans started arriving in Virginia as early as 1619, a naturally increasing enslaved population was an eighteenth-century phenomenon. Factors including high rates of mortality, mobility, an unbalanced sex ratio, and tensions among African Americans themselves, impeded the natural growth of the population (Menard 1975:387; Kulikoff 1977:398-400). Planters were only able to significantly reduce their purchases of Africans when natural increase became a strong factor of enslaved Virginians’ life.

Before 1710, the number of blacks in the Chesapeake increased rapidly from importation, rather than by natural increase (Kulikoff 1977:391). Historian
Ira Berlin has argued, "by 1730 almost 40 percent of the black people in the Chesapeake Colonies were native to the region" (Berlin 1998:127). Both importation and natural increase were responsible for the large presence of blacks in the first half of the eighteenth century, but, by the second half, the black population's growth was largely a product of natural increase (Kulikoff 1977:391; Berlin 1998:127-128).

In 1736, William Byrd II expressed concern about the growing number of blacks in Virginia. He attributed the increase to procreation but emphasized that the excessive import practices of his fellow white Virginians were also a major factor. Byrd feared possible insurrections by blacks. He also commented on the racial and other social attitudes of white Virginians.

They import so many Negros hither, that I fear this colony will some time or other be confirmed by the name of New Guinea. I am sensible of many bad consequences of multiplying these Ethiopians amongst us. They blow up the pride, & ruin the industry of our white people, who seeing a rank of poor creatures below them, detest work for fear it should make them look like slaves (Tinling 1977:487-488).

Eighteen years earlier, in 1718, Byrd had evaluated his estate and noted that it consisted of "above 43000 acres of land, about 220 Negros, with a vast stock of every kind upon it" (Tinling 1977:313). Byrd's enslaved population probably was increasing naturally by 1736 for him to develop a preference for Virginia-born or creole blacks and to decry importation of Africans.

In the eighteenth century, Virginian planters encouraged a naturally-increasing enslaved population by, for example, importing larger number of females, for "it allowed them to transfer much of the cost of reproducing the workforce to the workers themselves" (Berlin 1998:127). Thomas Jefferson
observed “a woman who brings a child every two years [is] more profitable than the best man on the farm [for] what she produces is an addition to the capital, while his labor disappears in mere consumption” (quoted in Berlin 1998:127). On purchasing two fifteen-year-old girls, another enslaver remarked about the advantage of having “young breeding negroes” (quoted in Berlin 1998:127).

Planters used material means to influence enslaved people's motherhood and childrearing practices in ways that would benefit the system. Thomas Jefferson rewarded his enslaved workers with housing (Sobel 1987:111). Planters in other slave societies tried other incentives. In the nineteenth century, Matthew Lewis instituted honors for mothers including a “play-day” for enslaved people on his Jamaican plantation (Lewis 1834:191-193). One honor allowed mothers to wear a “scarlet girdle” and to receive special attention and favors. In spite of incentives and indulgences, childbirth remained low on his plantation. Only about 12 to 13 children were added annually to his enslaved people, who numbered above 330, with females outnumbering males (Lewis 1834:320-321). Lewis blamed illness as one factor contributing to high infant mortality. But the females on Lewis’s plantation may have taken special steps to keep the birth rate low by using contraceptives from plants and other methods.

Enslaved people on the American mainland were a prolific people (Kulikoff 1977). Yet, like enslavers, they were very concerned about health and their children. This area of apparent shared concern (though not necessarily for similar reasons) has been the subject of scholarly research. Researchers have identified common stresses affecting enslaved people. These include nutritional deficiencies, parasites, respiratory diseases, dysentery, and normal complications
of childbirth, violence, and occupational hazards (Savitt 1978:49-82, 115-129; Kelley and Angel 1987; Kiple 1988; Steckel 1988; Khudabux 1999; Blakey 2001). Analyses of the skeletal remains from the African Burial Ground in New York have revealed the traumas and stresses of urban slavery for both children and adults. The skeletal remains of children, for example, exhibited signs of anemia, infectious diseases, and malnutrition while those of adults exhibited numerous fractures and other injuries from hard labor (Blakey 2001:412).

In addition, women's work, conditions of the living areas, policies concerning motherhood, and unsatisfactory provisioning of foods affected the health of mothers and children (Steckel 1988:197). Evidence from eighteenth-century diaries shows dysentery, cholera, typhoid, measles, worms, and respiratory illnesses to be common among enslaved Virginians (Barton 1804:52-53; Blanton 1931:157-158, 163-169; Tinling 1977:528; Savitt 1978:121, 172). In 1738, William Byrd II praised the medicinal value of the rattlesnake root and noted that it was a particularly effective cure for worms, "which makes its valuable in this country, where most of the children that dye, and most of the Negros, dye of worms" (Tinling 1977:528).

Mortality remained very high among the younger population as they died from dysentery, typhoid, smallpox, malaria and, other illnesses (Blanton 1931:163; Lebsock 1987:182). Families and households, both white and black, changed as children arrived and departed. One eighteenth-century enslaved woman in Virginia lost seven children, all below the age of ten. The deaths alarmed the enslaved population (Farish 1957:182). Enslaved and free women
could expect to bear from six to nine children, although there are reports of women who bore up to thirteen (Farish 1957:39; Lebsock 1987:42).

In nineteenth-century Virginia, dysentery, respiratory illnesses, and diseases of the nervous system were leading causes of infant death in Staunton, Petersburg, Augusta County, and Southampton County (Savitt 1978:121). Richard Steckel argued that although infant mortality was a problem for both whites and blacks in the nineteenth century, the effect was worse on the black population. More enslaved children died than white children, with the average of death being two enslaved children to one white child in the nineteenth-century South (Steckel 1988:217).

In the American Lower South during the nineteenth century, many enslaved women's pregnancies ended in stillbirths or the death of infants in the first year (Steckel 1988:197; Yentsch 1994:307). Table 4 shows a vivid picture of mortality: almost one half of the children died before their mothers on Pierce Butler's plantation in Georgia from 1838 to 1839. There was ample justification for Frances Kemble's concerns about the living and working conditions of enslaved people there (Kemble [1863] 1992; Yentsch 1994:307). Miscarriages among enslaved mothers were very high at almost 22 percent of the birth rate.

Historian U.B. Phillips believed that having children was advantageous to enslaved mothers. In his work, he regarded enslaved adults as childlike and irresponsible. His views imply a blindness to enslaved people's discontent with slavery. Phillips suggested,

as a rule, perhaps, babies were even more welcome to slave women than to free; for childbearing brought lightened work during pregnancy and suckling, and a lack of ambition conspired with a
freedom from economic anxiety to clear the path of maternal impulse (Phillips [1929] 1963:204-205).

Table 4.
Births and Miscarriages on a Plantation in Georgia during the Nineteenth Century

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enslaved Women</th>
<th>Births</th>
<th>Miscarriages</th>
<th>Children Living</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fanny</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanny</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah*</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sukey</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


This narrow interpretation of enslaved women’s fecundity implies that they were collaborating in their own enslavement by being prolific. Another perspective on this topic suggests how enslavers manipulated the system to ensure that they gained the most. Frances Kemble described the dilemma of enslaved women who used pregnancies as a means to gain more rest and food. However, this provided only a short reprieve for them; plantation management did not allow these women to spend much time with their babies. The latter were usually left to the care of young children (Kemble [1863] 1992:61). Management
did not lessen the amount of work allotted to women who had several children. Their work load was similar to that of younger women who had no children.

A formerly enslaved woman, May Satterfield, recalled what her mother told her about the exploitation of women during slavery:

Ma mama said that in dem times a nigger 'oman couldn't help herself, fo' she had to do what de marster say. Ef he come to de field whar de women workin' an' tell gal to come on, she had to go. He would take one down in de woods an' use her all de time he wanted to, den send her on back to work. Times nigger 'omen had chillun for de marster an' his sons and some times it was fo' de ovah seer. Dat's whar ha'f white niggers come from den (Perdue et al. 1976:245).

It is obvious that enslavers sought to maintain and increase their labor force and tried to deal with events of birth and illness of children that interfered with the daily operations of the plantation. In addition to the loss of productivity in terms of labor performed by children, plantation management had to contend with the lost labor time of mothers, midwives, and caregivers who attended mothers during childbirth and nursed children during illnesses. Midwives, for example, worked simultaneously as plantation laborers, nurses, doctors, and morticians (Greene 1965; Perdue et al. 1976). Undoubtedly, their work was important to health care on plantations.

Yet, the activities of black midwives could prove extremely unfavorable to the economics of plantation life. In 1766, Landon Carter complained:

27 more turkies hatched, so that there would have been at the Fork 113 in all; but as the old woman is a midwife and was obliged to attend Manuel's daughter Peg 4 of the formerly 86 dyed in the last wet weather (Greene 1965, i:306).

Carter lost in other ways by the hands of his midwife, perhaps the same old woman. His "old midwife" had incorrectly apprised Carter that an unborn
child was dead. Carter had paid a doctor to attend the enslaved mother in delivering the “dead” child, only to learn later that the mother had not been in labor. After the doctor left, the mother delivered the child. Carter was upset that he had paid the doctor a fee, which the latter had not earned, because of the midwife’s false alarm (Greene 1965, i:514).

Planters lost the labor time of the enslaved when mothers prevented their children from being sent to work too early or took measures to prolong periods of recuperation from illnesses. Formerly enslaved Amelia Walker told her interviewer that she was “sickly as a chile” and therefore was spared from going to work until the master thought otherwise. She recalled that she used to wait in the shade until her mother finished working. Her mother’s task was comparable to those allotted to men.

Mama plowed wid three horses — ain’t that som’p’? Thought women was ’posed to work ‘long wid men, I did. One day Marsa saw me playin’ roun’ an’ said, “Ain’t nothin’ matter wid dat gal.” Put me in de fiel’ de nex’ day— weedin’ corn. Sho’ foun’ what fiel’ work was about arter dat. Guess I was bout ten years old, an’ mama was mad fit to kill ’case dey done put her sick darter to work. Worked dat season, but dat was de onliest one. Nex’ year de war come an’ Marse went ’way to de fightin’. Us slaves worked den when we felt like it, which wasn’t often (Perdue et al. 1976:292).

White enslavers were at a disadvantage when illnesses rendered their black workers incapable. The enslaved population understood this dependency and sought to influence it to their advantage. They learned that they could negotiate, establish, and change their place in social relationships. These activities were enacted to establish autonomy and well-being. In addition to the acts of reciprocity mentioned above, enslaved people absented themselves from their duties, argued about work time, ran away and appeared openly in towns,
among other subversive activities. In eighteenth-century Williamsburg, one runaway enslaved woman was reported as frequently seen in the marketplace selling cakes and oysters (Windley 1983:211-212).

The enslaved were also called lazy. Yet, how can one be “ambitious” to work for life by force? A more realistic picture of enslaved people’s lifeways emerges when one examines the interrelated factors of their beliefs, ideals, and hopes that were translated and realized in activities to guarantee health and well-being.

Wrestling with Enslaved Mothers: The Enslavers’ Dilemma or Whose Fight was it Anyway?

The conditions of slavery both encouraged and hindered the maternal desires and aspirations of enslaved women. The prospect of rearing children, defined legally and socially as slaves, may have caused many women to practice preventive measures against pregnancy, to run away with their children, and even to engage in desperate measures like killing their offspring (Windley 1983:53, 103; Gilroy 1993:64-67, 219-220; P. Morgan 1998:540). Advertisements for the return of runaway enslaved women, for instance, noted that they were in advanced stages of pregnancy or that they absconded with children, as the following examples clearly illustrate.

May 28, 1767

RUN away, last night, from the subscriber in Chesterfield county,...A large fellow named JACK,...the fellow has carried off a wench, who is his wife, and a child of about 6 years old....

Yorktown, November 12, 1771

RUN away from Williamsburg, last Week, a tall slim Negro Woman named RACHEL, clothed in green Half-thicks, which Dress she may have changed, has a Scar on one of her Eyes, and is big with Child. Whoever will deliver her to the Subscriber, at York, or secures her so that she may be had again, shall have TWENTY SHILLINGS Reward.

ALLEN JONES (quoted in Windley 1983:103).

In April 1795, William Jessee made a public appeal for the return of his enslaved woman who had run away from his Middlesex County property in November 1794:

A mulatto woman slave, named MARY, about 26 years; and took with her two of her children, one a boy sucking at the breast named Billy; the other a girl named Lidia, about 9 years old (VHFA 1792-1795).

In July of the same year (1795), John Scott of Fredericksburg advertised that his “Negro Woman named Jane” took her two small children, a boy named Solomon and a girl called Rendor, when she went away. Apparently the mother had recently nursed Solomon for “the boy has just got thro’ the small pox, and shows the marks very plain” (VHFA 1792-1795).

A famous case illustrating an enslaved woman’s view of the irrationality of slavery is that of Margaret Garner, who in 1851 killed her baby daughter to prevent her from being returned to slavery (Gilroy 1993:64-67, 219-220,234). In fact, she had also intended to kill all four of her boys but was prevented when others came to their aid. Garner had escaped from Kentucky to Ohio where the law and enslavers had pursued her. Using the Garner’s tragedy, Toni Morrison developed a fictional story exploring the nature of love between black women and their children in her novel, Beloved (1988).
In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Linda Brent resorted to choosing the white father of her children because she feared she would have to bear children for whites anyway, particularly those of her legal owner. She took control of her own body, a contested terrain in the fight between her and her "master." Jacobs's action shows that the enslaved exercised conditional power in unexpected ways even if all the choices appeared evil (Yellin 1987). Many enslaved women became mothers without having any expressed desire for motherhood.

Yet, other enslaved females apparently encouraged motherhood and nurtured healthy children, for they never fully accepted that either their children or themselves were property. Some enslaved women and men may have welcomed children, believing that children "ensured personal immortality through living memory" (La Roche 1994:15). Fertility and procreation likely were perceived as sacred functions and enslaved women probably used beads, including waist beads, to influence activities in these areas. Evidence from the African burial ground suggests the use of waist beads in colonial New York (La Roche 1994:8-10). See Chapter Five for more on this topic. Over the centuries African women have worn waist beads and they are implicated in procreation and fertility (La Roche 1994:14-15). Childbearing may have been one way for the enslaved woman to express her individuality as well as her attachment to the community (Gilroy 1993:219). Children were testimonies to enslaved peoples' determination to survive, of their faith as members of the slave community, and their hope for a better life and freedom. Children were at the center of some women's struggles to establish and sustain health, well-being, and respectability.
Lucille Mair believed that black motherhood during slavery became "a catalyst for much of women's subversive and aggressive strategies directed against the might of the plantation" (Mair 1986:11). Enslaved women employed verbal protests as well as other actions to fight back against the injustices of slavery. Enslavers wanted to control enslaved people's lives and this included control of their bodies. When enslavers and enslaved mothers met in the arena of medicine and well-being issues, power kept shifting. At times, planters were at a disadvantage for they were uninformed or partially informed participants.

Landon Carter, for instance, found that an enslaved mother chose to treat her own child's illness rather than seek his assistance. She kept the illness of her "suckling child" a secret "until it was almost dead" (Savitt 1978:172). The child was suffering with the measles and was kept at the slave quarter. Carter almost lost "his property" because of the ability of his enslaved people to withhold knowledge. In spite of his attempts to be informed about his "people's" activities, Carter was not always aware of happenings at the slave quarter. He, however, took action when he was informed:

Last night at bedtime Nelly came bellowing about her girl about 6 years old all swelled up to the eyes; I ordered the child to be brought up, but Mrs. Impudence sent me word she could not be brought up. I do suppose she has been stuffing Potatoes for some time and possibly full of worms as they are a fine pabulum for them. This morning I first gave her sweet oil, a spoonful, that if anything had stung her the Poison might be enveloped and obtunded (Greene 1965, ii:865).

Carter also had a remedy for Nelly's behavior and described how she had neglected her children:

I will be particularly careful to have her mother whipped when she is well for, notwithstanding her Pretence about her Children, she is
a jade so fiery in her temper and her lusts that the children are oft left by her whilst she is running about to satiate her desires. Perhaps she is the oddest creature in all my gang, a very fine woman but so Sallatious and ill tempered withall that no husband will keep to her long (Greene 1965, ii:865).

Many planters were not as concerned about enslaved children as Landon Carter. Lorena Walsh found that doctors treated more enslaved adults rather than children at Nathaniel Burwell’s Carter’s Grove slave quarter. Williamsburg’s John Galt provided routine medical care for these laborers in the late eighteenth century. His medical books, which are available for the period between October 1783 and October 1785, show that Dr. Galt treated males and females, including the elderly. He diagnosed that one woman was suffering from a venereal disease. Dr. Galt treated less than ten percent of the children but as many as a quarter of the adults one or more times during a single year (Walsh 1997:179).

While Burwell might have been reluctant to spend money for the medicinal needs of his enslaved young residents, their parents may have played a role by not allowing their offspring to be seen by a white doctor. Some of the children that Dr. Galt treated suffered from internal parasites and he dispensed worm powders and laxatives as remedies. At Carter’s Grove, the health care of children seems to have been confined mainly to African-American medicine or treatment by overseers and local white residents employed for this purpose.

Enslaved people at this plantation may have found it less threatening to give their children herbal remedies for worms and other similar complaints. Taking responsibility for treating children’s illnesses led mothers to challenge and defy plantation authorities. At times, some mothers incorrectly diagnosed some illnesses. One nineteenth-century Virginian reported that an enslaved
woman had given her son worm medicines for some days before she realized that he was suffering from dysentery and not from worms (Savitt 1978:172).

Other proactive behaviors among enslaved mothers included monitoring the whereabouts of their children. An example from South Carolina documents how one enslaved mother carried her offspring around during the workday so as to be near her child (P. Morgan 1998:541). While traveling through West Africa in the first half of the eighteenth century, Thomas Astley saw African women carrying their children on their backs everywhere even when they were working. He attributed the flat noses of the children to this practice (Astley [1745-47] 1968:436). Another traveler, Jean Barbot, in West Africa 1678-1712, also commented on this practice of African mothers (Hair et al. 1992:87).

They carry their infants about on their backs almost the whole time, both while they are undertaking household tasks and when they travel between villages. They carry them in cloths fastened around the neck and under the armpits (Hair et al. 1982:87).

White Virginians may have discouraged their enslaved women from carrying children in this or a similar manner because it was so different from whites’ childcare traditions and practices (Walsh 1998:122). In addition, white enslavers may have considered that the practice would lower blacks’ productivity.

Apparently, some enslavers also did not encourage enslaved women to carry black children around while they worked at the “big house.” George Washington complained about the frequent visits of children from the slave quarters to the main house grounds. He forbade the practice but it did not abate (see Sobel 1987:143).
Some planters were insensitive in their dealings with black families and initiated living and working arrangements that divided them. Enslaved people who worked at the "big house" had to leave their families and some individuals were hired out to other plantations and to town-dwellers. All these activities fragmented enslaved families. Children were left at the quarters away from their parents or relatives. Mothers and other enslaved people resisted and harbored children close to their work areas in defiance of orders against these practices. These everyday activities of resistance in slavery were clearly as important as outright acts of rebellion, for it took strength and bravery to defy plantation management.

Many planters wanted to keep enslaved children away from the manor houses because they did not want enslaved youth to have what they perceived as a negative influence on their children. In 1760, Mrs. Maria Taylor Byrd wrote to her son William Byrd III, describing a white child's behavior.

I am greatly disturbed at the education of the little lady at Belvidere who's mamma ly's in bed till noon & her chief time is spent with servants & Negro children her play fellows, from whom she has learnt a dreadful collection of words, & is intolerably passionate. She was at play with a girl, who I order'd to call somebody to me, which made her so extremely angry that she curs'd me in the bitterness of her heart & wished me in heaven (Tinling 1977:682).

Black speech patterns influenced whites in ways that travelers to the Chesapeake found more appalling than did some white residents. In 1746, Edward Kimber criticized Maryland whites about their children's education. He noted that "when young, they suffer them too much to prowl among the young
Figure 7: Whites and blacks playing near a main house. Note the working black female nearby. (Henry Howe, Historical Collections of Virginia [1845] 1969:152 - 153, inserted page).

Negroes, which insensibly causes them to imbibe their Manners and broken Speech” (quoted in Sobel 1987:137).

Black speech mixed with outrage became an instrument for mothers as they fought against “the might of the plantation” and mitigated practices harmful to their well-being. Some Virginian women used verbal means to show their disapproval of standards of living that whites wanted to enforce on blacks. They confronted plantation owners with “sass” (talking back with impudence and disrespect) to vocalize thoughts of their oppression (Braxton 1989:31). In May 1793, Daphne and Nelly, enslaved workers on Champion Travis’s plantation on Jamestown Island, killed their overseer, Joel Gathright. He was the only white
Figure 8: Enslaved women at work in Tidewater Virginia at the end of the eighteenth century. Note the stance of the overseer. Sketched by Benjamin Latrobe (Latrobe Sketchbook III; Maryland Historical Society).

person at the plantation at the time (McRae [1886] 1968, vi:461-464, 521, 532-533, 542-543). It is important to note that Nelly was pregnant at the time of the incident. R. Sanders, attorney for James City County, recorded the statements of two black boys, who were witnesses and testified in court.

Gathright, the overseer, came at his usual time to the field where these women were working and blamed Nelly for suffering the fence to be left open, which had exposed the corn growing to be cropped by sheep. Nelly denied the charge and used some impertinent language, which provoked the overseer to strike her. This he did repeatedly with a small cane, till Nelly quitted her plough and ran; the overseer pursued and struck her on the ground after she had fallen. Nelly recovered from her fall, and immediately engaged him (McRae [1886] 1968, vi:461).
Daphne, an enslaved co-worker, came to Nelly’s aid and together the women engaged the overseer.

They beat him on the ground with their fists and switches with great fury for a considerable time. The overseer made frequent efforts to raise himself up and get from them in vain, and demanded to know if they intended to kill him (McRae [1886] 1968, vi:461).

Daphne and Nelly did not spare the overseer and by the time the two slave boys from whom he had requested help arrived, he was dead. At a court held in June of the same year, both women were found guilty of killing the overseer and were ordered executed. Nelly’s execution was postponed until October because of her pregnancy (McRae [1886] 1968, vi:464).

Although the crime infuriated many whites, some were sympathetic to Nelly’s plight. In September 1793, six planters petitioned the Governor for Nelly’s pardon, citing “that the long imprisonment w’ch she has suffered in a state of pregnancy is sufficient (if we may Judge from her penetancy) to work a reformation” (McRae [1886] 1968, vi:521). Other planters responded, (McRae [1886] 1968, vi:532, 542-543) informing the Governor about the horror of Nelly’s crime, their concern about the petition for her pardon, and that she had now “been delivered of her child some weeks, and now and awaits the Execution of her sentence.” They noted, moreover,

when we consider the alarming commotions which have lately existed among the negroes in this neighborhood, and the dangerous example of such a murder, we humbly conceive it is necessary for the public peace that the course of the law should have its full effect in this instance (McRae [1886] 1968:532, 542-543).

It appears that Nelly was executed. The case of Nelly and Daphne illustrates the complexity of race relations in the Virginian society. Apparently gender was an
issue, for some of the white planters defended Nelly as a member of a dependent
group in the society, namely women.

Examples from other slave societies underscored the importance of verbal
eloquence in the fight against slavery. "Sass" was, perhaps, a weapon employed
by more women than men. In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Linda Brent
had frequent verbal battles with her master, Dr. Flint, in North Carolina. These
battles may have helped to prevent him from sexually assaulting her (Yellin
1987:38-39, 58-59). Brent described her grandmother as an outraged woman
(Yellin 1987:28-29). Her grandmother's anger was used as a weapon to keep her
granddaughter from being totally subsumed under Master Flint's will.

