

# EXPLOITATION AND RESISTANCE: Enslaved Motherhood at the University of Alabama

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*From the time it was first opened to students in 1831 up until the outbreak of the Civil War, the University of Alabama (UA), as well as its faculty and students, depended on the labor of enslaved men, women, and children. While the available sources detailing the lives of these enslaved people are limited, information about the enslaved women who lived and labored at UA is particularly scarce. However, the collection of diaries kept by Basil Manly Sr., the president of UA from 1837 to 1855, offers a small yet noteworthy glimpse into the lives of some enslaved women who labored on campus inside the President's Mansion. By carefully analyzing excerpts from these diaries, this paper demonstrates how this group of enslaved women found ways to resist the exploitation of their bodies so as to maintain the integrity of their motherhood.*

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In writing about enslaved women, historians are often hard-pressed to find source material that provides insight into the bondwoman's unique experience under slavery. Deborah Gray White said it best: "Slave women were everywhere, yet nowhere."<sup>1</sup> It is therefore incumbent on historians to navigate the limited written records about enslaved women in order to figure out who these women were, what they did, what they valued, and how they responded to slavery's confinements. Nowhere does this seem more true than at the University of Alabama (UA) where published accounts about enslaved people on campus have focused on enslaved men.<sup>2</sup> This is despite the fact that enslaved women were just as present and vital to the institution's success.<sup>3</sup> Some of the difficulty in learning about enslaved women's contributions to the early history of UA is due to the fact that information about them predominately comes from the collection of diaries kept by Basil Manly, Sr., who served as the university's second president from 1837 to 1855. While Manly's diaries provide some insight into the lives of enslaved women at UA, these women's stories are being told by a White slaveholding male living in the antebellum United States South. As a result, what Manly writes about his enslaved women comes from the perspective of a slaveholder concerned with the labor his enslaved women performed, the children these women

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<sup>1</sup> Deborah Grey White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 23.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example: James A. Fuller, "'I Whipped Him a Second Time, Very Severely': Basil Manly, Honor, and Slavery at the University of Alabama," in *Slavery and the University*, eds. Leslie M. Harris, James T. Campbell, and Alfred L. Brophy (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2019), 114-30. As the other essays in *Slavery and the University* demonstrate, interactions between enslaved men and students or faculty have been the focus of most work on the subject to enslaved people at institutions of higher learning.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Hilary Green's work for the Hallowed Grounds Project has begun the process of acknowledging the roles enslaved women played at UA: Hilary Green, "Enslaved Women at the University of Alabama," accessed April 12, 2021. Additionally, some institutions have begun paying more attention to the roles of enslaved women, such as at Davidson College: Mary Elizabeth DeAngelis, "Here All Along: Enslaved Women and Domestic Workers Shaped Life at Davidson," *Davidson Journal*, April 1, 2021.

gave birth to, and the selling and hiring out of these women and their children for his own financial gain. Therefore, by investigating the experiences of enslaved women who lived and labored on UA's campus, I have attempted to write the first account centered explicitly around their lives.

With this in mind, how can we read Manly's entries in a way that informs us about these enslaved women's lives—given that his diaries are primarily concerned with the objectification and exploitation of these women's bodies? One particular approach that many historians have taken is looking at the enslaved woman's experience with childbirth and motherhood; the emphasis that slaveholders put on enslaved women's dual responsibility as both producers and reproducers meant that childbirth and motherhood played a significant role in shaping the lives of enslaved women.<sup>4</sup> Besides studying what motherhood meant for enslaved women, another approach historians have taken to learn about enslaved women is by focusing on the unique exploitation that they faced. Enslaved women were vulnerable to sexual attacks due to the contemporary perception of enslaved women as hypersexual beings.<sup>5</sup> The attention historians have paid to childbirth, motherhood, and sexual exploitation is owed to the fact that slaveholders typically focused on these subjects when writing about enslaved women, and Manly is no different. However, historians are increasingly looking at patterns of resistance among enslaved women, especially when this resistance relates back to their motherhood.<sup>6</sup>