In her book, *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender and the 'Vulgar' Body
of the Jamaican Poplar Culture*, Carolyn Cooper focused on Jamaica to discuss
orality and the problems enslaved women had in navigating the troubled sea of
sexuality and exploitation. Cooper especially analyzed "Me Know no law, me
know no sin," an eighteenth-century song that was transformed into a written
text by J. B. Moreton in his *West India Customs and Manners* (Cooper 1995).

**Me know no law, me know no sin**

Altho' a slave me is born and bred,
My skin is black, not yellow:
I often sold my maiden head
To many a handsome fellow.

My massa keep me once, for true,
And gave me clothes, wid busses:
Fine muslin coats, wid bitty too,
To gain my sweet embraces.

When pickinininy him come black
My massa starve and fum me;
He tear the coat from off my back,
And naked him did strip me.

Him turn me out into the field,
Wid hoe, the ground to clear-o;
Me take pickinniny on my back,
And work him te-me weary.

Him, Obisha, him de come one night,
And give me gown and busses;
Him get one pickinniny, white!
Almost as white as missess.

Then missess fum me wid long switch,
And say him da for massa;
My massa curse her, 'lying bitch!'
And tell her, 'buss my rassa!'

Me fum'd when me no condescend:
Me fum'd too if me do it;
Me no have no one for ' tand my friend,
So me am for'cd to do it.

Me know no law, me know no sin,
Me is just what ebba them make me;
This is the way dem bring me in;
So God nor devil take me! (Cooper 1995:19-20).

Cooper argued that this song represented black women’s fight against oppression through verbal creativity. As Cooper demonstrated, “orality” can “reclaim the self and empower the speaker... the issues of gender, race, class and voice intersect: the transgressive black women, bearer of the composite burden of master, overseer and mistress, is triply oppressed — or so it seems” (Cooper 1995:22). Some women were empowered when they verbalized injustices. Motherhood, for many enslaved women, was not a call to be conservative, but on the contrary it was a time for radical action.

Joanne Braxton’s representation of enslaved women as “outraged mothers” provides a complex picture of motherhood and childcare. Braxton
believed the “outraged mother” operated with a full awareness of “the abuse of
her people and her person” (Braxton 1989:21). These “outraged mothers”
planned their own pregnancies, traveled far to visit their children, and “sacrificed
and improvised” both to upheld and nurture “flesh and spirit” of children, self,
and family. Braxton discussed how formerly enslaved orator and writer Frederick
Douglass, for example, described his mother’s travels at night, by foot, from a
distance of about twelve miles away, to see him. She was hired out to work on a
plantation several miles away but visited her son in the time she had as her own,
after a hard day’s work.

She was a field hand, and a whipping is the penalty of not being in
the field at sunrise, unless a slave has special permission from his or
her master to the contrary—a permission which they seldom get,
and one that gives to him that gives it the proud name of being a
kind master (Gates 1987:256).

An influential spokesperson for African Americans, Booker T. Washington,
born between 1856 and 1859 in Franklin County, Virginia, of an enslaved mother
and a white father, recalled that during slavery his mother had little time to train
her children. She only “snatched a few moments for our care in the early morning
before her work began, and at night after the day’s work was done” (Washington
[1901] 1993:5). Black motherhood and childcare perhaps were more difficult and
painful in slavery than under other conditions, but many women never gave up
their responsibilities to protect enslaved children.
Chapter Three

The Interplay of Race, Gender, and Time in Nurturing

ANECDOTE

The errors of simplicity can never excite anger, they may sometimes produce much innocent merriment. A family lately advertised for a wet nurse. Among the various young women who offered themselves for the place, was an innocent girl, who appeared to be about fifteen years of age. Struck with her youth and simple appearance, the lady expressed much astonishment that she should be qualified for a wet nurse's place. "Madam," said the girl, "I never was a wet nurse yet, but I think that I could soon learn to be one."

— The Virginia Herald, and Fredericksburg Advertiser, February 7, 1793 (VHFA 1792-1795)

Breastfeeding and Nursing

Breastfeeding provides a good topic to start this chapter's analysis of the multifaceted nature of the interactions between blacks and whites. The discussion closes with contestations and outcomes relating to foods, other than breast milk. Breastfeeding benefits both mothers and children. Usually breast milk alone is adequate to maintain a child in good health for the first four to six months after birth. For mothers, regular breastfeeding acts as a form of a biological contraceptive that helps to prevent pregnancy in the first year and even up to two years after the birth of a child (Trekel 1989:38-41). Both black women as well as
whites learned about traditional contraceptives, child care, and weaning methods from midwives and other women (Treckel 1989:38; Schwartz 1996:242).

Cultural and economic factors impacted differently on breastfeeding and the weaning of infants for enslaved blacks and free white women during slavery (Greene 1965, i:496; Sobel 1987:136-137; Treckel 1989; Schwartz 1996). However, enslaved mothers’ decisions to wean infants may have been affected more by plantation directives than cultural factors. Enslavers regulated the daytime breastfeeding activities of enslaved mothers, but this may not have discouraged some mothers who may have continued to nurse babies up to their second birthdates. Perhaps some enslavers recognized and capitalized on prolonged breastfeeding for they tended not to issue rations to children less than two years old (Schwartz 1996:252).

In a recent anthropological study of breastfeeding in a peri-urban squatter community in Mali, Africa, Katherine A. Dettwyler found environmental constraints, economic and political conditions, women’s workload and cultural beliefs about the nature of children and foods impacted on decisions to breastfeed infants. Yet, breast milk substitutes were not widely adopted and breast milk was still the main infant feeding choice.

Breastfeeding is seen as a special process that creates bonds of kinship between women and children and among children.... Thus, where breast milk has more than nutritional importance, and where breastfeeding is viewed not as a constraint on women’s activities but as a process that provides contact and comfort and that creates kinship, bottle feeding has been resisted (Dettwyler 2000:318).

Like women in modern Mali, through breastfeeding some enslaved women developed a closer bonding with their children that gave mothers new hopes in
spite of the real possibility of separation through sale and death. In fact, breastfeeding was a bridge of interaction which promised some measure of equality and mutual understanding as women in slavery developed maternal ties to not only their own children but to others, white as well as black (Perdue et al. 1976:309; McMillen 1985:354)

Elite colonial white women in Virginia were in economic and social positions to employ wet nurses, perhaps following the British custom of employing white women in these roles (Treckel 1989:26-27; Thurer 1994:173-177). In the colonies, however, blacks were incorporated in this network (Morton 1941:104; Farish 1957:39; McMillen 1985:352; Treckel 1989:47-51; Schwartz 1996:248-249). Elite white women freed from nursing children, had time for travel or socializing.

Philip Fithian, a tutor to planter Robert Carter’s children, noted in his journal that,

the conversation at supper was on Nursing Children; I find it is common here for people of Fortune to have their young Children suckled by the Negroes! Dr. Jones told us his first and only Child is now with such a Nurse; & Mrs Carter said that Wenches have suckled several of hers—Mrs Carter has had thirteen Children She told us to night and she has nine now living (Farish 1957:39).

Supporting evidence for Mrs Carter’s declaration can be found in a letter her husband sent to one of his overseers in 1778.

My wife wants a wet nurse for her young child,... & she understands that Negro Suckey at Billingsgate Quarter has a good breast of milk. I will send a Negro in her stead, or make you a reasonable allowance for her service as a nurse (quoted in Morton 1941:104).

Breastfeeding crossed racial lines in the relationship between whites and blacks in Virginia. Some white women breastfed black babies. When interviewed
in 1937, ninety years old George White of Virginia recalled that his white mistress nursed him when he was a baby. He remembered that his enslavers, John and Lucy Young, had one little boy called Lawson “an’ mistress would nurse me when she nursed him, if mama was in de field” (Perdue et al. 1976:309). White women’s reasons for undertaking this activity were far more complex and not best described as either economic or altruistic. However, this perhaps “was one way some southern mothers rose above racial prejudice” (McMillen 1985:354). Children identified with each other across racial lines based on the knowledge that they had shared wet nurses. Breast milk was “more than nutrition” for it created ties between whites and blacks.

Yet, the societal difference between white women and black women continued to be a source of conflict, for white people’s economic, social, and health advancements were tied to the debasement of blacks. As providers of the labor and capital of white society, black motherhood was enslaved to white ideals of a better life. Thus blacks’ efforts to create a better life for themselves and their children were thwarted by the excesses of labor and the theft of their time without compensation.

Sally McMillen found abundant data to study motherhood and the experiences of literate middle – and upper- class white women between 1800 and 1860, but far less data about enslaved women. She declared that, “there is nothing to indicate that using a black wet nurse aroused a southern woman’s racial sensibilities” (McMillen 1985:352). In her study, McMillen used advertisements in the Charleston Courier to support her point that there was no prejudice against blacks as wet nurses, for both white and black nurses were
solicited. Yet, an alternative reading of these same advertisements of the nineteenth century shows that they incorporate practices of exclusion. While some advertisements included black nurses, one blatantly stated “wet nurse wanted. A wetnurse to go traveling; none but a white need apply” (McMillen 1985:351). The desire to exclude blacks from traveling assignments may have been based on the reluctance of the white woman to share space and food with a black enslaved person or, more likely, ensure that the nurse did not run away, especially if the trip was to the North. Usually the requirement for wet nurses was “available milk,” but at other times race mattered. Some white women were reluctant for blacks to be wet nurses to their children and only acquiesced when they had little or no alternative.

McMillen found that most white mothers breastfed their babies but wondered about the acquiescence of enslaved women when they had to serve as wet nurses to white babies. She remarked:

It would be interesting to know how slave women reacted to the nurturing duty imposed on them by their owners. Whether they resented feeding a white baby, particularly if their own had just died, or whether their maternal needs caused them to welcome the substitute baby is unknown (McMillen 1985:351).

Marie Schwartz suggested an answer to these questions. She writes, “the need for a wet nurse by the white family put an additional strain on a breastfeeding mother, who might find herself nursing another child in addition to her own” (Schwartz 1996:248-249). Childcare took enormous toll on enslaved mothers or caregivers who sometimes had to stay up through the night nursing babies.
Young girls also helped in childcare in Virginia. In 1728, a young black nursemaid was part of Thomas Jones’ household. Jones informed his wife who was away in England, that he had acquired “some Negro’s this year and Keep a Girl here that promises both in Temper & Capacity to make a Good Servant. She is good Natur’d & tractable, lively and handy among the Children” (quoted in Sobel 1987:135).

In 1803, an advertiser wanted to hire “a GIRL, that is a good Nurse; one from the country would be preferred” (VGGA 1799-1805). Another advertiser from Hanover County, a year later, provides more information about the age range of nurses. It lists for sale “a YOUNG WOMAN, about eighteen, who is an excellent house servant and seamstress, well acquainted with and fond of the management of children” (VGGA 1779-1805). Based on the requirements to be a wet nurse, these enslaved women would have to be post partum to have milk for white babies.

An advertisement in the Norfolk Gazette and Publick Ledger in 1808 also allows insight into the complex and stressful nature of black motherhood during slavery.

A WET NURSE FOR SALE

A Strong NEGRO WOMAN, with a good breast of Milk, and her Boy six weeks old — The woman is used to washing, ironing, and house­work (NGPL 1808).

Being placed on the auction block so soon after giving birth must have been traumatic for this woman. Whether or not she had experienced a terrible time with her master or mistress who had advertised her for sale, this woman would have been concerned about her future and that of her child.
An example from Georgia also suggests that some blacks did not see themselves as profiting from the intimacy of nursing. In 1858, Ella Thomas did not have enough milk to nurse her child. The problem was solved, however, as "one of the women at the plantation had just lost a baby a week old, and Pa kindly offered us the use of her" (quoted in McMillen 1985:350). While some enslaved women may not have been willing to offer their service as wet nurses, other females in bondage may have done so to save the life of both enslaved and white children.

Although black women spent considerable time nurturing white babies, many white women did not concede them any recognition of equality. Regarding enslaved people as extensions of the enslavers' will, some whites may have simply accepted the services of enslaved black nurses as commonplace. Some even complained about the service. Landon Carter, for example, complained that he only had enslaved people to take care of his children and he was unhappy with the quality of care given by black nurturers (Greene 1965, i:194). Other enslavers were more grateful and rewarded enslaved nurturers for their service. The will of Virginia planter and later absentee owner Philip Ludwell of Rich Neck and Green Spring Plantation, explained his obligations.

Whereas I stand engaged by promises to give freedom to 2 of my slaves, named Jane & Sarah, daurs. of Cress, for her faithful and unwearied care in nursing my dear little orphans from the death of their mother & finally sacrificing her life in their service, Now I empower my daur. H.P.L. on my death & desire her to have them brought over to England & manumitted... (McGhan 1982:652).

Black women developed deep affiliations with white families as they cared for white children. A man who was enslaved in South Carolina remembered his
mother had an elevated "status" for she was "up so high" because she was a "natural nuss [nurse] for white people" (Joyner 1984:78). They exacted concessions for such care and acts of inclusion. Some black caregivers requested special favors for their own children, including freedom just as Cress had requested of Ludwell.

Historian Eugene D. Genovese wrote on the nature of the relationship between black "mammies" (childcare providers for white children) and their charges (Genovese [1974] 1976:327-365). He described the sacrifices these "mammies" made and how these endeavors earned them respect, privilege, and immunity from some of the worse atrocities of slavery. Williamsburg's Polly Valentine, for instance, was both praised and censored for her services as an enslaved nursemaid (Edwards 1990). Years later, one of Polly's charges remembered her nanny:

In the center of which [a large room] there was a crib in which there was always a baby now, with Mammy Polly at its head, watching, and filling the interval of leisure darning for the little one, whose "nose had been broken" by the newcomer... The family began, as is the usual custom, with one child and ended, as the usual custom, with five or six, each new infant bringing a new burden to the willing back of "Mam Polly" and, in her open heart, finding a child's place, for she had no children of her own, and the wealth of her maternal love was showered in a golden harvest on the heads of the master's children (quoted in Edwards 1990:50).

Apparently her enslavers, the Tucker family, believed in the doctrine of reciprocity because they expected Mammy Polly to continue in their household after freedom came. They thought she had considered her task of helping to rear their children a voluntary duty rather than a burden. Mammy Polly valued freedom and her relationship with the Tucker family did not impede her decision...
to leave. Yet, the rest of the story illustrates the complexity of social relations in child-caring. As mentioned earlier, Mammy Polly returned to Williamsburg to nurse her former mistress, Lucy Tucker, when she learned that she was ill. She stayed until the death of Mrs. Tucker. Affection and, perhaps, as Genovese argued, obligations and reciprocity characterized the relationships between whites and blacks (Genovese [1974] 1976:146).

Not all household enslaved individuals were concerned about whether they appeared as ungrateful workers. During and immediately after slavery, many blacks left their places of bondage and did not return (Genovese [1974] 1976:97-112; Windley 1983). An 1865 journal entry of Southerner Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas illustrates the complexity of social relationships between blacks and whites in healthcare:

Susan, Kate’s nurse, most trusty servant, her advice, right hand woman and best liked house servants has left here. I am under too many obligations to Susan to have hard feelings toward her. During six confinements Susan has been with me, the best of servants, rendering the most efficient help. To Ma she has always been invaluable and in case of sickness there was no one like Susan. Her husband Anthony was one of the first to leave the Cumming Plantation and incited others to do the same. I expect he influenced Susan, altho I have often heard Pa say that in case of a revolt among the Negroes he thought that Susan would serve as ringleader. She was the first servant to leave Ma’s yard and left without one word of warning (quoted in Genovese [1974] 1976:102).

The intimacy that childcare engendered among whites and blacks was among the topics Frederick Law Olmsted commented on during his travels in 1852 when he passed through Virginia.

I am struck with the close cohabitation and association of black and white — negro women are carrying black and white babies together in their arms; black and white children are playing together (not going to school together), black and white faces are constantly
thrust together out of the doors, to see the train go by (Olmsted [1861] 1984:31).

Olmsted also noted that dogs, pigs, and children, both white and black, were lying about in the yards of Virginia (Olmsted [1861] 1984:31). The recollections of one formerly enslaved midwife provide another testimony to the inclusive nature of childcare practices. Mildred Graves described the white children she helped to deliver as “my babies.” She had fond memory of a particular white child who was born with great difficulty.

De baby was named Andrew an’ he was my chile. After he got older he use to steal over to Mr. Tinsley’s to see me. He would bring me things — eats, money, candy, an’ purty earrings (Perdue et al. 1976:121).

Graves’ midwifery skills earned her the respect of both white doctors and patients. She administered her skills during times of birth as well as death for she also prepared the dead for burial. She recalled, “I also use to shroud de dead” (Perdue et al. 1976:121). Yet, this close intimacy was not the ideal for some enslaved people; many enslaved women had perhaps little choice in the matter when they served as nurturers to white children. As enslaved laborers, they had few options to exclude themselves from unwanted and exacting tasks.

**Nurturing the Enslaved**

As we continue to look at activities testifying to “the strength of black mothers,” we encounter more factors that discouraged healthy childrearing. The negotiations and struggles of mothers to provide adequate nutrition and to spend time with their children were ongoing. The care of enslaved infants was a charged topic on the negotiation table of slavery. Mothers wanted time to breastfeed and
to adequately supervise their young ones (Greene 1965, i:496; Schwartz 1996:244-245). Mothers who were not given sufficient time to breastfeed probably had less milk over time because of the infrequent emptying of the breast. Others may have suffered from having breasts enlarged with milk that needed to be released. Enslaved babies may have suffered, too, as they cried from hunger, insufficient nursing time, and lack of comfort.

Many enslaved women had to leave children early to go back to work and children were introduced to supplementary foods, exposing them to the risk of malnutrition and illnesses caused from foods prepared and served under poor hygienic conditions, as discussed in section on Foods that follows. That some caregivers were children and elderly women impacted the health and well-being of enslaved people (Kemble [1863] 1992:10-11; Sheridan 1985:91-94; Sobel 1987:111). Todd Savitt, however, has pointed out that “neither malnutrition nor food contaminated by nannies killed slave children “in droves” on Virginia plantations” (Savitt 1978:96).

Enslaved women invested considerable time traveling from work areas to the places where they nursed babies (Blanton 1931:176; Genovese [1974] 1976:507). The limited time they were allowed to nurse their children was clearly a cause of concern, as the poem below illustrates.

[A Mother’s Plea – Nineteenth Century]

O, master, let me stay to catch
My baby’s sobbing breath,
His little glassy eye to watch,
And smooth his limbs in death,
And cover him with grass and leaf,
Beneath the large oak tree:
It is not sullenness, but grief, —
O, master, pity me!

The morn was chill — I spoke no word,
But feared my babe might die,
And heard all day, or thought I heard,
My little baby cry.

At noon, oh, how I ran and took
My baby to my breast!
I lingered — and the long lash broke
My sleeping infant’s rest.

I worked till night — till darkest night,
In torture and disgrace;
Went home and watched till morning light,
To see my baby’s face.

Then give me but one little hour —
O! do not lash me so!
One little hour — one little hour —
And gratefully I’ll go (Brown 1847:50-51).

In 1851, a Mississippi planter described feeding arrangements on his plantation, noting that:

The suckling women come in to nurse their children four times during the day; and it is the duty of the nurse to see that they do not perform this duty until they have become properly cool, after walking from the field (Genovese [1974] 1976:507).

Notice the difference between the poem’s version of travel and that of the planter. The poem described how the enslaved woman had to run to stretch time while the planter wrote about “walking.” Yet, he was aware of the impact of even walking, for he required a cooling down time before the women would be allowed to breastfeed. Enslaved mothers who had to breastfeed white babies perhaps were not subjected to such hazards of running or walking and needing time to cool down before this task. A South Carolina mistress, Eliza Lucas Pinckney, had
an enslaved wet nurse stayed at her home so she could monitor the woman’s diet as well as her nursing skills (Treckel 1989:49-50).

Many enslaved mothers treasured time spent with their offspring during workdays and complained about the limited time they had to do so. Landon Carter had problems with his nursing enslaved mothers over how many times infants should be fed. He wanted to grant them three feeding periods but the women wanted five (Greene 1965, i:496; Genovese [1974] 1976:498; P. Morgan 1998:544). Carter wrote,

I discovered this day what I never knew before, nay what I had positively forbid years ago, but negroes have the impudence of the devil. Last year the suckling wenches told the overseers that I allowed them to go in five times about that business; for which I had some of them whipt and reduced it to half an hour before they went to work, half an hour before their breakfast; and half an hour before they go in at night (Greene 1965, i:496).

Other enslaved women may have seen this as a constraint on their time and instituted other measures, like introducing early supplementary infant foods and taking babies to work, to alleviate this pressure. Taking babies to work areas, when permitted by weather and plantation managers would have reduced the travel time and anxiety of mothers.

Sometimes plantation owners both increased productivity and shortened mothers’ traveling time to feed infants by simple landscape management: they located enslaved people’s quarters close to work areas (Schwartz 1996:243). This seems to hold true at the sites I have compiled in Table 5 of main houses where slave quarters were situated within at least a five-hundred-foot radius. Beyond this distance slave cabins perhaps became field quarters rather than main house
Table 5.
Virginia Slave Quarters and Associated Main Houses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date (Century)</th>
<th>Name of Sites</th>
<th>Distance from Main House (approx. in ft.)</th>
<th>Quarter</th>
<th>Distance Traveled (approx. in ft.)*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seventeenth</td>
<td>Clift’s</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eighteenth</td>
<td>Mount Vernon</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>1080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>House for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Families</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eighteenth</td>
<td>Carter’s Grove</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>Field</td>
<td>4200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eighteenth/Nineteenth</td>
<td>Monticello</td>
<td>200-300†</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>1200-1800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nineteenth</td>
<td>Polly Valentine</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>1320</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


quarters. Except for the Polly Valentine House in an urban setting, the other sites are in rural areas.

Earlier, I presented information arguing for the proximity of white and black living areas in the seventeenth century and how whites distanced themselves from the laboring groups as time progressed. This can be interpreted again here by comparing the seventeenth-century Clift’s plantation proximity to the quarters and the nineteenth-century Polly Valentine site, which was far from the main house. The latter, even within the setting of a town and on a smaller landscape, was still placed at a significant distance from the main house. Overall, in looking at quarters near main houses, enslaved mothers would have traveled less than a mile for child-caring. Compared to quarters at a distance from working areas, this travel time would have been easier to coordinate with work than the traverse of four miles which some field workers endured as inferred in the citation below.
One Southern planter ordered that his nursing mothers should follow a set routine and his explanation provides a telling picture of the layout of the plantation and time mothers invested in keeping their children healthy. He wrote,

Sucklers are not required to leave their home until sunrise, when they leave their children at the children’s house before going into the field. The period of suckling is twelve months. Their work lies always within half a mile of the quarter... They are allowed forty-five minutes at each nursing to be with their children. They return three times a day until their children are eight months old — in the middle of the forenoon, at noon, and in the middle of the afternoon; till the twelfth month but twice a day, missing at noon (quoted in Blanton 1931:176).

These mothers likely traveled four miles each day to breastfeed children. However, not all quarters were far from working areas as seen from the information in Table 5. Proximity would have helped mothers to attend to children, breastfeeding needs, and other parental functions. This would also have permitted enslaved people to engage in subsistence activities like tending gardens and household tasks (see Chapter Four for a broader focus on slave housing and gardens). The downside of proximity to main houses was that an enslaved individual was liable to be called for household service and to be allotted night work after completion of daytime tasks. Some planters allowed enslaved mothers to keep babies nearby or moved mothers to working areas that were closer to the cabins (Genovese [1974] 1976:498; Schwartz 1996:244).