While my project ultimately coincides with all three of these approaches in engaging the experiences of enslaved women, I am specifically focused on the motherhood, exploitation, and resistance of those enslaved women who largely labored in domestic roles within the Manly household. To better understand how this group of women navigated enslaved motherhood as well as how they responded to the control and exploitation of their bodies, I have applied the work historians have already written concerning enslaved motherhood and resistance to my own work analyzing the diary entries that Manly dedicates to enslaved women at UA. Additionally, my work is influenced by scholars like Saidiya Hartman and Marisa Fuentes who have both put forth methodologies that allow historians to read beyond White, slaveholding narratives by piecing together and reframing fragmentary primary sources on enslaved women.<sup>7</sup> Relying on these methodologies and the work historians have already written about enslaved women has enabled me to circumvent Manly's perspective so that the history I am telling focuses on the enslaved women, not the White man who wrote about them. A small number of the diary entries that I analyzed deal with enslaved women who did not belong to Manly, but who were still connected to UA. However, I mainly focus on those diary entries that record the

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<sup>4</sup> Historian Jennifer Morgan wrote the foundational work regarding the value slaveholders placed on an enslaved woman's ability to reproduce: Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). See also, Marie J. Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave: Motherhood and Medicine in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*; Jacqueline Jones, "'My Mother Was Much of a Woman': Black Women, Work, and the Family under Slavery," *Feminist Studies* 8, no. 2 (1982): 235-69.

<sup>5</sup> White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 30.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example: Wilma King, "'Mad' Enough to Kill: Enslaved Women, Murder, and Southern Courts," *The Journal of African American History* 92, no. 1 (2007): 37-56; Liese M. Perrin, "Resisting Reproduction: Reconsidering Slave Contraception in the Old South," *Journal of American Studies* 35, no. 2 (2001): 255-74.

<sup>7</sup> See: Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1-14; Marisa J. Fuentes, Introduction to *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 1-12.

existence of Sabra, Mary, Lydia, “Little Mary,” Nancy, and Molly—the women Manly enslaved as his property.

By reading Manly’s entries about these enslaved women carefully and creatively, we can gain a sense of how they may have responded to slavery’s inherent objectification and exploitation of their motherhood. In my first section, I explain how slaveholders like Manly tried to control the enslaved woman’s reproductive experience as well as the measures enslaved women at UA might have taken to resist this control. In my second section, I point out the emphasis slaveholders placed on an enslaved woman’s role as a domestic laborer and how that might have conflicted with her responsibility as a mother. Further, I propose methods that the enslaved women at UA may have used to balance this dual responsibility. Lastly, my third section demonstrates that while Manly sought to profit off of his enslaved women and children by selling them or hiring them out, some of these women may have resisted such actions, especially if a sale or hire meant separating them from their family. If we use existing historical scholarship written about enslaved motherhood and resistance to make sense of what is written in the Manly diaries, we are able to see beyond the emphasis Manly placed on his enslaved women’s fecundity and their value to him as enslaved property. What we learn from Manly’s diary entries indicates that the women he enslaved not only found ways to regain authority over their reproductive experiences and to resist his fundamental exploitation of their motherhood, but that they also played essential roles in the President’s Mansion and were an important presence on campus in the first decades of UA’s history.

### Control of Conception and Childbirth

For enslaved women, motherhood often provided a place of refuge from the burdens of slavery. It also provided a sense of familial belonging and an identity outside of being a slave.<sup>8</sup> From the slaveholder’s perspective, however, the viability of the American slave regime depended on the enslaved woman’s fecundity. Slaveholders desired authority over all aspects of the enslaved woman’s reproductive experience: conception, pregnancy, and childbirth. Despite this, enslaved women sought control over their own reproduction, and they often found ways to resist the slaveholder’s exploitation of their reproductive systems. Though Manly does not document much relating to the lives of his enslaved women, he does record when his enslaved women give birth. In these particular entries, there is evidence that points to Manly’s enslaved women resisting his control of their reproductive experience.

One way that slaveholders like Manly pushed enslaved women into conceiving children was by encouraging enslaved women to enter into relationships with other enslaved men. In many cases, slaveholders would encourage their enslaved women to find a suitable partner or husband for themselves. Some slaveholders took matters into their own hands, however, and paired enslaved men and women together with the intent that they would procreate.<sup>9</sup> On one hand, Manly mentions two of his female slaves as having husbands: Mary, who is married to Larrey; and “Little Mary,” who is married to Ben.<sup>10</sup> While both Mary and “Little Mary” could have chosen these

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example: Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave*; Jones, ““My Mother Was Much of a Woman;” White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman?*; Emily West and Erin Shearer, “Fertility control, shared nurturing, and dual exploitation: the lives of enslaved mothers in the antebellum United States,” *Women’s History Review* 27, no. 6 (2017): 1006-20.