Archaeologists have suggested that the need for surveillance and discipline, particularly the need to keep enslaved people in constant awareness of their “inferior” stations, influenced the placement and condition of slave quarters (Epperson 1990; McKee 1992). Slave quarters were usually located close to the
enslaved work areas and, in addition, some were poorly built structures (Chapter Four discusses this in more details). Plantations were foremost business enterprises and accommodating enslaved workers to facilitate labor, time management, and overall efficiency were priorities for enslavers and managers (Schwartz 1996:244-245). However, I propose another reading of the plantation landscape, one that prioritizes the perspective of enslaved people and the outcomes of their struggles to guarantee the health and the well-being of mothers and children.

Rich Neck probably had an enslaved foreman but enslaved residents at Wilton, and Poplar Forest plantations, the main sites for my analysis of plant remains lived relatively close to management. These managers most likely wanted to maximize not only surveillance but also enslaved labor time. They situated enslaved people close to work areas, guaranteeing that child caring functions, for those who worked within mansion house and service areas, absorbed as little as possible of plantation time and resources.

The situation at George Washington's Mansion House farm apparently supports this point. A 1786 census of enslaved people lists forty one adults including seamstresses, spinners, knitters, laundresses, gardeners, house servants, carpenters, smiths, drivers and laborers (Pogue 1994:107). To be ready for duty and to maximize labor time for childcare, many of these individuals probably resided with their children in the House for Families that was near the mansion. Some of these children may have constituted the "nuisance" that Washington tried to keep away from his house. Keeping enslaved children away from manor houses may have been more of a problem for enslavers than the
documents indicate. The proximity of slave quarters to plantation main houses created other tensions and problems too. During epidemics and other troubled times some enslavers may have regretted that they had stationed their enslaved people close to the manor.

It could be argued also that decisions about the location of slave quarters were intricately linked to the need to indulge and reward reproductive women. Thomas Jefferson informed his overseer in Bedford County “Maria having now a child, I promised her a house to be built this winter, be so good as to have it done” (quoted in Sobel 1987:111). Maria’s house was to be built next to that of her sister (Sobel 1987:111). Women used these concessions to their advantage and sustained their communal and family ties.

Both enslaved people and enslavers may have preferred nurseries, for planters wanted time efficiency and mothers wanted to make sure that their infants were being cared for and not left alone in the care of older siblings (Schwartz 1996:245). Here we need to remember Frances Kemble’s description of the responsibility of some children on a plantation in Georgia. Grouping housing together in a quarter decreased the number of centers needed for child-caring activities and encouraged efficient use of caregivers. Undoubtedly Thomas Jefferson took these factors into account when he told his overseer to build black houses adjacent to each other so that “the fewer nurses may serve & that the children may be more easily attended to by the superannuated women” (quoted in Sobel 1987:111).

Jefferson’s directive suggests that some enslavers may have assigned elderly women to care for enslaved children rather than as nurses for white
children. Also recall that Frederick Douglass remembered that his grandmother's cabin was the daycare center for the plantation (Douglass [1893] 1994:476). This practice of using elderly or lame enslaved people as health care providers was also documented in Jamaica in the nineteenth century. In 1805, there were 34 females and 17 males chosen as medical attendants on ten Jamaican properties belonging to John Tharpe (Sheridan 1985:91-94). About one half of these enslaved attendants presided over the birth of babies or cared for children. Most of these enslaved workers were weak, sick, or otherwise unsuitable for fieldwork. Some of the midwives were weak while one of the children's cooks were described as having sores (Sheridan 1985:91-94) These blacks in health care were, in monetary terms, among the least valued slaves.

The poor health and the advanced age of plantation caregivers and healers may have hindered children and mothers from getting adequate health care, but patients, children, and other recipients may also have benefited from the knowledge and support of these elders. Children may have been prepared for adulthood by the lessons they learnt from grandmothers, mothers, uncles, and aunts, both relatives and non-kin. Many black medicinal specialists had their first lesson in health care and plant identification and use from elderly relatives and other caregivers. Yet, the practice of using elderly women and older children in childcare may not have been totally foreign to some enslaved blacks. Perhaps what was strange and alarming was the weak and sick condition of these caretakers, sometimes resulting from the abuses of slavery.

Enslaved women were essential to slave societies as mothers and nurses for babies, black as well as white. Yet, enslavers prioritized things that were
wholesome for the society and not necessarily for enslaved people. Enslaved women's efforts in self-determination were thwarted but they never accepted defeat for they instituted their own schedule for breastfeeding, dictated and negotiated the appropriate time to wean children, and directed allotments of things and services for themselves and their children (Greene 1965; Genovese [1974] 1976; Mair 1986; Braxton 1989; Bush 1996; P. Morgan 1998). Their activities often opposed enslavers' directives. More examples of the relentless struggles of blacks to define their own ways and the discriminatory practices of whites follow in the examination of foods.

**Foods and Social Relations**

Slavery restricted the time enslaved people spent providing for their own dietary needs and, in addition, enslavers monitored the distribution of food items. The enslaved population resisted these controlling measures for they impacted negatively on their health and well-being. According to archaeologist Larry McKee,

> foodways, as a physically and emotionally charged category of human behavior, was an inevitable source of conflict in plantation life... Masters attempted to use food as an important part of their overall system of social control, and slaves in turn devised strategies to make their rations more satisfying (McKee 1999:219).

Enslaved people challenged this inequitable system of food control. Struggles over food supplies were enacted within sites like smokehouses, dairies, and storehouses. In his interpretation of buildings within the plantation landscape, especially those at the “back of the big houses,” John Vlach described how planters used smokehouses symbolically as they controlled supplies:
A meat-filled smokehouse symbolized the self-sufficiency of a plantation. It demonstrated a planter’s ability to manage his affairs and adequately provide for his family and his slaves. The smokehouse also symbolized a planter’s mastery over his work force. Because the slaves’ survival and well-being was directly linked to the contents of the smokehouse, food allotments were often used as a means of social control (Vlach 1993:64).

Regulating the quantity and quality of the enslaved people’s diet may have been practiced also to keep them in a state of poverty and dependency. Making plantation management’s control appear natural and inevitable was a major goal.
of these schemes, for, from the seventeenth century, Virginia was described as a place with abundant agricultural produce, plants, and animals. As early as 1656, John Hammond noted how,

> cattle and Hogs are every where, which yeeld beef, veal, milk, butter, cheese and other made dishes, porke, bacon, and pigs, and that as sweet and savoury meat as the world affords, these with the help of Orchards and Gardens, Oysters, Fish, Fowle and Vension, certainly cannot but be sufficient for a good diet and wholsom accommodation, considering how plentifully they are, and how easie with industry to be had (quoted in Carson 1985:1).

In writing the history of Virginia in the early eighteenth century, Robert Beverley described plants growing in the colony that included cherries, persimmons, chestnuts, hickory nuts, walnuts, grapes, various melons, peaches, potatoes, peas, beans, and maize. He also listed fish such as perch, sturgeon, catfish, bass, drum, flounder, and herring (Wright 1947:129-147). Later, another Virginian, William Bryd II, boasted how eighteenth-century gardens in the colony had vegetables and herbs such as cucumbers, parsnips, radishes, asparagus, beets, broccoli, rhubarb, fennel, chives, garlic, rosemary, and turnips (Carson 1985:3). Planters purchased plants and seeds for their gardens from nurseries. For instance, many of Williamsburg's planters purchased plants and seeds from Peter Bellett during the time he had his nursery in this town from the late eighteenth century to the first decade of the nineteenth century (Sarudy 1998:67-69). Many of these flora and fauna of the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries have also been identified in the archaeological record (Brown and Samford 1990; Raymer 1996; Mrozowski and Driscoll 1997; McKnight 2000; Franklin 2004).
The documentary records point to pork and corn as the main dietary rations for the enslaved. In 1773, Philip Fithian recorded in his journal, “that excepting some favourices about the table, their [slaves’] allowance is a peck of Corn, & a pound of Meat a Head!” (Farish 1957:38). These were supplemented occasionally with beef, fish, chicken, and vegetables. Archaeologists have recovered the remains of eggshells and bones of chickens at the Rich Neck slave quarter and these are being analyzed by Department of Archaeological Research of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

Archaeological investigations on African-American sites in Virginia have clearly demonstrated that enslaved people supplemented their diets by hunting, fishing, foraging, rearing animals, and gardening (Atkins 1994; Bowen 1995; Franklin 1997, 2004; McKee 1999). George Washington’s enslaved people fished for themselves. On a Sunday in April 1760, Washington noted in his diary, “My Negroes askd the lent of the Sein to day but caught little or no fish. Note the Wind blew upon the shore to day” (Jackson and Twohig 1976:266). At Mount Vernon’s House for Families, the animal remains show very diversified diets with about forty-six species identified. Fish and other wild life made up a significant portion of the remains (Pogue 1994:112).

Joanne Bowen, zooarchaeologist at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, has suggested that at Rich Neck slave quarter in Williamsburg, the enslaved people may have sold the larger fish and kept the smaller fish for themselves (Bowen, personal communication, 2002). She based her interpretations of which fish were marketed on her study of consumption patterns on both elite white and slave sites. Although both types of assemblages show a range of species, the
Figure 10: The sheepshead is shown along with archaeologically-recovered bone fragments (The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation).

Figure 11: Dietary animal bone fragments from the Rich Neck slave quarter (The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation).
remains from larger fish like sturgeon, black drum, sheepshead, and striped bass were more common on elite sites. The remains of smaller fish species like sunfish and white perch are more prevalent in slave assemblages.

Monticello has fewer wild sources than the other sites, as a whole, but these remains constituted thirty to forty percent of the animal dietary data at African-American sites. These include fish, raccoons, and wild birds (Joanne Bowen, personal communication, 2002). That enslaved invested time in providing for their own well-being is perhaps a strong indication of their dissatisfaction with plantation rations.

Enslaved people in Virginia were known as the chicken merchants. James Mercer gave a firm directive to his steward in Virginia on how his enslaved people should be provisioned. They should be given “the innards of chickens unless he sold them to the local Negro chicken merchants” (Mullin [1972] 1981:50). These birds probably served more as trade items rather than meat for enslaved people's tables. Thomas Jefferson purchased chickens, ducks, eggs, and turkeys from his enslaved women at Poplar Forest (Heath 1999:50). Some enslaved females worked to sustain themselves and their families in the marketplace. The returns from these sales, even when small, may have helped these families in the quest for health and well-being. Monetary and other services may have been exchanged in the community for medicinal services.

Some enslaved parents may have found it hard to kill chickens for meals. One should not overlook the possibility that the children may have taken a special liking to these chickens. Remember Frances Kemble’s concern that chickens had a free range in the slave quarters and this was among several factors that she
found disturbing at the plantation in Georgia. It could be possible that some of these birds were even closer to the enslaved than she could have envisioned. When birds were part of household production unit providing eggs and reproducing, it may have been hard for children and adults alike to part with them or eat them, especially ones that they had for a long time and had named. For in naming chickens, the enslaved personalized and endowed affection to these birds. In Chapter Four, I will expand on this discussion about the power of naming and names in relation to children.

It might have been a dilemma for parents to provide nutritious and tasty meals for the family, yet not kill their chickens. A modern Caribbean poem, below, by Valerie Bloom (Agard and Nichols 1994:14) suggests what may have happened in some enslaved families.

**Chicken Dinner**

Mama, don’ do it please,  
Don’ cook dat chicken fe dinner,  
We know dat chicken from she hatch,  
She is de only one in de batch  
Dat de mongoose didn’ catch,  
Please don’ cook her fe dinner.

Mama, don’ do it, please,  
Don’ cook dat chicken fe dinner,  
Yuh mean to tell me yuh fegit  
Yuh promise her to we as a pet  
She not even have a chance to lay yet  
An yuh want to cook her fe dinner.

Mama, don’ do it, please,  
Don’ cook dat chicken fe dinner,  
Don’ give Henrietta de chop,  
Ah tell yuh what, we could swop,  
We will get yuh one from de shop,  
If yuh promise not to cook her fe dinner.
Mama, me really glad, yuh know,  
Yuh never cook Henny fe dinner,  
An she glad too, ah bet,  
Oh Lawd, me suddenly feel upset,  
Yuh don’ suppose is somebody else pet  
We eating now fe dinner

Their efforts to provide for themselves did not obliterate enslaved people’s awareness that plantation management discriminated against them in food supplies. In fact, it probably strengthened their dissatisfaction as well as their determination to seek retribution. Thus, they targeted plantation food storage and redistributed supplies in a more equitable manner. In essence, they were redistributing power. A wide variety of food items were taken and redistributed among the human “property” of enslavers including live animals, crops, and
cooked meals, as well as milk and butter. Formerly enslaved Charles Grandy of Virginia assured his interviewer,

'Curso we knowed it was wrong to steal, but de nigger had to steal to git somepin' to eat. I know I did... I got so hungry I stealed chickens off de roos'. Yessum, I did, chickens used roos' on de fense den, right out in de night. We would cook de chicken at night, eat him an' bu'n de feathers (Perdue et al. 1976:116).

The need for food to appease hunger and to supplement plantation rations drove many enslaved people to participate in the forbidden redistribution of enslavers' properties. In 1770, Landon Carter directed his overseer to search the slave quarters for missing items.

This morning we had a complaint about a butter pot's being taken from a dairy door where it was put to sweeten last night... Owen had gone over the River.... So he could not say whether the Servants that lay in the house had done it or not. How[ever] I sent Billy Beale to search all their holes and boxes; And in their loft it was found, but both of them solemnly deniing they knew anything of it (Greene 1965, i:495).

One of Thomas Jefferson's enslaved workers at Poplar Forest carried the produce he had taken from the plantation vegetable garden to his own place of storage, burying it in the ground (Heath 1999:37).

In May 1771, while living as an absentee planter in England, William Lee advised Cary Wilkinson, manager of his Green Spring Plantation near Williamsburg, how to enlist food in his fight to control the enslaved workers under his care (Wilkinson was also manager at Rich Neck). Apparently these workers were sharing foodstuffs, not just knowledge, as they embraced an evangelical Christianity in their pursuit of health and well-being. Lee wanted to control their religious beliefs by directing them toward traditional Christianity
and he hoped by increasing the amounts of rations to the enslaved would serve as an incentive. Lee wrote:

I am told the wandering new light preachers frm [from] the Northward, have put most of my Negroes crazy with their new light and their New Jerusalem: These vagabond preachers I have always observed encourage in fact, more wickedness than any other kind of men, therefore I wd [would] have my people discouraged as much as possible, frm [from] going near them: & perhaps the best method of doing it effectually is to encourage them all to go every Sunday to their Parish Church, by giving those who are the most constant attendants at Church, a larger allowance of food, or an additional shirt, more than the rest, whereby you will Make it their interest to do their Duty; But above all, let the punishment of those be very exemplary & solemn who are caught stealing any thing for these vagabond preachers, for I think that is generally the consequence of their preaching (quoted in Shepperson 1942:51-52).

Lee called for encouragement and rewards to channel his “people’s” religious fervor in an acceptable “enslavers’ direction” but placed maximum punishment on the unauthorized redistribution of plantation supplies. Wilkinson was to let the enslaved residents understand that only plantation managers had the authority to control and distribute plantation supplies. This example also shows that enslaved laborers’ food-sharing networks extended to whites in need of assistance. Enslaved women may have been prominent links in the network because of their access to kitchens. During the nineteenth century in South Carolina, a plantation’s directive also promised to reward enslaved individuals as follows, “to each person who has behaved well, and has not been sick during the week, 2 Fish or 1pt. Molasses” (quoted in Joyner 1984:94).

Enslavers used food items as an incentive to encourage the enslaved to be more productive, just as they had offered incentives of housing and other material items for reproduction, for hungry people could not do much work
Enslavers realized that "their people" redistributed not only food items but time that should have been spent doing "the master's work." Thus rations were used to regain time enslavers lost when enslaved workers redistributed temporal resources to their own advantages through feigned illnesses, prolonging recovery time, and elaborating minor injuries (E. Morgan 1975:318-319; Perdue et al. 1976:292). However, really ill people suffered because of the injustice of offering foods as an incentive for the sick to leave their beds and get back to work. This heartless provisioning system sought to rob its victims of the time to recuperate from illnesses caused by the system itself. Enslavers would not have robbed their own families of such needed recovery time.

At times, a wide spectrum of the enslaved population benefited from the redistribution process. Market days, festivities like corn shuckings, quilting parties, and, even funerals were occasions for exchanges (Lewis 1834:227; Abrahams 1992; P. Morgan 1998:641). Physically and symbolically this redistribution had consequences for the health and well-being of the enslaved population. Eugene Genovese wrote about an enslaved woman who had to hide a "taken" pig, which she was in the midst of cooking, from an overseer.

Upon hearing his approach, she placed the pot on the floor, covered it with a board, and sat her young daughter upon it. It seemed the poor child had a terrible cold that just had to be sweated out of her (Genovese [1974] 1976:606).

This story illustrates enslaved mothers' deep involvement in caring for the health of family members and plantation management's acquiescence in allowing them to nurture the enslaved population. Yet, management never had a full understanding of the "double play" or how much lay underneath enslaved
people's cultural practices. Note also how this anecdote suggests that black mothers administered “sweating” or “hot steaming” as a cold remedy.

Animals and their parts were helpful in other ways in childrearing. Black nurses used them in remedies to quiet babies, both white and black. One formerly enslaved woman from Virginia remembered:

Us nurses uster keep de babies from hollarin’ by tying a string 'roun' a piece of skin an' stickin' it in dey mouth. You see if dey got choked, we pull out de meat skin wid dis string.... I b'lieve dat meat-skin-suckin' help babies (Perdue et al. 1976:185).

Perhaps some mothers, white and black alike, would have been appalled to know about the care their babies received at the hands of some caregivers.

Milk was consumed during slavery in Virginia and enslaved people's access to this food item can be read as part of power struggles. By the eighteenth century, cows seemed to have been the dominant source of this product. Historical records suggest that goats were among Virginia's livestock in the first half of seventeenth century. However, by the eighteenth century fewer of these animals were in the Chesapeake (Walsh et al. 1997:37). Sheep were kept for wool and meat, but, especially for rural areas as the eighteenth century progressed, their status of providers of wool became more importance than their role in diets. Increasingly, Virginians referred to cows in association with milk, apparently an indication that the animals were vital to its availability in the society (Walsh et al. 1997:50, 56). Archaeological evidence also suggests that cattle were killed when they were older and that perhaps they were kept around for their milk (Brown 2000:F-13).
During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, dairying seems to have been a significant part of animal husbandry at Wilton Plantation. From 1783 to 1787, the Randolphins had between 98 and 109 enslaved inhabitants (Higgins et al. 2000:144). A study of the animal remains recovered from the archaeological investigation of the slave quarters indicates that between 1790 and 1825, the cattle were predominantly old animals. Gregory J. Brown, who analyzed these bones, noted that over three-quarters of the cattle population were more than four years old when they were killed. He did not find any young veal cattle. Brown has concluded, “traditionally, this suggests a husbandry system where animals are used for multiple purposes, perhaps for draft and/or milk, before being slaughtered for meat” (Brown 2000:F-13).

These older cattle perhaps provided milk for both the enslaved and free at Wilton. The 1785 probate inventory of Wilton plantation shows that one half of the enslaved population, forty-five, was valued below fifty pounds sterling per person. These figures suggest that young and/or old individuals accounted for a high number of the enslaved population at Wilton, as they would have presumably less value (Higgins et al. 2000:144-145). The inventory also indicates that animal husbandry was a significant plantation activity. It lists 127 cattle, 83 sheep, and 21 hogs. Butter was listed among the items that earned cash for the plantation in 1815 (Higgins et al. 2000:143).

Butter was made for the market and enslaved women worked with white women at this task at Carter’s Grove. William Nelson, the estate manager of this plantation employed women in butter-making after the middle of the eighteenth century. He supplied Williamsburg’s businesses like taverns and bakeries as well
as other non-food professionals with milk and butter (Walsh 1997:127). He appointed the wives of overseers to supervise dairying. The overseers and their wives were paid with a share of the butter made by both enslaved and free women (Walsh et al. 1997:18; Walsh 1997:123). When enslaved women involved in dairying were deprived of milk or its products, it must have added to their frustrations.

By the 1730s, most Virginia plantations had diversified their operations and were producing a variety of agricultural products. This trend had started as early as the end of the seventeenth century due, in part, to depressions in the tobacco markets and the increasing numbers of women and children in the population (Walsh et al. 1997:12). Dairies and milk houses as separate structures were built in the Chesapeake as early as the 1670s and were used to store milk, butter, and cheese (Lounsbury 1994:109, 231). Enslaved women were drawn into dairying and their diets and those of their children probably included, to varying degrees, milk and its products from the early days of slavery.

While enslaved women acquired new domestic skills within dairy operations (Walsh 1997:123), perhaps they did not welcome them. Rather, the operations may have been seen as added workloads. One man recalled that on a Virginia plantation where he was formerly enslaved, "Dey uster to milk sixty or fifty gallons of milk a day. We alwa's had two 'omen to churn, an' dey wo'Id churn every day" (Perdue et al. 1976:306). It appears that dairying replicated other practices of white supremacy in the society, in which white working women, like overseers' family members, supervised enslaved women and the latter were not given the fruits of their labor.
Travelers to the colony found that corn was used to make hominy, a dish that could include meat, vegetables, and milk as well. According to Pat Gibbs, who studied a number of these references, milk was a breakfast food for the elites and a common staple of blacks and poor whites. Virginians ate different versions of this food (Gibbs 1989:46-54). It is difficult to determine how much enslaved mothers may have helped to influence milk distribution from their enslavers.

Enslaved people may have regularly seen whites consuming milk by itself or in hominy, so they may have desired it for their own tables. Yet, some enslavers may not have seen their desires as important and only have offered milk to the enslaved when there was a surplus. This idea is suggested by a letter sent home by a soldier. While stationed at fortifications near Petersburg, Virginia, in 1864, Luther Holland wrote to his wife in Fluvanna County that she should “keep the little calf for Willy to play with and use the spare milk for the little Negroes” (Snead 1963:81). However, at a quarter on Sherman Varner’s Alabama plantation in the nineteenth century, the master regularly visited the quarter bringing milk to the infants left in the care of older siblings (Schwartz 1996:244).

Some formerly enslaved Virginians recounted that they had milk or milk products. Nannie Williams (born in 1836) remembered “Ant Hannah” who fed the children by pouring milk into a trough in her back yard (Perdue et al. 1976:323). Horace Muse, who was enslaved in Richmond County, recalled that some meals included “a pint o’ milk, a whole herrin’ an’ a ash cake too” (Perdue et al. 1976:215-216). Similarly other enslaved people remembered milk as part of their diets. Uncle Bacchus White who was enslaved in Spotsylvania County,
Virginia, remembered an enslaved childcare provider, Aunt Fanny, who made "mush" that contained milk for the children (Perdue et al. 302, 306). White described how Aunt Fanny took,

boiling water and pour 'hit o'er corn meal den let it git real cold an' cut 'hit ert in pieces, den cook it real brown on a griddle. Den aunt Fanny would put it in a large, wooden tray an' po'r milk o'er 'hit an' all de chil'en wo'ld git aro'nd and eat 'hit wid spoons which dey made ert of muscle shells (Perdue et al. 1976:306).

Apparently milk by itself was not given to these children but Uncle Bacchus noted that it could be acquired in other ways. He related how

Tom, one of the boys, uther to git a bucket of milk on de sly, an' one day Marse saw him an' Tom sed "Licker Marse, licker Marse." We uther to 'ave all de pot licker we want, but we di'nt 'ave no milk (Perdue et al. 1976:306).

This enslaved man and his comrades may have seen this as a symbolic victory against slavery.

Yet, memories of milk and its products may have been tinged with feelings of inequality about how enslaved children were fed. Several descriptions of food preparation and service for enslaved children suggested that they were feed in similar manner as some farm animals. Formerly enslaved people recalled that the children ate out of troughs, and ate "mush," as well as the unhygienic conditions of mass feeding (Perdue et al. 1976:302, 306, 323; Genovese [1974] 1976:507). Eugene Genovese also wondered about the psychological impact of this type of feeding for the well-being of children.

Time and time again they referred to having to eat "like pigs." If nothing else had told them, at a tender age, that they were of inferior caste, the trough must have; no white child ate that way (Genovese [1974] 1976:507).
Enslaved parents' work to instill a sense of pride and strengthen the self-respect of children was made more difficult by the reality of these treatments.

The above discussion has shown how the multiple historical, oral, and zooarchaeological sources combine to give a better picture of food items and practices than anyone type of source. The availability of foods in the society was no guarantee that enslaved people would be adequately provisioned. They had to be proactive for their own well-being and seek means to improve their diets.
Chapter Four

Slave Quarters, Gardens, and Plants

Slave Quarters: Implications for Health and Well-being

The discussion so far has concentrated on motherhood and childcare, particularly on social relations within the context of gender and race. This and the chapter that follows provide a more comprehensive treatment of the materiality of these relations with a particular focus on the physical environment and objects. Also there is an overview of factors and remedies impacting the health and well-being of enslaved people in general. Nevertheless, motherhood and childcare remain vital to the analytical thread. Chapter Three broached the topic of landscape analysis but this area needs to be addressed more closely. Hence the attention, in this chapter, on slave houses, gardens, and plants.

Adverse living conditions at slave quarters contributed to enslaved people's illnesses and required the community to be constantly engaged in reconstituting and maintaining health and well-being. Booker T. Washington recalled that the cabin in which he lived as an enslaved boy in Virginia during the second half of the nineteenth century,

had only openings in the side which let in the light, and also the cold, chilly air of winter. There was a door to the cabin—that is, something that was called a door—but the uncertain hinges by
which it was hung, and the large cracks in it, to say nothing of the fact that it was too small, made the room a very uncomfortable one (Washington [1901] 1993:4).

Earlier, travelers found similar conditions at slave quarters, for comfort was not the predominant factor many enslavers had in mind when they ordered quarters to be built. Ferdinand-M. Bayard, a French traveler, described the dwelling of an “enslaved couple” Maryland in 1791. This is an early example of the use of the word “enslaved” to refer to blacks during slavery. His description confirmed the poor living conditions of some enslaved blacks. Many enslaved Virginians may have lived in similar conditions:

A box-like frame made of boards hardly roughed down, up-held by stakes, constituted the nuptial couch. Some wheat straw and cornstalks, on which was spread a very short-napped woolen blanket that was burned in several places, completed the wretched pallet of the enslaved couple... (McCary 1950:13).

While traveling through the Hampton Roads area of Virginia in 1793, Reverend H. Toulmins described a log cabin where some enslaved people resided:

Adjoining the house of the master was a hut for his blacks, formed of small pine trees, laid one upon another and fastened at the end by a notch; but they were not plaistered, either on the inside or the outside (Tinling and Godfrey 1948:17).

Additional evidence of poor living conditions comes from J. F. Smyth’s writings. In 1794, he stayed overnight in a small cabin that he described as “miserable.” The cabin was “home” to a white overseer and six enslaved persons. This structure was not built for comfort or health for it housed far too many people and had too few amenities.

It was not lathed nor plaistered, neither ceiled nor lofted above... one window, but no glass in it, not even a brick chimney, and, as it
stood on blocks about a foot above the ground, the hogs lay constantly under the floor, which made it swarm with flies (quoted in Mullin [1972] 1981:51).

The living conditions for enslaved residents of well-known, wealthy planters’ did not appear to be different. In the 1790s, Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, a French traveler, visited George Washington’s Mount Vernon plantation and described the condition of quarters there (Budka 1965).

We entered one of the huts of the Blacks, for one can not call them by the name of houses. They are more miserable than the most miserable of the cottages of our peasants. The husband and wife sleep on a mean pallet, the children on the ground; a very bad fireplace, some utensils for cooking, but in the middle of this poverty some cups and a teapot. A boy of 15 was lying on the ground, sick, and in terrible convulsions. The Gl. [General] had sent to Alexandria to fetch a doctor. A very small garden planted with vegetables was close by, with 5 or 6 hens, each one leading ten to fifteen chickens (Budka 1965:100-101).

Most of Washington’s enslaved people lived on outlying farms in quarters that were mainly built of logs. These structures housed separate families and non-relatives; for both during and after slavery, blacks accommodated unrelated individuals as part of their households (Sobel 1987:108-110; McCartney 2000:21, 29). These buildings exposed the enslaved population to the vicissitudes of their environment. Enslaved people, however, took precautionary measures and protected themselves from fever, cold, and other illnesses. Respiratory problems may have been linked not just to drafts but to the very smoke that enslaved people inhaled from burning wood to keep warm. They stuffed various objects between the chinks of the logs of cabins to insulate them in cold weather (Breeden 1980:128). The use of a variety of objects, including textiles and plant parts, may have resulted in multi-colored trash-like displays. Moreover, by
intermixing objects of particular colors and qualities as fillers, residents of slave quarters may have guaranteed extra spiritual protection for themselves and their children (Edwards 1998:270).

Analyses of slave societies produced by supporters of slavery were not neutral documents but were part of the apparatus of using knowledge to control the lifeways of enslaved people. In the nineteenth century, subscribers to agricultural journals attributed poor health among the enslaved population to poorly constructed cabins. This idea may not have been incorrect, based on archaeological and historical accounts of slave housing (Kelso 1984:26-33, 102-128, and 1997:58; Sobel 1987:100-126; McKee 1992). As a remedy, some nineteenth-century recommendations in the agricultural journals called for the building of comfortable houses and even suggested that these should be made of bricks (Breeden 1980:125). Also, these subscribers criticized the accumulation of trash around slave living areas and concluded that trash also contributed to the unsanitary conditions of these places (Breeden 1980:132).

However, trash can give insights into the life of the enslaved (Edwards 1998:245-271). Archaeologists, for instance, value trash because the forms and contexts of things on archaeological sites provide clues to how people in the past had acquired, used, and discarded them. People in colonial times, including the enslaved segment of the society, generally deposited trash close to living areas in yards, near doorways, and only occasionally in “trash pits” (King and Miller 1987:37). But, at times, the only available holes in the ground for enslaved people were the root cellars in the cabins. Trash disposal had tremendous implications for the health of the society. In addition, houses and the yards were intensively
used. Therefore, it should not be surprising to find a high density of trash associated with high intensity land use (Mrozowski 1988:20). Areas of these yards and houses were used for workspaces, and activities like rearing animals exposed residents to possible disease.

Oyster shells were among the trash in these yards and, at times, formed unsightly heaps (Singleton 1991:170). They were mainly from the remains of meals, but enslaved people also used them as utensils and for other purposes, including as paving in yards. They also crushed them to use as fillers in mortar for the chinking of slave quarters (Genovese [1974] 1976:531; Singleton 1991:170). When enslaved blacks used oyster shells as spoons at their quarters, this probably exemplified not only creativity but material deprivation as well. Enslaved people may have also used oyster shells for protective purposes, based on the linkage of these objects to water and the association of the color white with power. Other shells have been found in enslaved people’s quarters and these may have been linked to protective rituals. In the early twentieth century and even today, Africans and African Americans have continued to decorate graves with shells (Thompson 1983:135-138; Sobel 1987:219-220).

One prescription of interest to archaeologists from the nineteenth-century literature is the advice that slave houses should be raised from the ground, allowing for a space beneath that could be kept free of trash (Breeden 1980:120-121). Another is the recommendation that, to prevent disease, “it is highly important that dirt-floors should be raised a foot higher than the surrounding surface of the earth, and well rammed, to keep them dry” (Breeden 1980:115-116). Archaeologists have found examples of pier-supported structures that may have
resulted from these attempts to change enslaved people’s living areas (Edwards 1990:107-116; Singleton 1991:167). There is less evidence for pier-supported houses in eighteenth-century Virginia. Rather, slave houses had a remarkable numbers of sub-floor pits that are evident in those at Wilton, Rich Neck, and Poplar Forest (Appendix A). Perhaps pits could be readily dug in houses that were not on piers. When uncovered, these pits have been found filled with household garbage, personal objects, and work tools. These were receptacles for trash during and after the houses were occupied (Kelso 1984:102-128).

Sub-floor pits have served as rich contexts for the recovery of materials relating to medicinal practices and protective rituals. These materials include plant remains, pharmaceutical bottles, ceramic ointment jars and salve pots, wine bottles, shells, metals, and animal bones (Edwards-Ingram 1997:70-72; Leone and Fry 1999:394-398, 401). Examples of these materials recovered from the three main plantations are discussed in this dissertation. The plant remains are reviewed later in this current chapter while the other materials that were not previously addressed in Chapter Three are discussed in Chapter Five.

Some Africans in Virginia may have been familiar with these pits as storage areas. A traveler in pre-colonial West Africa noticed,

the manner in which property is preserved in Bonny is such as would naturally suggest itself to a people who are almost wholly destitute of the security of doors and locks. Most of the hard articles, such as lead and iron bars, chests of beads, and marcelas, (a kind of coin) they bury under the floors of their houses. Much valuable property is secreted in this way (Frank Cass & CO. LTD. 1970:251).
Archaeologists in Virginia have interpreted some sub-floor pits as storage areas for root crops based on evidence like Robert Beverley's assertion in the early eighteenth century that Indians employed pits in a like manner.

The Way of propagating Potatoes there, is by cutting the small ones to pieces, and planting the Cuttings in hills of loose Earth. But they are so tender, that is very difficult to preserve them in the Winter; for the least Frost coming at them, rots and destroy them; and therefore People bury 'em under Ground, near the Fire-Hearth all
the Winter until the Time comes, that their Seedings are to be set (Wright 1947:145).

Interpretations have suggested that the pits were receptacles for items the enslaved acquired clandestinely (Kelso 1997:68) and that they were established altars for nurturing the spiritual well-being of residents and other visitors to the quarters (Samford 1999). I think that based on beliefs about the possible consequences of different practices for protection, enslaved people may have deposited trash in root cellars or other sub-floor pits. As many domestic activities were conducted after sunset, residents of slave quarters may not have thought it wise to place the residue outdoors. It was important to know when to engage in particular activities as the consequences could be harmful to one’s well-being.
Support for this viewpoint comes from the interview of a formerly enslaved individual of Virginia who cautioned against disposing “trash” after dark for “to take up ashes or sweep trash out of doors after sundown will certainly bring bad luck” (Perdue et al. 1976:249). Additional evidence is found in the recollections of a black resident of Kentucky in the 1930s. Nannie Eaves countered, “Course I neber sweep de trash out de house after sun down jest sweep hit in de corner of de room cause hit is bad luck ter sweep out de door after dark” (Rawick [1941], 1972:vii, [34] 61).

One unlucky outcome of such practices was probably plantation management’s retaliation on learning, from trash, that the enslaved had included illicit courses like ‘taken pig’ and ‘clandestine chicken’ in their meals. As mentioned earlier in Chapter Three, management did not approve of enslaved people’s unauthorized redistribution of plantation livestock and food supplies. Depositing trash within cabins may have saved many enslaved individuals harsh whippings and other punishments.

Based on their own conceptions of their living areas, enslaved women engaged in practices important to their health and well-being. In the 1720s, planter “Robert “King” Carter argued with his enslaved women about yard maintenance. The women had been sweeping the areas around their quarters and the paths to their gardens plots. Carter was unhappy with these swept yards but was unable to curtail this practice within “the shadow of his house” — a practice that apparently contrasted with his grassed and manicured lawn (Hudgins 1990:68). Over the centuries, Africans and New World black people have maintained a tradition of sweeping yard areas (Thompson 1990:164; Heath and
Bennett 2000:43). Sweeping helps to remove contaminants. Traditional advices in the African Diaspora instruct about the proper times and ways to sweep. Heeding these precautions should result in good luck and health as well as the avoidance of trouble with spiritual beings. In addition to earlier references about this subject is another custom from contemporary Jamaican society: sweeping should not be done after dark and generally it should be done in an outward direction, never inward (Rhona Vassell, personal communication 1999-2003). The rest of this chapter will continue to focus on enslaved people’s living areas as sites for the production of foods and medicines.

**Gardens and Plant Use**

Scholars, using historical and archaeological evidence, have confirmed that enslaved people had gardens (Gibbs 1999; Heath and Bennett 2000). These were usually small plots of land adjacent to slave quarters. Within these “spots,” “plots,” or “grounds,” enslaved people grew produce important to health and well-being, including exchange. The historical evidence for these gardens includes plantation records, accounts listing the purchases made to or from enslaved people, and maps showing the layout of plantations (Gibbs 1999:9-13). Visitors to Virginia described enslaved people’s gardens. While traveling through Virginia in 1732, William Hugh Grove noted that enslaved Virginians had cultivated plots with plants like peas and potatoes (Stiverson and Butler 1977, lxxxv:32).

Remains of plants, post mold from for fenced enclosures, disturbed ground, and soil rich in chemicals associated with decayed organic matter are
among the information that archaeologists have used to interpret gardening activities at slave quarters (Heath and Bennett 2000:48-49). Other evidence includes the remains of hoes, forks, shovels, knives, and other tools. These were probably not owned by the enslaved but stored at their living areas and used for gardening.

Gardening is an area that shows enslaved people’s concerns and management of the time that they considered their own. At nights and on weekends when they were given time off from the drudgery of their work, many enslaved people used this time to engage in farming activities. While gardening was a major activity done when the enslaved population was not working for the enslavers, they also spent the time fishing and building and repairing slave quarters. Thomas Jefferson respected enslaved people’s time off and even paid them for landscaping work done at Poplar Forest (Heath 1999:50).

Enslaved people’s gardens were symbolic because they represented achievements on ‘their-own-time’ and served as a strong counter claim to those who claimed they could not provide for themselves. These workers planted a variety of crops in their “little lots,” showing their resourcefulness and determination to be central in providing their own fare (Farish 1957:96). Thus controlling the time allotted to them was central to management of health and well-being. A formerly enslaved Virginian remembered that enslaved people were permitted to have gardens and this was one means to gain “many trifling conveniences. But these gardens were only allowed to some of the more industrious” (Duke 1995:32). Some enslaved laborers may have been too
exhausted and ill at the end of the day or on weekends to engage in gardening for themselves.

Thus, perhaps, to maximize their time off from their labor for their enslavers, especially on a Sunday, the main day for planting, the enslaved community did not report illnesses right away to plantation authority but rather reserved Mondays for this task (Greene 1965, i:174). They guarded Sunday as their own and did not wish to be confined by illnesses — real or feigned. When
they were on “their own time” some enslaved people did not waste time in
starting activities. On a Sunday in 1774, Philip Fithian observed:

Before Breakfast, I saw a Ring of Negroes at the Stable, fighting
Cocks, and in several parts of the plantation they are digging up
their small Lots of ground allow’d by their Master for Potatoes, peas
&c; All such work for themselves they constantly do on Sundays, as
they are otherwise employed on every other Day (Farish 1957:96).

Some enslaved workers improved their agricultural skills when they were
selected as gardeners in orchards, kitchens, and ornamental gardens.
Advertisements for the return of runaway enslaved Virginians identify males as
gardeners. For example, in April 1792, Robert Beale of Culpeper advertised that a
man called Sam, whom he had recently purchased, had run away. Sam had
informed his purchaser that “he is by trade a ditcher, and knows something of
gardening” (VHFA 1792-1795). An estate sale advertisement in December 1803
lists among the “property” of the late Lewis Burwell of Richmond, Virginia “four
good BLACKSMITHS and a GARDENER, men” (VGGA 1799-1805). In
November 1804, Peter Bellett offered to sell his nursery in Williamsburg
“Containing 20 acres of rich manured Land, with about 100,000 Trees.” He
noted, “Also—may be had with the Nursery, 8 NEGROES, 3 of which are well
acquainted with Gardening and Nursery work” (VGGA 1799-1805). Also letters
to the Tucker family of Williamsburg written or dictated by their enslaved people
described gardening activities and produce to their enslavers. These letters were
written in the first two decades of the nineteenth century (Blassingame 1977:8-
11).

The historical evidence indicates that enslavers selected males rather than
females as estate gardeners, although, in 1805, an enslaved woman was in charge
of the garden for a white household in Norfolk (Jabour 1998:33). Women were skilled agricultural workers and combined these duties with nursing and child care. As mentioned earlier, African women gardened while carrying babies on their backs. Frederick Douglass described his grandmother Betsey Bailey as “a good nurse and a capital hand at making nets” for fishing, a famous fisherwoman, and a competent gardener. She was known to be adept in keeping her seedling sweet potatoes viable throughout the winter. Grandmother Betsey was requested to help in the planting of potatoes by various individuals in her neighborhood for it was believed “that her touch was needed to make them grow” (Douglass [1893] 1994:476). She was usually rewarded with a share of the harvest, a rather advantageous situation for herself and her grandchildren. On the other hand, both males and females along with children farmed enslaved people’s plots or lots of ground.

While many enslaved individuals may have delighted in working their own gardens, others may not have carefully tended their plots. This might have been true for the most skilled enslaved gardeners, because of lack of time and incentive. Apparently enslaved people arranged their gardens based on cultural practices as well as the size and the type of terrains in which these plots were located. On small plots, some gardeners probably dispensed with planting in rows and mingled different plants without any effort to segregate them.

This intercropping likely ensured some soil preservation and food crops at different times of the year, thus helping the enslaved to gain some control over food supplies. Plants like pumpkin, watermelon, potatoes, and beans may have been planted among taller plants like corn. Taller plants cast shadow upon tender
cuttings and shade-loving plants thus facilitating favorable conditions for growth. However, when the ease of weeding was the main criterion, organizing a garden in rows was the preferred practice.

Some enslaved cultivators' decision to plant in rows and to orient plants in particular directions may have been based on their beliefs and attitudes toward nature, not just on the geographical layout of the land and biological factors promoting the growth of plants. Formerly enslaved individuals have suggested that phases of the moon could influence the growth of crops. It was important to know the correct time to plant certain crops and when not to do so. For instance, one woman contended that "whatever ter be made underneath de ground like turnips, potatoes, onions is ter be planted by de dark of de moon. Beans, peas, corn in de light of de moon" (Rawick [1941], 1972:vii, [32] 59).

The agricultural practices of elderly twentieth-century African Americans of the Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia give us an idea of traditional agricultural practices that may be similar to those of enslaved people. The Sea Islanders, one as old as 114 years old, and some of the younger ones in their mid-50s, planted their potatoes in rows (Blake 1998:33-36). However, the researchers found that things were more complex:

In planting the vines are always laid toward a particular side of the row. When we inquired about this practice, we were informed that this was done so that the vines would catch the first rays of the rising sun; they were laid toward the east. Only then did we note that almost all the gardens were planted north and south so that the crops would always get the first and last rays of the rising and setting sun. In those cases where rows were not planted on a north-south axis, it was generally due to some peculiarity of the land, usually a problem in drainage (Blake 1998:35-36).
Weeding perhaps posed special difficulty when plants were not in rows. In an interesting discussion of weeds, Michael Pollan (1991:129) has insisted that weeds are also products of human activities, just like cultivated species, because they usually grow in gardens, pastures, and disturbed landscapes. Cultivation introduces other wild plants into garden areas. Weeding, however, helps to generate more weeds, but, as Pollan has also pointed out, different people treat similar plants in different ways. Thus weeds were both accepted and rejected as garden plants (Pollan 1991:116-138).

Enslaved people may have tolerated weeds in the yards of their cabins and deliberately left some areas free for their growth. A nineteenth-century description of the American South provides a picture of a yard in which “on every side grow rancorous weeds and grass interspersed with fruit trees, little patches of vegetables and fowl-houses effectively shading the ground” (Breeden 1980:120). Other enslaved black laborers, like the residents of this yard, may have only tended their garden areas and allowed weeds and grass to grow freely elsewhere. Some weeds in African-American gardens and yards had medicinal and food values. These included burdock, smartweed, and pokeweed. Burdock leaves were used in tonics for general health in Virginia (Perdue et al. 1976:73). Enslaved Jamaicans used pokeweed for greens (Grimé 1979:160). In this sense then, certain plants were not seen as weeds, just as wild plants.

Enslaved people grew starchy grains as plantation produce or for their own needs. They stored foods in root cellars as Booker T. Washington remembered about slavery time. Washington wrote that his cabin had an earthen floor and, in the center of the floor, “there was a large, deep opening...
covered with boards, which was used as a place in which to store sweet potatoes during the winter" (Washington [1901] 1993:5). Archaeologist Jay Haviser found that contemporary people of African heritage in Curacao, a Dutch Caribbean island, stored seeds for cultivation in dark green bottles (Haviser 1999:253). Like their descendants, enslaved people may have also stored seeds in bottles and placed them in root cellars to keep the seeds viable for cultivation during planting seasons. The dark green color would have filtered out the light, discouraging the growth of mold; thus the roots would not develop algae and the seeds would stay fresher for a longer time.

Accounts detailing purchases from the enslaved population suggest that they planted larger grounds on marginal lands, within woodlands, or on generally "unimproved areas" of plantations. At Monticello, Thomas Jefferson’s household regularly purchased agricultural products, including seeds, from enslaved individuals (Gruber 1990:70-71). Among the plants that the Jefferson household purchased were clover seed, watermelon, hominy beans, potatoes, melons, grass seed, hops, cotton, corn, cucumber, and cherries (Gruber 1990:70-71). Jefferson household had the alternative of purchasing seeds from merchants. For example, during 1804 and 1805, Minton Collins regularly advertised garden and grass seeds for sale in the Richmond Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser (like the advertisements for February and December 1804 and September and November 1805). He listed red and white clover seeds, peas, lettuce, beans, and cabbage (VGGA 1799-1805). Landon Carter also encouraged enslaved entrepreneurs; he asserted that, “my people always made and raised things to sell” (Greene 1965, i:484).
Allowing the enslaved to supplement rations was one way to include them in taking care of their own well-being. Further, in purchasing from the enslaved population, enslavers thrust them into a commercial relationship that hinted at equality. An enslaved person, however, was "property" so this legal designation excluded him or her from the rank of a meaningful merchant. Foraging, gardening, and petty trading practices were incorporated within the system and therefore did not threaten the system but rather strengthened it by making the enslaved bear the cost of their own upkeep.

New Contributions to the Analysis

Detailed ethnohistorical work has not been done for Virginia so to help fill this gap, I have compiled a list of plants and information about their value to black Virginians using documentary records, mainly the interviews of formerly enslaved workers and historical references (see Table 6). This is my effort to identify more plants than the usual few that archaeologists have attributed to medicinal purposes. The comparative archaeological data in Table 6 is derived from Table 8 where the botanical remains recovered from slave quarter sites are listed. Table 6 is meant to depict the choices made by the black community itself. Of the 38 plants found in documentary sources, only ten are also listed with the archaeological data. This suggests that many plants would have left little evidence for archaeologists to find, based on the parts used, like the leaves and barks, and how they were prepared for medicinal uses, like tea or poultices (Miksicek 1987:220-221).
From some historical descriptions, especially diary entries, it is difficult to tell whether some plants used by whites as well as blacks were grown in gardens or gathered from fields (Ulrich 1991:353). Some plants, cultivated or appearing as weeds, doubled as culinary herbs and medicinal plants for blacks as well as whites. Over the centuries, black Virginians have used plant remedies for various illnesses and for good luck. As Table 6 shows many of the plants were used in remedies for cold and fever often as teas. Also notice how health care is conflated with good luck in the use of plants like John de Conqueror root and cow peas. Plant remedies were used both internally as well as externally to prevent and treat illnesses and to pave the way for good luck.

Many of the plants black Virginians used in medicine were not cultivated in gardens but rather were gathered from places like woodlands and uncultivated areas, which, during slavery, may well have been on their resident plantations. Table 7 illustrates this point by focusing on plant habitats. A selection of 12 of the 38 historically-documented plants from Table 6 helps to provide a picture of the range of habitats that were exploited. Only twenty-five percent of the plants (3 of 12) were listed as grown in gardens or on cultivated land. Seventy-five percent (9 of 12) of the plants were gathered and two-thirds of this group came from non-arable areas.

Virginia landowners incorporated woodlands as pastures for livestock including cattle and pigs from the seventeenth century (Walsh et al 1997:25-32, 48-51). In the late seventeenth century, some farmers may have kept up to one half of their plantations as woodlands. In 1799, George Washington found woodland pastures, and these areas were near slave quarters, useful in his
### Table 6.
**Medicinal Plants Used by African Americans During and After Slavery in Virginia: The Documentary and Archaeological Evidence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plant</th>
<th>Century</th>
<th>Doc</th>
<th>Archaeo</th>
<th>African-American Use</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam and Eve (Aplectrum Nutt.)</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Good luck (root carried in one's pocket)</td>
<td>P76:246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burdock (Arctium minus)</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tea</td>
<td>P76:73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catnip (Nepeta cataria)</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Used for tea (for children)</td>
<td>UVA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherry, wild (Prunus serotina)</td>
<td>19&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;/20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Beverage to prevent illness/to cure cold (see dogwood and poplar); bark and blossom used</td>
<td>P76:73; 246; W83:215; R96; M&amp;D97; Moo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfrey (Cynoglossum virginianum)</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Beverage to cure cold</td>
<td>P76:76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corn (Zea mays)</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Food</td>
<td>S&amp;B77:33; R96; M&amp;D97; Moo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton (Family Malvaceae, Gossypium sp.)</td>
<td>19&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Cotton string around part of the body that is in pain</td>
<td>W83:215; M&amp;D97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowpeas (Vigna sinensis)</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Food; good luck/money</td>
<td>P76:248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crowfoot/heart leaf (Japanese honeysuckle, Lonicera japonica)</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Beverage to cure cold</td>
<td>P76:73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogwood (Cornus florida)</td>
<td>19&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>For dental care (twigs); for chills/fever; bark used with wild cherry and poplar barks</td>
<td>G79:109; W83:215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flagroot (Acorus calamus)</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chew; for stomach ache</td>
<td>P76:73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honey locust (Gleditsia triacanthos)</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Sweetener</td>
<td>M&amp;D97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horehound (Marrubium vulgare)</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Beverage to cure cold</td>
<td>P76:73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horsemint (Mentha spp.)</td>
<td>18&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cure for stone (used with red onion)</td>
<td>G79:67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huckleberry (Family Ericaceae, Gaylussacia sp.)</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hiccough</td>
<td>UVA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimson weed (Datura stramonium)</td>
<td>19&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>For headache</td>
<td>W83:215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John de Conqueror</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Root used in good luck charms</td>
<td>UVA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
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<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Master weed</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>General illness; for health</td>
<td>P76:310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May apple (<em>Podophyllum peltatum</em>)</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>General illness</td>
<td>P76:310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onion, red (<em>Allium sp.</em>)</td>
<td>18&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>To cure stone (used with horsemint); for fever patients; put under bed</td>
<td>G79:67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peach (Family <em>Rosaceae</em>, <em>Prunus sp.</em>)</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Dysentery</td>
<td>UVA; R96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pepper (<em>Piper sp.</em>)</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Place in shoes to prevent chills</td>
<td>W83:215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persimmon (Family <em>Ebenaceae</em>, <em>Diospyros virginiana</em>)</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>For worms; sweetener</td>
<td>B04:52-53; R96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter’s root</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>General illness</td>
<td>P76:310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plantain (*Musa sp. or <em>Plantago sp.</em>)</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Leaves made into salve; for burn</td>
<td>UVA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poplar (<em>Populus sp.</em>)</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Beverage to prevent illness/to cure cold (see dogwood and cherry); bark and blossom used</td>
<td>W83:215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red oak (Family <em>Fagaceae</em>, <em>Quercus sp.</em>)</td>
<td>19&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Bark used in tea for illness of the nervous system</td>
<td>W83:215; R96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabbit tobacco (Family <em>Asteraceae</em>, <em>Pseudognaphalium obtusifolium</em>)</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Asthma</td>
<td>UVA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rat vein (<em>Chimaphila maculatta</em>)</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Used in beverage to cure cold</td>
<td>P76:73, 246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sage (<em>Salvia L.</em>)</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tea for cold/measles</td>
<td>UVA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sassafras (<em>Sassafras Laurus</em>)</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Roots used in tea; good for the blood</td>
<td>UVA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snakeroot (<em>Aristolochia serpentaria</em>)</td>
<td>18&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>To prevent illness, blacks in Virginia gathered and sold this root in 1700s.</td>
<td>G79:75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spicewood (Family <em>Lauraceae</em>, <em>Lindera benzoin</em>)</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Teas</td>
<td>UVA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet potato (<em>Ipomoea batatas</em>)</td>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Food/malaria cure; cultivated to keep malaria away</td>
<td>P76:278; Moo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<th>Doc</th>
<th>Archaeo</th>
<th>African-American Use</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sweet William (Dianthus barbatus or Phlox sp.)</td>
<td>20th</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Good luck (carry in one’s pocket)</td>
<td>P76:246, 310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tansy leaf (Tanacetum vulgare)</td>
<td>20th</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fever, swelling, pneumonia (wrapped on naked body)</td>
<td>P76:73-74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watermelon (Citrillus vulgaris)</td>
<td>20th</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Seeds used in tea; for kidney trouble</td>
<td>P76:73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wormseed/Jerusalem oak (Chenopodium ambrosoides)</td>
<td>20th</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tea for backache</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sources: Bo4=Barton 1804; G79=Grímé 1979; G90=Gruber 1990; Moo=McKnight 2000; M&D97=Mrozowski and Driscoll 1997; P76=Perdue et al. 1976; R96=Raymer 1996; S&B77=Stiverson and Butler 1977; UVA=UVA Folklore Collection; W83=Waters 1983.

Doc=Documentary source; Archaeo=Archaeological source.

Some plants listed as twentieth-century customs (mainly based on the time when the information was collected) were also probably used during slavery.

herding system that also included the use of pens, stalls, and enclosed fields (Walsh et al 1997:49-50). Enslaved people would have access to woodland pastures especially when they worked with livestock.

It is clear that enslaved people gathered medicinal plants, as botanist Mark Catesby recorded for snakeroot (Serpentaria):

The usual price of this excellent root, both in Virginia and Carolina, is about six pence a pound when dried, which is money hardly earned. Yet the negro slaves, who only dig it, employ much of the little time allowed them by their masters in search of it; which is the cause of there being seldom found any but very small plants (quoted in Grímé 1979:75).

In the seventeenth century, snakeroot was known both in England and Virginia for its medicinal proprieties. It was said to be effective as “a tonic, diuretic, diaphoretic and stimulant” as well as for its usefulness in “typhoid and digestive disorders” (Blanton 1930:109). Apparently its popularity did not wane over the
Table 7.
Plant Habitat: A Selection of Plants
Used by African Americans During and After Slavery

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plant</th>
<th>Dry Woodland</th>
<th>Moist Woodland</th>
<th>Dry Field</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Waste Area</th>
<th>Wet Places</th>
<th>Cultivated Land</th>
<th>Garden</th>
<th>Roadside</th>
<th>Thicket</th>
<th>Riverbank</th>
<th>Clearing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catnip</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horehound</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimson weed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May apple</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plantain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sassafras</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tansy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia snakeroot</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wild cherry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wormseed/ Jerusalem oak</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: See Table 6; and Reader's Digest 1986; Fernald 1987; Erichsen-Brown 1989; Chevallier 1996.

century for by early eighteenth century, Robert Beverly expounded its value as “much admired in England as a cordial and being a great antidote in all pestilent disorders” (quoted in Blanton 1930:109-110). Apparently enslaved people knew of the value of this plant. Twentieth-century African Americans boiled the roots of the snakeroot plant and used it as a tea. It is believed to be an effective cure for infections, viruses, and liver and kidney problems (Fontenot 1994:138).
Recollections of formerly enslaved people suggest that the woods were a favorite place to gather medicinal plants. Dr. Jones, for example, was a conjurer who did not work in the voodoo tradition and he used roots to help the sick. According to Pasty Moses, Dr. Jones had “larn’t’ bout dem in de piney woods from he old granny” (Mellon 1998:96). Yet the search for some plants may not have been an easy task. In 1940, a descendant of enslaved African Americans, then living in Virginia, expounded on the power of the John de Conqueror root in “trickin” or “conjuring.” Melviny Brown declared that, “it’s de spirit o' trickin’ dat leads you right whar to find dat root” (ALFC 1940-41). Robert Farris Thompson has suggested that the use of John the Conqueror roots is related to Kongo practices of using charms. Blacks on the American mainland considered the roots very effective in love and gambling (Thompson 1983:131).

It is apparent from the foregoing that spiritual guidance was important in the mission to locate and use certain plants. A recollection from a formerly enslaved Georgian gives another dimension to this specialized practice. She remembered Aunt Darkas also had another level of vision when she sought herbal cures in the woods.

She wuz blind, but she could go ter the woods and pick out any kind of root or herb she wanted. She always said the Lord told her what roots to get, and always, 'fore sunup, you would see her in the woods with a short-handled pick. She said she had ter pick 'em 'fore sunup; I don' t know why. If you wuz sick, all you had to ter do wuz go ter see Aunt Darkas and tell her (Mellon 1998:95).

From Table 7 and the foregoing examples it is obvious that the woodlands were the main pharmacy for enslaved people and there self-service as well as guided
acquisition was employed, for in addition to help from the divine, elderly people aided in finding medicinal materials.

The historical evidence for different areas of the Americas indicates that some plants were directly related to the well-being of the enslaved but in complex ways; because some were used in actual and alleged suicides, poisonings, and abortions. It is obvious that enslaved people did not always use plants to affirm life. Plants allegedly were used to aid abortions or to help pregnant women in labor. Cotton and the fruits of the okra plants were believed effective in these areas (Mitchell 1978:42, 72; Grime 1979:63).

In 1840, a French writer noted that enslaved people on the American mainland used the root bark of cotton to induce abortion. The inner bark of the root of a young cotton plant was believed to be most effective for this purpose (Mitchell 1978:42). Both Native Americans and European Americans used this plant to ease the pains of childbirth and in related areas of women's care (Mitchell 1978:42).

One chronicler of eighteenth-century life in Guyana wrote, "the female slaves who intend to procure abortion, have found the advantage of previously lubricating the uterine passages, by a diet of these pods" (Grime 1979:63). Seemingly, okra was introduced to the Americas from Africa. Peter Kalm, a Swedish traveler observed okra growing in gardens in Pennsylvania in 1748. Apparently these gardens were owned by whites but probably farmed by enslaved blacks. Kalm noted that "the fruit, which is a long pod, is cut whilst it is green and boiled in soups, which thereby become as thick as pulse. The dish is reckoned a dainty by some people, and especially by the negroes" (Kalm 1772:58).
During the nineteenth century, blacks on plantations in South Carolina used the parched seeds of the okra as a substitute for coffee and traditional home remedies from this state recommend that the blossoms, used alone, or mixed with soap and sugar, were effective to treat sores that were difficult to heal (Mitchell 1978:72) In eighteenth-century Jamaica, a naturalist recorded that the plants "are carefully planted by Europeans, as well as slaves in their gardens, and the unripe pods, which are in use, are common in markets" (quoted in Grime 1979:64). It is clear that blacks in different areas of the Americas employed spiritual as well as secular guidance in plant use. The analysis in the next section is an attempt to coalesce documentary and archaeology records with a particular focus on Virginia.

**The Archaeobotanical Analysis**

An analysis of the archaeological data about plants helps to connect the historical evidence with real communities. The following discussion is centered on materials from Rich Neck, Wilton, and Poplar Forest sites. Of the thirty-eight plants listed in Table 6, ten of these have been identified in the archaeological records of these three slave quarter sites. This discrepancy is not surprising for archaeological sites do not contain samples of all the plants enslaved people used as foods, medicines, and material culture. There are several factors affecting the survival and recovery of plants, including past cultural and environmental ones, as well as the recovery methods archaeologists have employed.

Charles Miksicek noted that, "frozen, acidic, waterlogged, permanently dry, or chemically unique localities" encourage good preservation of plant
remains; these conditions are not frequently found. Rather most archaeological sites are “in open, well-drained areas with alternating wet and dry conditions” and plant remains are unlikely to be preserved in these contexts (Miksicek 1987:219). Charred seeds have the best chances of preservation. Recovered botanical remains would still not include some plants used by enslaved people for medicinal uses, for these functions may have taken place elsewhere. Other plant practices may have left no evidence in the ground.

The relative importance of cultivated and wild plants in the subsistence economy of enslaved people was the main issue for archaeologists interpreting these sites, and although the medicinal value of plants was considered, the topic was not addressed in depth. For Wilton and Poplar Forest, plants used for fuel and construction were analyzed (Raymer 1996:18; Heath and Bennett 2000:49; McKnight 2000:G17). Although the archaeologists prioritized the recovery of the botanical remains, the amount of materials collected and examined differed from site to site (see Appendix B). Plant remains were recovered mainly from sub-floor pits, postholes, and trash pits associated with the living areas of the enslaved populations at these sites.

Botanical remains from Poplar Forest, Rich Neck, and Wilton plantations indicate that both gardens and the adjacent woodlands provided plants for the enslaved residents. Recall that the historical record suggests that enslaved people traded many plant products, far more than the low number listed in archaeological analyses. Plants like oak, elm, and pine, identified from wood charcoal remains, from Poplar Forest and Wilton are not included in Table 8,
### Table 8.
**Examples of Botanical Remains from Three Sites in Virginia**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scientific Name</th>
<th>Common Name</th>
<th>Poplar Forest</th>
<th>Rich Neck</th>
<th>Wilton</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quercus sp.</td>
<td>Acorn</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hordeum sp.</td>
<td>Barley</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phaseolus sp.</td>
<td>Bean</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phaseolus</td>
<td>Bean family</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galium sp.</td>
<td>Bedstraw</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juglans nigra</td>
<td>Black walnut</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prunus sp.</td>
<td>Cherry</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prunus sp.</td>
<td>“Choke cherry”</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zea mays</td>
<td>Corn</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gossypium herbaceum</td>
<td>Cotton</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vigna sinensis</td>
<td>Cowpeas</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitis sp.</td>
<td>Grape</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chenopodium sp.</td>
<td>Goosefoot</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carya sp.</td>
<td>Hickory</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gleditsia triacanthos</td>
<td>Honey locust</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaylussacia sp.</td>
<td>Huckleberry</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polygonum sp.</td>
<td>Knotweed</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leguminosae</td>
<td>Legume</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Cucurbitaceae</td>
<td>Melon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Poaceae</td>
<td>Millet</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avena sp.</td>
<td>Oats</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prunus persica</td>
<td>Peach</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arachis hypogaea</td>
<td>Peanut</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hordeum sp.</td>
<td>Pearl barley</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diospyros virginiana</td>
<td>Persimmon</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phytolacca Americana</td>
<td>Pokeweed</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubus sp.</td>
<td>Raspberry</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secale sp.</td>
<td>Rye</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polygonum sp.</td>
<td>Smartweed</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cucurbita sp.</td>
<td>Squash</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ipomoea batatas</td>
<td>Sweet potato</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helianthus sp.</td>
<td>Sunflower</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triticum aestivum</td>
<td>Wheat</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Raymer 1996; Mrozowski and Driscoll 1997; McKnight 2000; Franklin 2004.*

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but they are included in the discussion (Raymer 1996:18; Heath and Bennett 2000:49; McKnight 2000:G17).

These plants were important to enslaved people's health and well-being. The cultivated species include beans, melons, corn, wheat, sweet potatoes, cowpeas, pumpkin, squash, and peanuts. Many of these plants were probably grown in gardens close to quarters. At Poplar Forest, for instance, there is evidence of planting features and trace chemical analysis that indicates the use of fertilizer near the slave quarter called Structure I (Heath 1999:45-46; Heath and Bennett 2000:48-49).

Some fruits identified at these archaeological sites may have been used to make beverages for medicinal purposes and for refreshment. The enslaved population used persimmons as a worm medicine for children in early nineteenth-century Virginia (Barton 1804:52-53). Evidence of this plant has been recovered from the Poplar Forest site. Enslaved people may have used locust or honey locust, recovered from the Rich Neck slave quarter, and persimmons in ways as described by Peter Randolph, who fled to Boston in 1855 to escape his enslavement on Carter H. Edloe's plantation, on the bank of James River, a few miles from Richmond.

There are some little fruits in Virginia that are called “simmons”; they grow very plentifully and are sweet and good. The slaves get them in the fall of the year, then they get a barrel and put the “simmons” into it, and put water there too, and something else that grows on tree, they call “locusses,” which are about ten inches long, and two across. They put the “locusses” and the “simmons” into the water together, and let them stand for two or three days. Then the water is drained off, and the leaves are used as you would use coffee. The slaves put this liquid in gourds, and carry it to the field with them, and drink out of their gourds while they eat their bread (Duke 1995:2-3).
Wild species gathered by the enslaved included edible nuts like black walnuts and hickory. Herbaceous wild plants like pokeweed, smartweed, and knotweed may have been used for food, including potherbs or greens, as well as for medicine. These herbaceous wild species are commonly found in agricultural fields, roadsides, or yards.

At Wilton Plantation, where the site was occupied for about ninety years, ca. 1750-1840 (Higgins et al. 2000:144), most of the herbaceous plants were not represented after the 1790s. While the researchers suggested that the enslaved population at Wilton probably shifted from using plant medicines to rely more on pharmaceuticals (Higgins et al. 2000:136). The fact that only three pharmaceutical bottles were found that dated after the 1790s weakens this premise. More will be said about this shortly.

At Poplar Forest, where the excavated slave quarter site was occupied between 1790 and 1812 (Heath and Bennett 2000:46), goosefoot, smartweed, and pokeweed were present. Another possible explanation for their absence from the later time periods at Wilton Plantation is that over time these plants were depleted near the dwelling areas and enslaved residents did not have the time or were not inclined to go far afield to search for them. Another important consideration in discussing the availability of plants near the enslaved living areas is the factor of weeding.

Whenever a cultivated area is not cleared of weeds, these plants tend to flourish. The enslaved people may have even practiced weeding and clearing yard areas upon the plantation owner's directives. At Poplar Forest, perhaps these weeds were still available close to the quarter, while at Wilton, after 40 years of
occupation, the area around the quarter was barren. This in turn might depend on how close crop fields were to residence and quarters. Planters may not have allowed “weeds” that might spread into fields.

The Rich Neck plantation study did not produce examples of the weeds found at Poplar Forest and Wilton. Were the yards at Rich Neck kept free of weeds and grass? However, this plantation was less than one mile from the town of Williamsburg, so it is possible that enslaved people had opportunities to use more varied remedies, including materials from apothecaries or from doctors. Another possible explanation linking the previously suggested ones is the question of generational changes. The later periods at Wilton were characterized by descendants of enslaved Africans, who perhaps were not attuned or inclined to the “ways” of earlier generations. This might explain the absence of some plants in the later assemblages from this site. For Rich Neck, its proximity to a major town, unlike the other sites, may have influenced the medicinal behaviors of its captive laborers.

The archaeological assemblage from Rich Neck, housed at the Department of Archaeological Research of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, includes twelve pharmaceutical objects, represented by salve pots, drug jars, and bottles. Only three of these twelve objects date to 1720s and relate to the initial occupation of the site. The other nine objects date to 1760 and later. They are associated with the later stage of the occupation and ending date of the site. Therefore, more conventional medicinal materials are represented after the middle of the eighteenth century. This correlates to the development of the town and the increasing availability of doctors and medical supplies.
Wilton Plantation, on the other hand, had less of a variety and number of pharmaceutical materials. Only five pharmaceutical bottles were found. Two bottles were from Period 1 (ca. 1750-1790), two for Period 2 (ca. 1790-1825), and only one was found for Period 3, ca. 1825-1850. (Higgins et al. 2000: 144 and Appendix E-14-16). This evidence suggests that proximity to towns may have influenced the quantity of “mainstream” medicinal materials on African-American sites. If the Wilton enslaved community had received more formal medical care, obviously the medicinal materials were not stored at the quarters.

**Plants and Punishment**

In the complex and oppressive world of enslavement, plants were linked with the oppression of the enslaved for enslavers used plant parts in punishments. William Wells Brown described the “Virginia Play” as a practice of tying up and whipping the enslaved. The wounded victim was then smoked over a fire of tobacco stems (Vlach 1993:65). Many enslaved residents in Virginia were seriously scarred and harmed by flogging. One Virginian enslaver believed that whipping “his people” with parts from particular trees would encourage tractability without leaving damaging evidence.

Frank Bell, a formerly enslaved worker who was born in 1834, recalled how one enslaver had a particular preference for using cherry whips to beat his enslaved people (Perdue et al. 1976:25-28). According to Bell, when his enslaver had to administer a punishment “he would always cut hisself a cherry sapling, cause a cherry sapling don’t make no soar on a slave’s back” (Perdue et al.
Switches from other plants, perhaps cut from woodlands adjoining plantations, were also quite effective materials for flogging enslaved people.

Children and pregnant women were not spared this severe treatment (McRae 1968:461-464-521; Greene 1965, ii:865; Perdue et al. 1976:150; Blassingame 1977:48-49). One formerly enslaved individual remembered that,

It seemed lak yo' chillum b,'long to evybody but you. Many a day my ole mama has stood by an watched massa beat her chillum 'till dey bled an' she couldn' open her mouf. Dey didn' only beat us, but dey useta strap my mama to a bench or box an' beat her wid a wooden paddle while she was naked (Perdue et al. 1976:150).

Another recollection of slavery in Virginia stressed that one enslaver was an equal opportunity provider in this sphere. “Beat women! Why sure he beat women. Beat women jes' lak men. Beat women naked an’ wash ’em down in brine” (Perdue et al. 1976:274). One advertisement for the return of a runaway also testified to this practice.

N.B. Run away, about the 15th of December last, a small yellow Negro wench named HANNAH, about 35 years of age;...She has remarkable long hair, or wool, is much scarified under the throat from one ear to the other, and has many scars on her back, occasioned by whipping. She pretends much to the religion the Negroes of late have practised, and may probably endeavour to pass for a free woman...

STEPHEN DENCE (quoted in Windley 1983:50-51).

Remember that in 1793, Daphne and Nelly allegedly killed their overseer, Joel Gathright, for flogging a pregnant Nelly (see Chapter 2). For the Bantu people of Africa, beating a pregnant woman is considered “a crime against the mother and her infant, as well as the community and its future” (Fu-Kiau 1991:36). Similar concepts may have influenced how descendants of Bantu and Bantu-influenced people viewed similar flogging in the Americas. The Bantu
people lived in southwest and Central Africa during the Atlantic slave trade (Holloway 1990; Thornton 1992). It is understandable that blacks viewed with disfavor the ways whites employed plants in punishments. Yet, overall, plants were very useful to blacks as seen in foregoing examples and as illustrated in the section that follows.

**Things from Plant Materials**

As aspects of material culture, plants and plant products were useful in many areas of enslaved people's lifeways. Some blacks were skillful at fashioning items from plant parts. Enslaved Virginian crafted gourds grown in their yards into musical items and containers for foods and medicines, and some of these probably were trade items too (Genovese [1974] 1976:531; Perdue et al. 1976:16; Duke 1995:2-3 has references for gourds used as drink containers). In Georgia, “the wooden bowls what slave chillun ate out of was made out of sweetgum trees” (Killion and Waller 1973:57). Plant products also were used as tools such as mortars and pestles, walking sticks, and feeding troughs, fulfilling needs while allowing creativity in manufacture. Table 9 provides more examples of the varied ways plants and their products may have served the enslaved community.

The plant data for Poplar Forest and Wilton plantations contains species that were important as fuel and as structural materials. Oak, elm, hickory, and pine, for example, were used as firewood. Pine and oak were perhaps used more often than hickory and elm. About fifty percent of the wood charcoal from Poplar Forest was from pine (Raymer 1996:18; McKnight 2000:G-17; Health and Bennett 2000:49). The main material used to build structures seemed to have
been hickory. Philip Fithian noticed enslaved people building a fence with chestnut stakes on the plantation where he worked as a tutor (Farish 1957:74).

**Table 9.**

**Plant Products and Ways Enslaved People Possibly Employed Them**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Products</th>
<th>Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timber Products</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round wood</td>
<td>House posts, beams, dug-out canoes, fences, footbridges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sawn timber</td>
<td>Flooring, walls, canoes, furniture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Split trunks</td>
<td>Walls, doors, flooring, paths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Timber Products</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaves</td>
<td>Thatch, fans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stem</td>
<td>Tying materials, fish traps, basketry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branches</td>
<td>Toothbrushes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roots</td>
<td>Tying materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeds</td>
<td>Personal adornment, games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pigments</td>
<td>Dyes and paints, body painting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Plant products and usage adapted from Cotton 1996:192.

Plants used as structural materials and for firewood were important to the health and well-being of enslaved people for, as is evident in the earlier discussion of enslaved people's quarters, the houses were drafty and a good fire in the cold months would have prevented illnesses and appeased some dissatisfaction.

Enslaved people had to treat plant parts when they were used in labor for these could be dangerous to health. One formerly enslaved worker from Virginia described the danger of using untreated hickory sticks in field work. He remembered:

Dem old slave-time hoes! Hammered out of pig iron, broad like a shovel. Dey make 'em heavy so dey fall hard, but de bigges' trouble
was liftin’ dem up. Use a hick’ry limb fo’ a handle. Slave would always have special hoes. Had to shave de knots off smooth an’ scrape ’em wid glass ef you want to keep any skin on yo’ han’s (Perdue et al.1976:77).

As both male and female enslaved workers worked in fields and used hoes, it might have been very hard for mothers with babies and ill people to carry out such labor.

The foregoing discussion used documentary and material culture evidence to explore the different paths and methods that enslaved people in Virginia used to fight for autonomy in motherhood and healthcare. The next chapter will move this argument beyond Virginia to look at the wider African Diaspora for people of African descent prioritized a multivariate approach to living based on the importance of knowing causes and cures for various maladies. Protecting against and treating ills within the overall misfortune of enslavement and its aftermath have been essentials for black people in the search for a wholesome living.
Chapter Five

Medicating Slavery: A Medley of Materials and Deeds in the Diaspora

A Multivariate Medicinal Practice

The old black nurse brought a cargo of herbs, and wished to try various charms, to expedite the birth of the child, and told me so many stories of pinching and tying women to bed-post, to hasten matters, that sometimes, in spite of agony, I could not help laughing, and, at others, I was really in a fright, for fear she would try some of her experiments upon me. But the maid took all the herbs from her, and made her remove all the smoking apparatus she had prepared for my benefit.

--Lady Nugent's Diary, Wright 1966:124

In 1802, an enslaved woman recommended a variety of remedies to Lady Maria Nugent, wife of a Jamaican Governor. Nugent wrote of her experiences with Flora, an old black nurse, who wanted to assist with the birth of Nugent's child. Like Francis Kemble, Lady Nugent had to evaluate different cultural and medicinal practices relating to health and childbirth. Nurse Flora had a variety of remedies and not the least was verbal. She used words as a powerful medication not unlike other women who had confronted whites. Lady Nugent, fearful of the materials of black medicine, did not escape the benefits of laughter as good medicine.

This chapter concentrates on beliefs and practices that fall within the realm of the sympathetic approach to medicine and folk traditions. These varied
activities of blacks in the pursuit of health and well-being explored here are
difficult to align with the beliefs and practices of whites. Overall, these beliefs and
practices owed their vitality and extraordinary persistence to the fact that they
were overwhelmingly confined within interpretive communities of blacks.

Practices relating to birth, childcare, and death in the African Diaspora
demanded strong medicine to ensure health and well-being. The information
from different scholarly endeavors testified to the vitality of these practices. For
instance, archaeologists have recovered evidence of the multi-faceted nature of
black medicinal practices. Investigation at a house site of an African-American
midwife in Mobile, Alabama, for example, uncovered objects presumably
associated with midwifery (Wilkie 1997:85). These materials included patent
medicinal bottles, whiskey containers, animal bones, yellow sulfur, glass crystal,
and flaked stones. Apparently this midwife intertwined different medicinal
knowledge and practices in her work. While the patent medicinal bottles suggest
knowledge of official medicine, several of the recovered materials like the glass
crystal, yellow sulfur, and the flaked stones indicated folk traditions (Wilkie

Sally Brown, who was born enslaved in Georgia, told her interviewer in
1939:

When the woman had babies they was treated kind and they let
them stay in. We called it “layin-in”. We didn’t go to no hospitals.
We just had our babies and had a granny to catch them. The granny
would put a rust piece of tin or an axe under the straw tick [bedding
material], and this would ease the pains... Well the granny put an
axe under my straw tick once. This was to cut off the after-pains and
it sure did too (Killion and Waller 1973:29).
Brown was thirteen at the time of emancipation and perhaps spoke of practices that continued into freedom. To help mothers after delivery, Brown remembered, they were given a rest period called the "layin-in." Apparently about five days after the delivery, mothers were allowed to walk outside for a short time (Killion and Waller 1973:29).

Many practices were directed toward the protection of children who were required to wear necklaces made of pierced coins, animal teeth, and buttons to counteract illnesses in childhood and to ease pains during teething (Wilkie 1997:86-87). Nineteenth-century folklore collected by the Hampton Institute included selections relating to childcare; perhaps variants of these injunctions were practiced during slavery.

Never tickle a baby's feet, it will make him stammer.

Dont let the baby see hisself in de lookin' glass. He won't cut his teeth easy.

Don' name de baby twell its ober a month ol', 'twill die ef you do.

Ef a dog jump ober de cradle when de baby in dar, dat chile will hab bad luck.

Don' let nobody rock de cradle without de baby in it. Dat'll make de baby cry all de time (Waters 1983:216).

The following are selections from the interviews of formerly enslaved workers in Virginia collected in the 1930s and 1940s.

Ef a little piece of "asfedida" is sewed in a cloth and to a string that is worn around the baby's neck, the child will ever be healthy.

No Negro mother will beat her child with a broom. "Make the child no 'count'."

An empty cradle must not be rocked for fear of rendering the baby cross.
To let the infant see itself in the mirror will make its teeth hard.

Cutting the nails of a nursing infant will make it “rougish” (Perdue et al. 1976:248-249).

Note how certain beliefs were similar for different groups who had survived enslavement or who were direct descendants of the survivors.

Over the years, Jamaicans have placed opened Bibles above the heads of infants. Scissors and measuring tapes were used with or without the Bibles (Wilbert Edwards, personal communication, 1999-2003; Rhona Vassell, personal communication, 1999-2003). According to tradition, the dead feared the measuring tapes because on seeing these objects, their status as dead people would be emphasized. They would recall that they were measured so that they could be outfitted and provided with coffins for burial, and thus would keep away.

The power of the word was also called upon in protective rites for children. Thus naming practices were included in the requisites for health and well-being. Although both whites and blacks participated in naming enslaved people in Virginia and other slave societies, research has shown that blacks attached special meanings to names (Joyner 1984:217-222; Sobel 1987:154-164; P. Morgan 1998:454-455). Charles Joyner, for example, has demonstrated that enslaved people in South Carolina, like their African ancestors, followed naming customs emphasizing, “socially significant, almost mystical, and illustrated personal and historical experiences, attitudes toward life, and human values” (Joyner 1984:217).
He has insisted that the power to name may have been seen as an important aspect of control and of the effort to order reality. Thus enslaved people claimed the right to name their children, which resulted in children having two names, one used by plantation management and the other, usually called a basket name, known to the enslaved community. This double naming practice followed African patterns and was not just an outcome of enslaved people’s fight with enslavers.

Examples from nineteenth-century Jamaica too show clearly that enslaved people believed that names encoded powerful medicine. A father, seeking permission to change the name of his enslaved son, told Matthew Lewis that he wanted the child to be given the name of his dead grandfather. The father believed that the ill health of the child was caused from the grandfather’s displeasure that the child was not named after him (Lewis 1834:349). A mother with a sick child on the same plantation also requested a name change for her child because she was certain that the child would not prosper with a name like “Lucia” (Lewis 1834:349).

Yet, it was considered risky to name children after the dead, for this could result in their death too. A formerly enslaved woman in All Saints Parish in the Georgetown district of South Carolina remembered her mother naming her grandchildren.

I had Sally! I had Sally again. I didn’t want to give the name ‘Sally’ again. Say, ‘First Sally come carry girl.’ Ma say, ‘Gin ’em name “Sally” ’ I faid (afraid) that other one come back for him. Had to do what Ma say. Had to please ’em. Ma name Sally (quoted in Joyner 1984:221).
After slavery, schoolteacher Rosa Bella Cooley found that basket names or secondary names were still given to African-American children in the South. When Cooley asked a mother the reason she was told, "so the evil one can't know the real name" (Abrahams and Szwed 1983:362). The power of naming was not lost on enslaved people or on their descendants who, while using European, American, and other names, still used African ones as part of their identities.

The cross mark was important to African Americans during and after slavery and it appeared in different forms and contexts in houses, yards, and public structures. While focusing on the cross as a symbol of Christianity, enslaved people used it in ways that drew on other African religious practices. For scholars, the Bakongo people have been a source for understanding variants of the cross mark (Thompson 1983:103-111, and 1993:56-59; Nichols 1989:14; Ferguson 1992:109-116; Gundaker 1993:61). This group and other people they had influenced illustrated their understanding of spiritual forces, life, death, and the interrelationship of these forces in a variety of drawings.

Enclosing a cross within a circle, depicting "the four moments of the sun," for instance, makes one type of cosmogram. It depicts the counterclockwise path of the sun, connecting strategic hours to birth, life, death, and rebirth. The vertical line of the cross is understood as the path to the power of God linking an upper living world and a lower world of the dead that the horizontal line separates (Thompson 1983:108-109; McGaffey 1986:42-56; Nichols 1989:14; Gundaker 1993:61). Marking strategic areas, like corners and the center of a room or a yard as well as entrances and other accesses, were important for protection and good luck.
Thompson described the association between the Bakongo cross and the Christian vision of God.

This Kongo "sign of the cross" has nothing to do with the crucifixion of the Son of God, yet its meaning overlaps the Christian vision. Traditional Bakongo believed in a Supreme Deity, Nzambi Mpungu, and they had their own notions of the indestructibility of the soul: "Bakongo believe and hold it true that man's life has no end, that it constitutes a cycle, and death is merely a transition of change." The Kongo youwa cross does not signify the crucifixion of Jesus for the salvation of mankind; it signifies the equally compelling vision of the circular motion of human souls about the circumference of its intersecting lines. The Kongo cross refers therefore to the everlasting continuity of all righteous men and women (Thompson 1983:108).

Archaeologists have given credence to enslaved people's employment of the cross mark in healing rituals. Archaeologist Leland Ferguson convincingly argued that "x" marks found on pottery recovered from African-American sites are related expressly to the health and well-being of enslaved people (Ferguson 1992:109-116). These people incorporated colonoware pottery proactively in culinary and medicinal practices to sustain themselves. While Ferguson also looked at the pottery from Virginia, the strongest evidence to support his thesis came from South Carolina.

Most of the colonoware from South Carolina was recovered from rivers next to old rice plantations. Ferguson found decorations similar to crosses and "x" marks on these pots. More important, for Ferguson, were the decorations that were enclosed by circles. By summing up the evidence, which included information on where the pots were found and the markings on them, Ferguson suggested that pottery was connected to enslaved people's rituals that included...
elements of principles derived from African religions, more specifically those of the Bakongo people (Ferguson 1992:109-116).

Ferguson presented a narrative of a colonoware vessel being used in a healing ceremony for a baby. A healer placed the bowl in the water at night and with the advent of morning new hope arrived for the baby as well as the community (Ferguson 1992:109-110). Ferguson's imaginative story was based on the nature of his evidence and the strong presence of Africans related to the Bakongo, but the cross mark in various permutations is also used for similar purposes by peoples from Angola north through Sierra Leone.

Overall Ferguson has made a strong case for looking at colonoware as part of cultural struggles between whites and blacks. His interpretations, however, support a more insular approach to African Americans' identity formation processes than Moyer's (see Chapter Two). Enslaved women may have led many of the rituals and culinary practices that Ferguson discussed.

While colonoware and its associated practices may have contributed to solidarity among enslaved people, this aspect of material culture was mainly confined to the private spheres of life, separate from and therefore mainly "invisible" to whites. Thus, these practices would have failed to threaten the social and political structure of plantation society in any significant way (Edwards-Ingram and Brown 1998). Nevertheless, these "acts of opposition" and "self-confirmation" may have inculcated and sustained solidarity among the enslaved community that increased individuals' sense of well-being in the face of oppression. However, the separatist cultural acts of enslaved African Americans
also benefited whites because "they served more to contain the potential volatility of slave resistance than express it" (Edwards-Ingram and Brown 1998:7).

That beliefs about the cross mark were shared is demonstrated in the following examples. A formerly enslaved individual described it as a remedy for bad luck.

We alls believed dat it wuz bad luck ter turn back if yer started anywher, if yo' did back luck would sho' foller yer; but ter turn yo' luck, go [b]ack and make a cross in yo' path and spit in it (Rawick [1941], 1972:xvii [2] 45).
A nineteenth-century test to expose social offenders illustrates the use of the cross mark in the search for justice and it shows corporation in the community as well.

If anyone do you a wrong, get a rooster and turn a wash pot over it and make all the people that you suspect go up and make a cross on the pot. When the one who has wronged you makes the cross mark the rooster will crow (Waters 1983:216).

The cross mark continued to be a powerful symbol after slavery, as seen in a letter dated January 11, 1878. In this, a Hampton Institute graduate of Great Bridge, Norfolk County, Virginia, detailed the effect of the cross mark on a “colored man”:

There is a colored man who lives about one hundred and fifty yards from my school. Several of my pupils have to pass his yard on their way to school. One day, a little girl about ten years old, had a little stick, and, in running, made some cross-marks in the sand. He saw her making these marks. He ran out with a handful of salt and something else and threw it over these marks. In ten minutes I saw him making for me. He asked for “Ellen.” I called her to him. He said, “What did you put in the road to cripple me and my folks?” The child said, “I didn’t put nothing there. I only was running, sir.”

The child could not satisfy him, but then she gave him as much satisfaction as I could give. He went a half-mile after the little girl’s mother, and made her come and look at the marks. Had it not been for me, the child’s mother would have whipped her (quoted in Waters 1983:142).

Note the use of salt to counteract evil in the above story. It was considered a powerful substance. Salt has been linked to African enslavement and life in the African Diaspora (McKinney 2002:176-206). American colonists traded salted cod for slaves in West Africa and families in the interior sections of Africa sold children into slavery for salt (Kurlansky 2002:219; McKinney 2002:177). In the American mainland colonies, salt was produced locally but most of it was
imported from England. Salt was used to preserve meats like pork and beef in Virginia during slavery (Atkins 1994:56). Virginia, too, imported salt from England but also made their own. In fact the colony built a cottage industry of salted pork fat. Virginia hams were famous, by the time of the American Revolution, and were exported to other colonies including New York and overseas to Jamaica and England (Kurlansky 2002:218).

Enslaved Virginians received salt as part of plantation rations and in times of war, like the American Revolution and the Civil War, suffered like other residents from the shortage of the substance (Farish 1957:129; Kurlansky 2002:221; American Memory). In fact the consequences may have been even direr for the enslaved population in different areas of the American South. In 1937, an African-American woman from Mobile, Alabama, told her interviewers of an enslaver who sold his enslaved woman for “a sack o’ salt” during the Civil War (American Memory).

For enslaved Virginians, salt had curative powers. It was used to cure wounds, such as those that resulted from whippings that enslaved people received. After a whipping a bucket of salt water was poured over the victim “to sterilize the sore body.” Some sores healed within a few days (Perdue et.al 1976:255-256). A nineteenth-century remedy prescribes the effectiveness of a mixture of salt and gin in shoes as a warranty of protection against the wearer getting chills (Waters 1983:215).

Plantation management, too, considered salt as an effective cure. At times enslavers and managers were treating complaints that they had the power to prevent in the first place. In 1773, Philip Fithian learned that salt was an
ingredient in a Virginian cure for “Sulleness, Obstinancy, or Idleness.” An overseer described remedies for these complaints among enslaved people.

Take a Negro, strip him, tie him fast to a post; take then a sharp Curry-Comb, & curry him severly til he is well scrap’d; & call a Boy with some dry Hay, and make the Boy rub him down for several Minutes, then salt him, & unlose him. He will attend to his Business... afterwards (Farish 1957:38).

Jane McKinney has pointed out the symbolic and medicinal use of salt as well as possible African influences in beliefs and usage about this substance among people of African descent (McKinney 2002:176-206). For instance, she has written about the beliefs and practices of not offering salt to the spirits for it would make them become heavy and impede them from flying away from the world of mortals. To abstain from eating salt was one way to counteract evil spells. The slave trade was equated with witchcraft. Africans who needed to return to Africa as spirits from their exile in the Western Hemisphere had better options of so doing if they abstained from salt. Some religious and cultural groups like the Rastafarians in Jamaica avoid food like salted fish and pork that were once imported for enslaved people and now for the working class, perhaps because they see these items as part of oppression of black people. One religious sect, called the Revivalists, on the island believed that salt is a taboo to the spirits (McKinney 2002:192-193).

Salt was an important medicinal ingredient in charms. It was used in “protection mixture.” One prescription for such a potion directed that a mixture of pepper, red or black, and salt placed at both the front and the back of a house will thwart unwanted love or prevent another from stealing the love of one’s partner. The mixture was considered potent when placed under the bed of a loved
partner for it would cause the latter to forget the affection of any other (Mellon 1988:99).

One formerly enslaved woman in Virginia advised that, “Don’t let nobody payback borrowed salt; if you do bad luck will come to you” (Perdue et al. 1976:249). Another black Virginian woman, when interviewed in the 1930s, also warned “nebber carry back salt dat yo’ habe borrowed, fo’ it will bring bad luck ter yo’ and ter de one yo’ brung it ter” (Rawick [1941], 1972:xvii [1] 44). Apparently, this belief was known among other individuals in the American South, for one formerly enslaved woman from Arkansas also cautioned that salt should not be returned when it was borrowed for it would be an unlucky deed (American Memory).

Jamaicans too believed that salt could be the source of bad luck and it is very unlucky to walk over spilt salt. It should be swept up and washed away with water. Salt is associated with ill luck in vernacular speech and when someone is having a string of misfortunes or is not prospering, the general reference is that “mi salt” or “him salt.” To ward off evil spirits from a dwelling, Jamaicans have practiced sprinkling salt at the four corners of each room in a house. This tradition is also recommended for purification of new or old residences (Wilbert Edwards, personal communication, 1999-2003; Rhona Vassell, personal communication, 1999-2003). The diverse practices and materials in health and well-being testify to black’s people ongoing effort to prevent and medicate themselves against various ills and maladies.
Enclosing and Endowing Power

Francis Kemble (see the introductory narrative of this dissertation) found enslaved children with head wraps and denounced it as a “stupid negro practice.” What beliefs about well-being may have influenced these mothers to tie up the head of their children in multiple wraps? Were they trying to protect the health of these children? They may well have been doing so if we look at other similar practices in Africa and the Diaspora. The traditions of wrapping and tying in black culture have African parallels. These have been traditional ways of enclosing charms and more broadly for sealing intentions (Thompson 1983:103-111, 117-131; Gundaker 1993:61; McGaffey 1991).

The ritualized use of certain substances enclosed by wrapping was believed and is still considered a practice that has the power to harm or aid. Africans and their descendents in the Americas subscribed to these practices but enslavers sought to punish both “doctors” and “patients.” A survivor of slavery spoke about these practices when she was interviewed in Virginia in the 1930s (Perdue et al. 1976:266-269). She recounted, “many of us slaves feared de charm of witch craft more than de whippin’ dat de Marster gave. Dey would keep their tiny bags of charms closely hidden under their clothes” (Perdue et al. 1976:268).

In Africa, *Nkisi* (plural *minkisi*), a charm of the Bakongo people, is a “strategic object” with spiritual energies. Medicinal materials, including cemetery earth, animal bones, and herbs, are wrapped together along with material instructions to direct their power. These were usually enclosed in bundles or sculptured forms (Thompson 1983:117-131; McGaffey 1991). In the Americas, wrapped objects were central to practices of “good” and “bad” medicine in
hoodoo, voodoo, and obeah. All these spiritual and medicinal practices have been demonstrated to have connections with Africa.

Shaved or loose human hair was important for blacks in the Americas for they believed that the hair had magical powers. Rosanna Frazier, a formerly enslaved woman, believed that “a conjure man from Louisiana robbed her of her sight by passing powdered rattlesnake dust through her hair” (Escott 1979:106). Another formerly enslaved man, William Easter, recalled that hair was included in medicinal rites (Escott 1979:105). In the West Indies, the criminal record books of the parish of St. Andrew in Jamaica had entries for the years 1773 and 1782 documenting that some enslaved “criminals” were to be transported from the island because hair and other materials relating to “obeah” were found in their possession (Abrahams and Szwed 1983:196-197). In present-day Jamaica, people of African descent will not discard body hair carelessly for they believe that this material could be used to harm them. One way to get rid of detached hair is to saturate it with water and then burn it (Rhona Vassell, personal communication, 1999-2003).

Many enslaved people may have invested the hair and the head with spiritual meanings. Enslaved people on Francis Kemble’s and Pierce Butler’s plantation may have subscribed to aspects of this idea as well as others as they wrapped babies’ heads. Protecting infants’ heads kept them free from crawling insects as well cold air. Their actions also may have been based on the belief that an uncovered head would increase the chances of catching a cold.

Blacks, literally and practically, used their heads to lighten their loads. The common West African practice of transporting goods on the head was common
too in the Americas (Herskovits [1941] 1970:146; Greene 1965, i:554; Abrahams & Szwed 1983:Figures 8, 9, and 12; Campbell and Rice 1991). In the eighteenth-century, Landon Carter had to scold his pregnant enslaved laborers about the same practice. He wrote, “I hardly think my big bellyed are to be matched in Virginia. As soon as a wench is with child I have been used to indulge her in not carrying weights on her head or shoulders” (Greene 1965, i:554). Wrapping the head or wearing turbans facilitated transport.

Colonel C. L. G. Harris described an aid in transporting loads that was a cultural tradition of Jamaican maroons and explained how it was made and used.

The katta is made by winding the material around the hand, removing it while allowing it to retain its circular shape then fastening the loose end by simply pushing it down in the depressed centre. Its primary purpose is to soften the pressure of a weight carried on the head (Harris 1994:52).

Some enslaved people may have used a similar device to carry wide range of things, including live animals, furniture, and agricultural produce (Abrahams and Szwed 1983:Figures 8, 9, and 12).

Whites' descriptions of the headdresses of enslaved people can be read as confirmation of the cultural differences between blacks and whites as well as of enslaved people's search for autonomy. Some enslavers identified enslaved "mammies" as people with wrapped headdresses (Genovese [1974] 1976:354, 558-559). Pictorial representations of many enslaved women including nursemaids during the nineteenth century featured them with wrapped headwears (Campbell and Rice 1991). While wrapping the head was a common practice among blacks, some enslaved women at main houses may have been forced to cover their hair so as not to seen as competing with their mistress in the
arena of beauty. This idea is supported by evidence from Louisiana, where, in 1786, a governor ordered “all free women of color to tie their hair in a “tignon” or head tie” so as to tilt the field of competition wherein white males had to choose among white and “colored” women (Simkins 1990:167).

Eugene Genovese wrote that as far as militant blacks were concerned, the wearing of handkerchiefs transformed this item into “a mark of servility, of Aunt Jemimaism,” which was unacceptable. On the other hand, for racist whites, it exemplified that “old-time Negro,” they missed with “nostalgia and regret” (Genovese [1974] 1976:558). Wrapping and tying the hair and the head, however, were not simply unconcerned or quick solutions to hair care for the enslaved. I believe that through these practices, enslaved women gained more strength to face the conditions of slavery. The head was important to survival and wrapping protected and empowered it.

Hair care was part of weekend rites as enslaved women searched for “the lice out of the hair of their husbands, their children, and each other” (Genovese [1974] 1976:552). Yet, the hair of some children might have been left purposely uncombed. In black traditions, a baby’s hair would not be cut until the child was a year old. Many Jamaicans today, following traditional beliefs, wait until male children are talking clearly before giving them their first haircut.

During slavery, the hair of some black children appeared unkempt because their mothers or caregivers lacked the time or energy to provide them with frequent hair care or the hair was left that way on purpose. On a visit to the home of an enslaved person in Maryland in 1791, a Frenchman found:
Figure 17: An assortment of modified objects from the Rich Neck slave quarter. Items featured are fragments of pewter spoon handles, tobacco clay pipe bowls, and a shell (The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation).

Table 10.
A Selection of Presumably Medicinal Materials from Four Slave Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Rich Neck</th>
<th>Poplar Forest</th>
<th>Wilton</th>
<th>Monticello</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cowrie shells</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beads</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmaceutical containers</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierced coins</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decorated spoons</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mud dauber nests</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nails</td>
<td>✓</td>
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Some little Negro boys and girls, naked, offered us a gourd that they had just filled. These children were thin; naps of tawny hair which covered their temples indicated lack of nourishment, or its poor quality; their restless eyes fearfully looked us up and down (McCary 1950:13).

Appearance, however, can be deceptive in understanding hygiene. Today, not combing certain kinky hair for a day can create an impression of extreme untidiness. Undoubtedly the hair of some enslaved children would remain "unkempt" even with regular hairstyling.

The idea of wrapping and tying appeared in many contexts in the life of enslaved people and their descendants. Compelling information to support the wide spread practice of bundling materials together in activities of health and well-being comes from the study of African Americans at the Jordan Plantation, Brazoria, Texas. Here a cabin dating to the nineteenth century had materials including cast iron kettles, chalk, bird skulls, doll parts, knives and spoons, patent medicine bottles, and a thermometer (Brown 1994).

The archeologist, Kenneth Brown, believed that the location of these materials, beneath the hearth and near the doorway of the cabin, were as significant as the fact that they were intentionally buried. Presumably, the materials that were found beneath the hearth were placed there while the fireplace was used as a cooking area. Brown suggested that curing/conjuring rituals were done inside the cabin and that the trash was related only in part to Euro-American culture (Brown 1994:95-118).

Materials buried in isolation have also been purposely placed. An archaeologist in Virginia has uncovered a whole bottle, of a nineteenth-century
manufacturing date, beneath a freestanding wall in front of a fireplace at the Willcox Plantation at Flowerdew Hundred in Prince George County (Deetz 1993:145). The archaeologist, James Deetz, has surmised that the bottle was deliberately buried there. The inner wall was built in the 1830s, after the kitchen was constructed. Deetz treated the kitchen as a “cross-road”:

The kitchen marks the place where the world of the Willcoxes and that of their slaves abutted one another. It is, in a sense, the mediation between the two worlds where the residents of the slave quarter, and possibly of the kitchen itself, worked to feed the planter and his family and to provide other amenities as well (Deetz 1993:145).

The kitchen at the Willcox plantation was a wooden two-room over two-room structure with a brick chimney at both ends. The lower rooms probably were used as cooking and laundry areas and the upstairs rooms likely served as housing for members of the enslaved people at the plantation (Deetz 1993:144-146). Additional evidence of burying objects in buildings comes from Curacao, where people of African ancestry buried coins dating from 1875-80 in the four walls of houses (Haviser 1999:232).

Wrapped, encoded, and buried materials pointed to secret knowledge that enslavers were not privy to and that enslaved people drew on this fact. It suggested control and direction as they sought to influence outcomes. Therefore, when enslaved people medicated their personal spaces as well as those of enslavers, they probably felt protected as they traversed the entire property.

The Symbolic Use of Colors and Cloths

How cloths and particular colors were used in traditional African societies suggest ideas about their roles in societies in the Diaspora in the arena of health.
and well-being. In traditional African societies, textiles served as a form of multivocal communication. The African writing tradition often used cloths for graphic displays. These writings were considered sacred and protective and were associated with knowledge and power.

The Ejagham people of Southwestern Nigeria, for example, developed a unique form of graphic writing that included gestural signs, *nsibidi*. Rituals and customs influenced by *nsibisi*, or “cruel letters, served the law and government. Elements of these writings have surfaced in Cuba (Thompson 1983:227-268).

Over the centuries, African cloths have always been arresting because of patterns created in the deliberate clashing of “high-affect colors,” such as blue against white (Thompson 1983:209). African appreciated the aesthetic of “off-beat patterns. This was usually created when the woven strips of different patterns were pieced together. The material produced from this process had an asymmetrical and unpredictable design. Visual aliveness and strength in the aesthetic structure of African cloths came from the spontaneity of their designs.

Robert Farris Thompson has indicated that asymmetrical and multi-strip patterned textiles in West Africa, particularly in Senegambia, have served to “keep away evil spirits.” According to Thompson, these materials were believed to have operated in this capacity because of the nature of evil spirits: they travel in straight line (Thompson 1983:221-222). Similar beliefs have been associated with people of African descent in the Americas. For instance, in the British West Indies, patchwork dresses were known to be most effective against evil spirits. Decorating the walls of houses with mismatched newspapers and magazines are among the methods that African Americans have enlisted to keep away evil spirits.
Like African religious concepts, blacks' protective conventions were encoded in many forms.

The protective power of textiles, things worn on the head, or used for good luck were associated with their colors too. Red, for example, was and is still associated with the Yoruba god called Shango (Thompson 1983:84-87). Africans and African-descended populations consider this color as endowed with Ashe, "the-power-to-make-things happen" (Thompson 1983:5). For African Americans, red signified danger, protection, conflict, and passion. Wearing particular colors such as red and white were defense against annihilating powers (Thompson 1983:221-222). Red became connected with the Lord's children in African-Americans' Christianity, one with strong African influences.

Who is that yonder all dressed in red?
I heard the angels singin'.
It looks like the children Moses led,

In Jamaican traditions, to guard against evil spirits and even friendly deceased family members, babies were dressed in red or made to wear red-colored objects (Wilbert Edwards, personal communication 1999-2003; Rhona Vassell, personal communication 1999-2003). From my experience in dealing with bereavement in the family and being encouraged to use red things, the power of the color red also lies in its ability to ward off sadness, impart brightness, and even give strength to the bereaved.

Other colors with symbolic importance for blacks in the Americas include white and blue. White is identified with the Yoruba deity of creativity, Obatala (Thompson 1983:11). It represents character, pure intentions, and the source of
knowledge. In Kongo religious concepts, it is related to the spiritual world, a world that is believed to exist in a watery form beneath the world of the living (Thompson 1983:108-109). The practice of decorating yards and gravesites with white shells may have been derived from these and other similar concepts. White-colored things continue to be important in ceremonies, including baptisms, weddings, and funerals.

In West Africa, blue was a favorite color in Nigeria (Gates 1987:14) and the color of the protective eyes used by Muslims and Mediterranean peoples (Dublin 1987:1987:14) and the 1989:105-106). Apparently enslaved blacks preferred blue beads for this color is predominant among the beads from the African burial ground in New York (La Roche 1994:15). Also, blue is the main bead color among the beads found on sites dating to the colonial and antebellum eras in South Carolina and Georgia (Stine et al. 1996:65).

Archaeologists studying slavery have interpreted blue beads as linked to protection as well as fertility and have suggested that they were worn on necklaces, wrist and ankle bands, or as waist beads to protect the wearers (Singleton 1991:162; La Roche 1994: 13-15; Stine et al. 1996:61-62). (See the section on Mortuary Practices for more on beads). Placing blue cross marks on babies was considered effective protection against evil spirit (Beckwith 1929:57-58). Protective rituals were also linked with other activities exemplifying patience.
The Symbolic Use of Plants

Plants were connected to black religious practices by serving as symbols of achievements and possibilities. In connoting plants with well-being, formerly enslaved Virginian George White, born in 1847 and interviewed in 1937, recalled:

I just go an' get me some roots when ever I feel sick. I know master weed, peter's root, may apple, sweet william roots are good for a lot of things (Perdue et al. 1976:310).

White insisted that different roots were applicable to different situations, such as, to help in monetary matters and the search for a job. He believed that God was important in treating illnesses and healing with roots:

Dere's a root for ev'y disease an' I can cure most anything, but you have got to talk wid God an' ask him to help out. I had de colic one time an' I didn' know what to do, an de Lord tol' me to git dat root up on de wall an' chew it an' I did. I got all right (Perdue et al. 1976:310).

It is clear that many members of the enslaved population of Virginia cherished beliefs that a Christian God maintained watchful eyes on their affairs. He was not a distant God; He actively intervened in everyday life providing divine guidance in the search for health and well-being. Yet, enslaved people were not free to deal with God on their own terms, for whites sought to control black people's worship and service. The recollections of some formerly enslaved people described efforts to conceal worship, for they would be punished if plantation management caught them engaged in this activity. However, some enslavers permitted open service and allowed their people to use slave quarters or special places built for this purpose (Perdue et al. 1976:79).

Church services controlled by whites did not meet the standards of blacks who thought the white preachers used these occasions to encourage obedience to
enslavers. Blacks wanted to worship in their own way as stated by a formerly enslaved man of Norfolk Virginia. He recounted that the,

Ole white preacher jest was telling us slaves to be good to our marsters. We ain't kerr'd a bit 'bout dat stuff he was telling us 'cause we wanted to sing, pray, and serve God in our own way. You see, 'legion needs a little motion—specially if you gwine feel de spirret (Perdue et al. 1976:100).

In worshipping in their own way, trees were central to religious experiences of enslaved people for many meeting places were in brush arbors and in the woods. Also trees served as altars to offer prayers. A formerly enslaved woman, Bethany Veney of Page County, Virginia (Duke 1995:45-56), described her effort to attend a religious camp meeting.

I knew that master David had forbidden me to do so. One night, I started out, and, as I came to a persimmon-tree, I felt moved to go down on my knees and ask the Lord to help me, and make master David willing. In a few minutes I felt very happy. I wanted to remain on my knees... (Duke 1995:51).

Veney remained on her knees and walked on them to her master and made her request, she was granted permission to attend the meeting.

Enslaved parents may have planted trees honoring the birth of their children, thus guaranteeing their health and well-being. One oral account collected from Belle Jackson in 1941 in Danville, Virginia, described this activity.

When er baby is borned, set out in er corner of yo' garden er little Sap'lin tree and name it fer de baby, 'tis best ter plant dis tree jes' fo' sunup, so as ter ketch de strengt'ur de risin sun. No word mus' be spoke 'till de tree is plant'd, and den face de east and sing de plantin' song. If 'n de tree grow strong an spred out de chile will grow strong (ALFC1940-41).

Martha Beckwith (1929:55) found this practice in early twentieth-century Jamaica.
Trees were planted at the head of graves as markers (Thompson 1983:138; Yellin 1987:90; Gundaker 1993:61). Robert Farris Thompson has identified this as a Kongo-Anglo influence among African Americans. He has suggested that “trees planted on graves also signify the spirit; their roots literally journey to the other world” (Thompson 1983:138). Traditionally, in the American South, plants such as cedars were planted in graveyards. Evergreen plants like cedar trees may have served as a symbol of immortality and a metaphor for the soul of the departed, for if the tree flourished all would be well with the soul of the departed. Trees, therefore, symbolize that death is not the end for they lived on after the departed (Puckett 1969:421-422; Thompson 1983:139). Linda Brent of North Carolina referred to a tree that her father had planted to mark the grave of her mother (Yellin 1987:90).

The Number Nine

The number nine is associated with both life and death in the African Diaspora. It is symbolic of patience and the need to wait for things to happen in due time. For instance, in paying respect to the departed and allowing the time for a proper “send off,” “set-up” or “settin’ up” was part of mourning customs in the African Americas (Waters 1983:277; Abrahams and Szwed 1983:160; Nichols 1989:21). These all-night meetings at the home of the bereaved family allowed friends and families to support each other. Spiritual songs and prayers along with recollections of the deceased were usually included in these nightly meetings. In 1897, the Southern Workman published the following account of the “settin’ up”
from a correspondent of Gloucester County, Virginia, detailing how it was practiced in that area.

The people begin to gather about six o'clock on the second night and when enough are gathered together they begin singing and praying. This they keep up till one o'clock, when a lunch, consisting of coffee, biscuits, crackers, cakes, sweet bread, pudding and tea is served. After the lunch they begin again and sing plantation melodies keeping time with a low and impressive beating of the feet. The songs sung at a 'settin' up' are usually bordering on the minor, and are sometimes very weird, but most are of Heaven, the Promised Land, and rest. The singing is kept up until about four in the morning, when the neighbors begin to leave in small parties, for no one would think of leaving a 'settin' up' alone. The third night is a repetition of the second.

It is at these "settin's up" that many of the "spirituals" have first been brought forth, some friend of the deceased thus giving vent to his emotions in original song. The last to leave a "settin'up" is the first to die, and it is for this reason that no one is willing to leave alone (Waters 1983:277).

Mourning customs in Jamaica, too, include nightly "set-up" gatherings culminating with a special ceremony on the ninth night (Abrahams and Szwed 1983:160). This ceremony marks the final separation and "sends off" of the dead (Wilbert Edwards, personal communication, 1999-2003; Rhona Vassell, personal communication, 1999-2003).

One fictional product about the African Diaspora also addresses the "nine day theme." In *The Bridge of Beyond*, by Simon Schwarz-Bart, a novel set in the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe after slavery, Telumee, the granddaughter of "Queen without a Name," the matriarch of the community, related what happened at her grandmother's death.

Man is not a cloud in the wind that death scatters and destroys at a blow. And if we Negroes at the back of beyond honour our dead for nine days, it's so that the soul of the deceased should not be hurried in any way, so that it can detach itself gradually from its piece of
earth, its chair, its favourite tree, and the faces of its friends, before going to contemplate the hidden side of the sun. And so we talked and sang and drowsed for nine days and nine nights, until Queen without a Name’s soul should cast off the weight of the earth and take flight (Schwarz-Bart 1982:125).

In the arrival of children, the importance of patience and the reliance on time and nature for health and well-being are also apparent. In the early nineteenth century, an enslaved midwife informed Matthew Lewis that, “Oh, massa, till nine days over, we no hope of them” (Lewis 1834:97). Lewis was concerned about the high number of infant deaths caused by tetanus or lock jaw. Frances Kemble too found this problem prevalent on her husband’s plantation in Georgia in the 1830s. She noted that the women complained about this illness “to which their babies very frequently fall victims in the first or second week after their birth, refusing the breast, and the mouth gradually losing the power of opening itself” (Kemble [1863] 1992:18).

Enslaved mothers resisted Matthew Lewis effort to institute measures to combat incidents of tetanus. He had ordered that immediately after birth, babies should be plunged into a “tub of cold water” (Lewis 1834:321). The mothers were so set against this order that it could not be enforced. Drawing on practices of the Bakongo and Bakongo-influenced people, who consider the dead as occupying a watery, upside-down, white world underneath the world of the living (see Thompson 1983:106-109; Gundaker 1993:61), I tentatively suggest that these mothers may have been alarmed by this order because they considered immersing infants in water would be akin to reinforcing these children’s connections to the realm of the dead.
It is likely that medicinal activities were instituted during the first nine days to guard against this possibility. The children needed rituals to bring them into life fully, the world of the living, and not activities to reinforce ties with the world of the dead. One black midwife who was formerly enslaved in Kentucky advised, “neber wash de baby till tis over a week ole” (Rawick [1941], 1972:vii [82]109).

Enslaved people’s beliefs about the interconnections and disjunctions between the world of the dead and that of the living are alluded to in other childcare practices of people of African descent in Jamaica. According to their traditions and practices, “the ninth day” after birth or death is a significant day (Wilbert Edwards, personal communication, 1999-2003; Rhona Vassell, personal communication, 1999-2003). One popular custom dictates that both mothers and newborn babies stay indoors until after the ninth day of the delivery of a baby. During this interval both mothers and baby should not be allowed any visitor except the midwife and immediate family members (Rhona Vassell, personal communication, 1999-2003).

Martha Warren Beckwith recorded the lifeways of Jamaican black peasants between the summers of 1919 and 1924. In Black Roadways: A Study of Jamaica Folk Life, she described beliefs and activities relating to newborn babies (Beckwith 1929). Her work verifies that nine was a significant number for these descendants of Africans.

The momentous time in an infant’s life arrives on the ninth day after birth, when for the first time he is taken out of doors. During the first nine days the mother eats only soft food, like arrowroot, bread, and milk. On the ninth day, a bath is prepared for the child, a
little rum thrown into it, and each member of the family must throw in a bit of silver “for the eyesight,” or “for luck.”

To ward off evil spirits, indigo blue is added to the bath and the forehead marked with a blue cross. The mother also has a bath, and the midwife offers a prayer before bringing the baby out into the air. Negro nurses of white children have been observed to place the cross at the back of the neck of their charges, where it will not be observed by the skeptical white mothers (Beckwith 1929:57-58).

The number nine was significant in naming practices of South Carolina Sea Islanders in the 1920s; for a baby was named on the ninth day after birth (Herskovits [1941] 170:190). It is interesting to note the multiplicity of methods African Diaspora’s people employed for the health and well-being of the mother and child: proper food, baths, various objects, including objects of special colors, the use of cross marks, and prayers. The foregoing examples add to the credibility of the multivariate definition and practice of medicine I use throughout this essay.

**Mortuary Practices: Solidarities and Contentions**

Mortuary practices, including previously mentioned “setting ups” provide a productive area of analysis for studying communal behavior, negotiation, dispute, cooperation, racial tension, creativity, persistence, and resistance (McCarthy 1993; Orser 1994; La Roche 1994; Perry 1997; Costlin 1999). Here the focus is on burials and their material accouterments for apparently they had counter-hegemonic qualities and consequences for slave societies. For example, they were appropriate settings for planning resistances against slavery. In 1687, the colonial authorities in Virginia deliberated about the danger of slave funerals (McIlwaine 1925, i:85-87).
From their account, it seems enslaved people were gathering on Saturdays and Sundays "in great Numbers in makeing and holding Funeralls for Dead Negroes" (McIlwaine 1925, i:86). The Council believed that these occasions were being used to plan insurrections. The governing body was reacting to the discovery of a slave conspiracy on the Northern Neck and found it necessary to issue a proclamation,

requiring a Strickt observance of the Severall Laws of this Collony relateing to Negroes, and to require and Command all Masters of families haveing any Negro Slaves, not to permitt them to hold or make any Solemnity or Funeralls for any deced Negroes (McIlwaine 1925, i:86-87).

Enslaved people had to obtain permission to hold funerals and mourners from other plantations had to get the consent of their masters or mistresses to attend these gatherings (Walsh 1997:105).

Laws regulated funeral activities of enslaved people but did not obliterate medicinal practices connecting to burials. Food and liquor were important at funerals. The family of the deceased usually provided these substances and mourners comforted the family of the deceased (Nichols 1989:21). In 1753, a South Carolina resident, Charles Pickney, noted in his account book "payment of one pound, ten shillings for the making of a coffin and for rum and sugar at the burial of a slave child" (P. Morgan 1998:641). In 1785, Virginian planter Robert Carter refused to sell old Nat "Brandy to bury his Granddaughter Lucy" but he offered old Nat a dollar "telling him that he might lay out his Annuity as he pleased" (P. Morgan 1998:641). Food was a principal item interred with the deceased (Ball 1858:198).
In 1816, Matthew Lewis too found this double use of funeral in Jamaica and reported on a conspiracy that was discovered at a formerly enslaved child’s funeral in Jamaica. The overseer at the plantation, where the funeral was held, had noticed a large number of strange black “mourners” at the cabin of the father of the deceased, who had roasted a hog for the occasion, and had eavesdropped on their conversations. The “mourners” had used the child’s funeral for the swearing in of conspirators (Lewis 1834:227).

In the Americas, some Africans and their descendants believed that after death they would return to an African spiritual homeland, but some considered heaven to be the new meeting place (Sobel 1987:96, 186). In 1762, a Virginian planter noted in his diary that “Frank, a daughter of Betsy and old Jack, died. A few hours before, she told her mother she was dying and hoped to see her in heaven” (quoted in Sobel 1987:186). The funeral of an enslaved boy in nineteenth-century Jamaica, however, was described as conducted “that night according to African customs ... accompanied with dancing, singing, drinking, eating, and riot of all kinds” (Lewis 1834:327).

Charles Ball, in his narrative Fifty Years in Chains: or, the Life of an American Slave (1858), reported on the burial of a boy in which he, Ball, and the enslaved mother assisted the African father. The boy was buried with,

- a small bow and several arrows;
- a little bag of parched meal;
- a miniature canoe, about a foot long, and a little paddle, (with which he said it would cross the ocean to his own country) a small stick, with an iron nail, sharpened, and fastened into one end of it; and a piece of white muslin, with several curious and strange figures painted on it in blue and red, by which, he said, his relations and countrymen would know the infant to be his son, and would receive it accordingly, on its arrival amongst them (Ball 1858:198).
The father had been a priest in Africa and was accustomed to being supported and served. He concluded the funeral by cutting a “lock of hair from his head, threw it upon the dead infant, and closed the grave with his own hands.” The man informed the bystanders; “the God of his country was looking at him, and was pleased with what he had done” (Ball 1858:198).

African customs continued to influence enslaved people’s burial practices. While enslaved people mourned the death of loved ones many, at the same time, rejoiced that death took their relatives out of the “wretchedness” of slavery. (Perdue et al. 1976:322-323). Others believed that their loved one had returned to Africa and a proper burial was important for a good return home. Some enslaved parents appeared to be or were calm when faced with the death of their children. They lived with the possibility of losing their children through death or other forms of separation and this may have contributed to a level of calm when they were faced with the reality (Genovese [1974] 1976:496). Apparently others expressed grief openly.

Philip Fithian noted how grieved the enslaved parents were at the death of their child of about six years old. The parents had asked him to read prayers over the grave. His employer’s children along with forty or fifty enslaved workers attended the funeral. It appeared that the parents were too grieved to go to the grave site, but wanted a Christian burial for their loved one (Farish 1957:182, 184).

Others did not let the lack of conventional literacy or other factors to influence them to ask whites to read prayers over graves. In 1852, Frederick Law Olmsted witnessed some “negro” funerals on a Sunday in Richmond, Virginia in
the nineteenth century (Olmsted [1861] 1984:34-37). He saw blacks laying a child
to rest with the singing of “a wild kind of chant.” Olmsted also described the
activity of a well-dressed black man who was part of another interment at an
adjacent grave. This man “stepped to the head of the grave, and, after a few
sentences of prayer, held a handkerchief before him as if it were a book, and
pronounced a short exhortation, as if he were reading from it” (Olmsted [1861]
1984:35).

Apparently this speaker performed by transforming materials and texts:
the handkerchief could be read, it became the Bible as well as a hymnal. He was a
“man of words” and also used Biblical citations, verses from hymns, and his own
interpretations of death and the afterlife to minister to the need of his
community. Grey Gundaker has explored aspects of reading and non-reading as
powerful performances among blacks (Gundaker 1998a: Chapter 6; and 2000).
The speaker’s activities guaranteed that the dead were laid to rest properly and
the living community could “go on.” The ceremony also included singing and
planting live branches at the head and foot of the grave.

Enslaved African Americans and their descendants enacted medicinal
rituals at gravesites and they were considered charmed places (Brathwaite
1971:216-218; Thompson 1983:132-142; McCarthy 1993; Orser 1994:36-38; La
Roche 1994; Perry 1997). Incorporating rites from different religious traditions
may have been one way to guarantee that all bases were covered in the effort to
sustain health and well-being. Archaeologist Charles Orser has noted that African
Americans were perhaps willing to bury the dead with African-inspired objects
mainly because these materials would be hidden (Orser 1994:36). Perhaps these
grave goods and their associated behavioral practices were not intended for white
gaze and thus represented blacks’ efforts to exclude whites and avoid potential
conflict over burial practices.

Internal conflicts among blacks probably influenced funeral customs and
material objects associated with graves. At times, enslaved people may have
disagreed about burial practices, particularly if more African-related rituals were
considered incompatible with other forms of religious beliefs such as Christianity.
Contentions over funeral procedures and customs may have been resolved by
allowing both conflicting and compatible practices within the same ceremony.

While some aspects of death rituals are not amenable to archaeological
studies, burials are recognizable (Costlin 1999:85). Cathy Costlin has indicated
that objects found in graves represent intentional and meaningfully placed
materials as parts of rituals for the living as well as for the dead (Costlin 1999).
Investigations of the nineteenth-century cemeteries of the First African Baptist
Church in Philadelphia uncovered materials suggesting African and African-
American burial rites. For even when touched by the Baptist faith, these practices
included placing objects such as shoes, coins, and ceramics in graves (McCarthy
1993). Many of the deceased may have practiced Christianity as Baptists in their
living years, but the archaeological data shows that other religious traditions were
also observed. Both the material and the performance aspects of mortuary rites
brought together different individuals and religions.

Archaeological analysis of the colonial African Burial Ground in New York
included the study of 427 burials (Perry 1997:3). Children were about forty-five
percent of the burials (La Roche 1994:7), a testimony to high infant mortality
within this enslaved population. Warren Perry described "a double burial with a woman cradling an infant in her right arm suggesting death in childbirth or soon thereafter. This burial, however, is not separated from the general burial population" (Perry 1997:3-4). In Africa, some graves are separated from others based on the circumstances surrounding death. Death by childbirth and suicide, for instance, require special funerary treatments (Perry 1997:3). In colonial times, if blacks in New York were practicing such rituals, they may not have deemed it necessary or were unable to enforce any special treatment to segregate the remains of the woman and child from the other burials. Living under conditions of domination and racial discriminatory practices, including the involuntary separation of families, may have led to changes in burial practices where the African-American community no longer thought this separation of the dead as necessary.

Yet, it is apparent that some practices were maintained to ensure the health and well-being of the living community and the proper provisioning of the dead. The practice of passing babies and children over coffins at funerals perhaps was part of enslaved people's funeral rites. Similar practices by people of African descent today are also directed towards protecting children and ensuring their health and well-being with the aid of the ancestors (Nichols 1989:16-17; Rhona Vassell, personal communication, 1999-2003).

In spite of the various levels of material deficiency suffered by the enslaved, they placed things that were usable to the living community with the dead. Some of these materials that were placed inside and on graves were associated with the deceased before death (Thompson 1983:132-142; La Roche
1994; Walsh 1997:106-107). These include tools, coins, personal objects, decorative items, foods, and pottery. Beads, coins, clay pipes, and ceramics are prominent among items that are frequently recovered from African-American graves.

At the Utopia site near Williamsburg, Virginia, an African-American cemetery with the eighteenth-century remains of thirteen adults and twelve infants or small children was uncovered (Fesler 1996:5; Walsh 1997:106). The number of children dying was almost equal to that of the adults, suggesting high mortality among the former group. Three adults were interred with clay tobacco pipes under their arms and an adolescent was buried with a necklace of “transparent multifaceted, amethyst-colored glass” beads (Fesler 1996:5; Walsh 1997:106).

In his eighteenth-century narrative, Olaudah Equiano described burial practices with tobacco pipes in Africa. He recalled that the wise men of his village were buried with pipes and tobacco (Gates 1987:21). Both males and females smoke tobacco for relaxation and children practiced doing so without their parent’s knowledge. Some enslaved individuals may have used the smoke of the tobacco in “smoking rituals” of healing. Robert Farris Thompson has linked other types of pipes on African-American graves to the well-being of the dead and to Kongo-influenced practices in the Americas. He has pointed out that they were “representing voyage, through smoke or water, from this world to the next” (Thompson 1983:139).

The custom of placing valuable and usable objects in graves can be read as indications that certain beliefs and activities strengthened enslaved individuals as
well as the community. Historian Lorena Walsh has concluded that the necklace found in one of the burials at Utopia was “a cherished possession in life” (Walsh 1997:106). Cheryl La Roche (1994) studied a number of burials at the African Burial Ground in New York and their associated artifacts. She found that both infants and adults were buried with beads. One child was buried with beads at the waist while another was interred with beads around the neck (p.7-8). An adult female burial had about one hundred beads around the pelvis (p.8-10).

Beads protected African Americans in life and served them in death (La Roche 1994: 13-17; Stine et al. 1996:61-63). Power or energy resided in these objects and they could be accessed for good or evil purposes. Christianity, Islam, and other religions influenced the use of beads by Africans and African Americans (Dublin [1987] 1998:47; Orser 1994:37-38). For centuries, Africans have had access to beads and the raw materials for their production (Dublin [1987] 1998:37,47). Beads associated with Christianity have been found in the burial of a black male, presumably an African, at a cemetery in New Orleans, Louisiana. The burial dates to the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries (Orser 1994:37-38). In Islamic cultures, children and women were identified as people in need of extra protection and when they wore bead amulets their protection was believed guaranteed (Dublin [1987] 1998:37). Beads and seeds may have been used together or as interchangeable items, strung together and worn for protection during slavery (Brathwaite 1971:233-234). Usually archaeologists overlook the possibility of seeds as decorative and protective objects and mainly interpret them in the realm of diet or pharmacological materials.
Africans and their descendants continued and elaborated on practices from Africa mixing these with new ones. Practices of motherhood, health, and well-being helped enslaved people and their descendants to perpetuate their notions and ideals of a wholesome life. These activities and beliefs indicated that, in spite of a life of oppression and material insufficiency, blacks were never culturally deficient but sought to live a life of creativity as they engaged in their own practices.
Conclusion

Slavery in Virginia entrapped the society in an ongoing power struggle over different cultural notions and practices. Africans and their descendants were forced to pitch their forces against enslavers, mainly whites, and their associates. While considering and treating blacks as an unequal people, whites prided themselves on an alleged superiority based on race, free status, as well as economic, political, and other social advantages. Thus, the study of enslaved people is also an analysis of inequalities and how an economically and socially marginalized people made significant contributions to an overall American culture. Yet, at the same time, they managed to nurture and create distinctive practices among themselves that shored them up as a people with power.

While I spent considerable time discussing enslaved people's practices that could be considered separate and more or less hidden from the dominant white gaze and may have risen, in part, from the nature of power and race relations in the society, I have not ignored personal relationships between blacks and whites for these interactions resulted in many ambiguities and furthermore impacted enslaved people's well-being. The ambiguities were clearly present in the area of motherhood and child care responsibilities. Racist practices dictated that white women supplied the heirs and black women the laborers of plantation society. Altogether, these dictations resulted in circumstances that contributed to the
overall injustices of enslavement. For many enslaved black women, motherhood and child care responsibilities provided means of empowerment that made these individuals proactive in influencing their own lifeways and the future by fighting enslavers' directives, redistributing foods and time, requesting housing, and demanding other rights and concessions. In addition to these activities of women, the enslaved population, overall, improved their well-being by appropriating the tools of their trades for their own enterprises. They sold animals and garden produce to enslavers and others and protected themselves spiritually and physically, for example, by guarding religious activities at slave quarters and in the woods. Enslaved people proved that they were not docile but a force that, at times, enslavers had to remunerate.

In their observances and celebrations, blacks affirmed "that their lives were special, their lives had dignity, their lives had meaning beyond the definitions set by slavery" (Raboteau 1978:231). Here slave quarters and other discrete living areas are especially important variables to consider in studying enslaved blacks. They were sites of joy and sorrow, especially when linked with prayer services and other celebratory practices of marriage, birth, child rearing, and death. At these places, enslaved people created, consumed, and recalled knowledge and materials for health and well-being. Knowledge held individually and collectively was significant to blacks' resilience and their living areas reflected and encoded their cultural practices and were the very sites for such construction.

Places and practices connected to renewals and rebirths were significant; for blacks interacted with whites on uneven social fields where the ills of slavery
sought to obliterate blacks' sense of selfhood and community. Yet, as seen from numerous examples in this study, they found alternative ways to communicate, develop, and apply these concepts. They worked within their traditions as well as created syncretic solutions that exemplified fluidity in their search for a wholesome life. Black people fought to ameliorate the legal and social definitions and practices of enslavement. They enabled themselves and their loved ones to withstand slavery, itself, being the main perpetuator of many of their misfortunes.

As different groups of people, plants, objects, the cultural landscape, and the spirit world were seen as contributing negatively or positively to the pursuit of health and well-being, a wholesome and an aware living were strong medicine in the ability to withstand slavery. Therefore, cultivating a broad knowledge of how and when to openly confront or to subtly resist authorities and various other maladies was a priority for achieving potentials. Blacks communicated among themselves, and also to whites, their ideals about health, patience, strength, and respect for the spiritual world, people, time, and nature. By these and other means, enslaved people strived in their pursuit for an ideal life and attained goals in remediying the ills of slavery.

Throughout this dissertation, I have emphasized how people of African descent in the Americas were knowledgeable about things and conditions that were detrimental to their notions, ideals, and pursuit of a wholesome life. I have presented and interpreted a range of information to support my main viewpoint that motherhood, health care, and well-being practices formed a multifaceted arena where blacks and whites interacted and, at times, blacks had conditional
power. Overall, enslaved people's activities illustrated that they cared extraordinarily for their children and their own health as they resisted the dehumanizing conditions of slavery.

Although focusing on Virginia, I explored connections with other societies in the African Diaspora. For it is not misleading to explore commonalities among cultures in Africa and the Americas. On the contrary, this perspective should be integral to any activity of historical production for, with the onset of Atlantic slavery, none of these cultures developed in isolation. The significance of Africa to people of African descent and those who interacted with them is undeniable. These peoples have evoked her powers consciously, collectively, and deliberately as they confronted different oppressive and celebratory conditions in the New World.

Like other scholars of the African Diaspora, I found practices that have geographical and chronological parallels. However, I would caution that these cultural phenomena should not be read as any indication that different groups of blacks had similar experiences during slavery and afterward. Nevertheless, it should be clear from the range of evidence presented in this dissertation that black people's efforts to medicate the devastating impact of enslavement whether through open resistance or more covert practices in motherhood, health care, and well-being matters were widespread occurrences in the African Americas.

In this work a multi-level analysis would have been impossible without the combined use of the documentary and archaeological data. This approach has permitted a more in depth study of enslaved people whose past is elusive when researchers depend on documents alone: many aspects of their history were not
written down. Furthermore, many blacks' activities were hidden from the main chroniclers of slave societies, whites with unsympathetic gazes.

I have examined the cultures of enslaved people without restricting the discussion to domination and resistance, for I have emphasized cultural dynamics and the individual. A focus on people rather than social structure has allowed a stronger analysis of actions and intentions and thus strengthens understanding of the complex nature of the social interactions between blacks and whites during slavery. Yet, the lifeways of blacks were created and transformed through acts of interaction as well as of separation.

It is clear from the profusion of works cited in this dissertation that materials from the African Diaspora continue to facilitate new research ideas and methodologies and even reassessments of the scope of the field. Like this dissertation with its potential to contribute significantly to scholarship regarding the nature of social interactions and cultural practices, studies of Africans and their descendants should prioritize multi-level analyses thus allowing for more opportunities to interrogate different data and perspectives, cross disciplinary boundaries, and include diverse experiences. All these efforts should result in a more comprehensive understanding of the past and a stronger appreciation of difference.
Appendix A

Notes on the Three Slave Quarters

Rich Neck

The slave quarter at Rich Neck plantation in Williamsburg, Virginia, was occupied from about 1740s to 1770s (Franklin 1997, 2004). This outlying quarter did not have an adjacent big house structure during this time. Excavations at the site during the early 1990s uncovered the remains of a central fireplace, fifteen root cellars, artifacts (including ceramics, tools, beads, and buttons), animal bones, and seed remains that suggested how the enslaved may have utilized their environment and included things, they perhaps obtained in the nearby town of Williamsburg. The archaeological evidence indicates that a duplex cabin, 30 x 20 feet, once stood on the site. This cabin was divided into two rooms measuring 15 x 20 feet each. The quarter probably had a dirt floor.

A 1767 probate inventory lists twenty-one slaves at this site (VMHB 1913:395, 401). The cabin probably had upper story/loft areas to accommodate the twenty-one enslaved people, some of whom may have been relatives. These enslaved individuals included ten men, five women, three boys, and three girls. Based on the monetary value of the adults as listed on the inventory, couples were likely present at Rich Neck. One woman, Hester, was valued at 10 pounds
sterling, compared to Judith and Dinah valued at 50 pounds sterling each. These figures suggest that young adults as well as those advanced in age were living at Rich Neck. The biological parents of the children counted may have been among the adults listed on the inventory—or at least the mothers. Since, according the laws of Virginia, the child's status followed that of the mother, the Ludwell family most likely were the legal owners of the mothers. The enslaved population at Rich Neck produced major crops like tobacco, wheat, and corn and engaged in other agricultural activities (Shepperson 1942:14-16).

Enslaved people at Rich Neck sought freedom too in their search for health and well-being. Probably a result of opportunities created by the Revolutionary War, Rich Neck's proprietors, Philip Ludwell II's daughter and her husband, were left with only one enslaved person in 1781 (Shepperson 1942:136). By the next year Cary Wilkinson, the manager, advertised for the return of a runaway man, perhaps the enslaved individual who had stayed behind.

FORTY DOLLARS REWARD

Run away from Mr. Paradise's mill, near Williamsburg, a negro man named GEORGE, a carpenter by trade, but has been miller at the said mill for many years. He is about five feet ten or eleven inches high, and has some defect in one of his eyes. It is thought he will make for the northward, or the Pamunkey Indian town. Whoever takes up the said negro and delivers him to me near Jamestown, shall be paid the above reward by

CARY WILKINSON (quoted in Windley 1983:216)

George, a skilled worker, most likely had assisted his fellow enslaved residents by processing grains they had grown or had been issued as rations.
Wilton

The Wilton plantation slave quarter site in Henrico County, Richmond, Virginia belonged to the wealthy Randolph family. The site dates from 1750 to 1840 (Higgins et al. 2000:144). Tobacco was the dominant crop grown in the early years but the plantation adapted to a more diversified economy and wheat production became significant in the later period of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century.

Agricultural production and the number of enslaved people at the plantation declined in the nineteenth century. Between 1783 and 1787, Wilton enslaved people averaged 103 individuals. But from 1788-1820, the average number of workers was 60 and only adults over twelve were counted. In 1828, the average number of tithables decreased to about 48; between 1829 and 1842, enslaved people who were counted dropped to an average of 34. Some of these individuals were probably sold to pay off debts or they were moved to other plantations owned by the Randolph family (Higgins et al. 2000:143). The slave quarter site at Wilton plantation was located approximately 300 meters north of the mansion site. The mansion, an elegant structure, was built in the late 1740s or early 1750s (Higgins 2000:141).

The archaeological evidence at Wilton for the slave quarter includes trash-filled pits, fences, roads, a grave, and at least six buildings. The buildings either housed enslaved individuals or were slave quarters. The archaeologists identified three periods of occupation at the site. The first period dated from ca. 1750 to the early 1790s. The earliest building defined archaeologically by sub-floor pits or root cellars, and called Structure I, was present during this period, along with
fences and refuse scatter. This slave quarter had a dirt floor and was probably constructed of pine logs. It measured about 11 x 6 meters and had a chimney at both ends. It had five sub-floor pits (Higgins et al. 2000:150). This building probably housed twelve to fifteen people and probably included both related and unrelated adults and children.

The second period of occupation covered the years from 1790 to 1825. The site was expanded during this time and at least five single log structures, probably single-family dwellings, were present. These buildings were smaller than Structure I and were probably more like huts or hovels. The third period, ca. 1825-1840, was one of decline for the plantation, and the enslaved population was largely gone by 1840 (Higgins et al. 2000:144, 150, 155).

**Poplar Forest**

Archaeologists excavated structural and other features that related to enslaved people's life at Thomas Jefferson’s Poplar Forest plantation in Bedford County, Virginia. The site lay within the forty-five acre “mansion house field.” The “mansion house” or overseer’s house was located several hundred feet to the south and east of the slave quarter site (Heath and Bennett 2000:46).

The slave quarter site was occupied between 1790 and 1812 (Raymer 1996:1, Health and Bennett 2000:46). Botanical materials were recovered from two structures, sub-floor pits, and postholes. Structure I was a duplex cabin measuring 15 x 25 feet and, containing three sub-floor pits. Structure 2 was built thirteen feet northeast of Structure I and measured 13 x 13 feet. It was probably not built to house enslaved workers, but, based on the archaeological evidence,
they may have lived there. It had no chimney or sub-floor pits. A third structure, likely a dwelling, was also uncovered (Raymer 1996:1-2; Heath and Bennett 2000:48-49).

A possible planting area was located near Structure 1. It is uncertain whether this was an estate garden or a slave garden. However, there is a strong possibility that enslaved laborers farmed this garden. Enslaved people lived and worked at Poplar Forest, perhaps as early as the 1760s. By the 1790s members of seven enslaved families, numbering less than one hundred, lived at Poplar Forest (Heath 1999:13).
Appendix B

Archaeobotanical Analysis

It is problematic to compare botanical remains from these sites because of the different sampling and recovery techniques employed by the archaeologists. Rich Neck’s archaeologists, for instance, worked with a larger number of soil samples than workers at the other sites analyzed. At this site, 5,223 liters of soil were processed and analyzed for botanical information. The researchers found 700 carbonized specimens but only 664 of these were identifiable (Franklin 2004:167-169, 176-178). Only the results of the analysis of carbonized seeds are available for Rich Neck, for, unlike the Wilton and Poplar Forest assemblages, its charcoal remains were not studied.

At Wilton plantation, the general categories of material sorted and examined include cultivated plant remains, carbonized seeds, nutshell, and amorphous charcoal. Twenty soil samples totaling 171 liters were collected from thirteen features. The botanical remains included 15 seeds and 316 cultivated plant remains (cupules, cupule fragments and segments, kernels and kernel fragments, and glumes) and 50 nutshell remains. (McKnight 2000: G-3, G-11, G-12). Poplar Forest’s archaeologists floated 527 liters of soil. This, in addition to other recovery methods, resulted in 190 charred seeds, other reproductive
structures including maize cupules and nutshells, and charcoal wood remains (Raymer 1996:2).

Table 11.
Botanical Remains Retrieved from Soil Flotation Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rich Neck</th>
<th>Poplar Forest</th>
<th>Wilton Plantation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liters floated</td>
<td>5,223</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of seeds recovered</td>
<td>664</td>
<td>190*</td>
<td>15*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* In addition to seeds, these assemblages include carbonized nutshells and other cultivated plant remains. Source: Raymer 1996:2,9; McKnight 2000:G-3, G-11,G-12; Franklin 2004:167-176

The archaeologists at Rich Neck, Wilton, and Poplar Forest collected non-carbonized seeds but they were not included in the final analysis of the botanical remains. Non-carbonized seeds pose special problems to archaeobotanical analysis, as it is difficult to conclusively date non-carbonized seeds to the historical occupations of sites. They usually are modern or intrusive materials in historical contexts. One way archaeologists have dealt with this problem is to identify non-carbonized seeds in the assemblage but not include them in the final analysis, and that method is followed here.

Rich Neck

The initial construction of the duplex cabin at Rich Neck plantation in the 1740s is marked by an absence of botanical materials. The specimens, mainly from the root cellars, relate to the middle and later phases of the occupation of the site (Mrozowski and Driscoll 1997:14-21; Franklin 2004:177-179). The middle
phase, perhaps, reflect managers’ demand for the enslaved population to grow more foods for their own subsistence. Another possibility is that, this population chose to plant gardens without coercion. The second highest concentration of botanical remains relates to near the end of occupation of the site (Mrozowski and Driscoll 1997:14-21; Franklin 2004:177-180) and perhaps represented a period when the workers likely shouldered most of the responsibility for their well-being. This was about the time of the American Revolution when food supplies to the plantation were disrupted and some enslaved workers had deserted plantations.

Gardens at Rich Neck may have been household gardens or common plantation ones. The botanical remains from the slave quarter include seeds from both cultivated and wild species, and probably represent both plantation supplies and the enslaved community’s production and foraging activities. Weeds that were found in the Wilton and Poplar Forest assemblages have not been identified in the Rich Neck assemblage.

**Wilton**

At Wilton plantation, the researchers prioritized assessing the role of cultivated and wild plant foods in the subsistence economy of the enslaved workers who had occupied the site during the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century. Their analysis concentrated on the botanical samples recovered from sub-floor pits from six slave cabins. Like the other sites, the assemblage includes wild and domestic seeds and other plant parts. Local forest resources, including timber and nuts, were also among the data. The evidence,
including wheat, oat, bean, corn, squash, and possibly sweet potato, points to the cultivation and consumption of garden varieties. However, some of these species may have been remains of plantation rations and not foods the enslaved population produced for themselves.

**Poplar Forest**

Botanical remains of fruits, nuts, vegetables, edible weeds, and other plants were recovered from the Poplar Forest slave quarter site. The macroplant assemblage includes twenty categories of charred seeds. Fourteen of these plants are grouped as economically important food items. These include vegetables, fruits, and nut-producing ornamentals. Three varieties of edible herbaceous weeds and one plant possibly used for bedding material are among the four economically important plants. The other categories list grass and an unidentified member of the bean family (Raymer 1996:9).
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VITA

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Ywone Edwards-Ingram was born in Jamaica and attended Strathford High School until her graduation in 1979. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in History and Social Sciences in 1986 from the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, in Jamaica. In 1988, she entered the Masters of Arts Degree program in Anthropology at the College of William and Mary and successfully completed the program in 1990. She started her doctoral work in American Studies at the same institution in 1995.

Ywone Edwards-Ingram works for the Department of Archaeological Research at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and also teaches part-time at the College of William and Mary.