<sup>9</sup> Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave*, 15-16.

<sup>10</sup> Excerpt recording Mary and Larrey’s relationship: University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections (UALSC), Manly Family Papers, Diary Number 5, Basil Manly, Sr., 1847-1857, image no. 7; Excerpt recording “Little Mary” and Ben’s relationship: UALSC, Manly Family Papers, Diary Number 5, Basil Manly, Sr., 1847-1857, image no. 46.

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men as husbands themselves, it is also possible that Manly chose their husbands for them. With the exception of Mary and “Little Mary,” Manly never writes about his other enslaved women having husbands, despite the fact that these women had multiple children. It could be that enslaved women like Sabra and Lydia did have husbands but that Manly simply did not record this information. Manly may have facilitated the conception of these women’s children by setting them up with some of his own enslaved men or other enslaved men who worked on campus. It is also possible that Manly fathered these enslaved women’s children himself.

Forced sexual encounters between White men and enslaved women also served as means to increase enslaved women’s reproduction. Indeed, the portrayal of Black women as overtly libidinous meant that White men perceived Black women as open to sexual encounters, and that any resistance to a White man from a Black woman was insincere.<sup>11</sup> Enslaved women at UA lived on a campus filled with White male students, faculty, and visitors, leaving them vulnerable to sexual assault. An example of how this perception of enslaved women might have led to an increased vulnerability to sexual exploitation can be seen when Manly writes about Luna, one of Professor Barnard’s enslaved women. Manly notes that Morgan, one of Barnard’s enslaved men, “acts as a Pimp to get out Barnard’s women—especially the younger Luna; whom they use in great numbers, nightly.”<sup>12</sup> If Manly’s account is taken at face value, one interpretation of this entry may suggest that Morgan was procuring Barnard’s female slaves for White men (whether those men were students, professors, or citizens of Tuscaloosa is unclear). If this is the case, perhaps Professor Barnard allowed this to happen, hoping that might result in his enslaved women becoming pregnant. However, it is also possible that Manly did not fully understand what was happening between Morgan and Barnard’s enslaved women or that he was misinformed about the situation.

While the accuracy of Manly’s claim about Morgan acting as a “Pimp to get out” Professor Barnard’s enslaved women is unclear, one of Manly’s later diary entries suggests another possible case of an enslaved woman being sexually assaulted. In an entry from November 1852, Manly writes of a student named Alfred S. James being in “Stafford’s back-yard cursing, on Friday night—(while the child of Moses was dying—) after a girl of Moses by whom he (or someone else) has a child.”<sup>13</sup> This diary entry suggests that an unnamed enslaved woman, presumably Moses’s girlfriend or wife, had a child fathered by a student named Alfred S. James. Manly writing of James “cursing” at this enslaved woman suggests, at the very least, a degree of familiarity between the two, although the dynamic of their relationship remains unclear. There is a chance that their relationship was consensual. However, it is equally plausible that James sexually assaulted this enslaved woman and fathered her child. If this is the case, this entry would support the veracity of Manly’s diary entry concerning Morgan and Barnard’s enslaved women, as it reinforces the notion that enslaved women at UA experienced sexual assault.

Despite the fact that slaveholders sought control over every aspect of enslaved women’s reproductive experiences, a few of Manly’s diary entries suggest that enslaved women met this exploitation with resistance. In a diary entry dated February 22, 1843, Manly writes, “Between the hours of 12 & 1 o’clock this morning, my Servant, Lydia, was delivered of a male child. The affair was all over within 15

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<sup>11</sup> White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman?*, 30. See also: Jennifer L. Morgan, “‘Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder’: Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1770,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (1997): 167-92.

<sup>12</sup> UALSC, Manly Family Papers, Diary Number 4, Basil Manly, Sr., 1848-1855, image no. 87.

<sup>13</sup> UALSC, Manly Family Papers, Diary Number 4, Basil Manly, Sr., 1848-1855, image no. 205.

minutes after we were first apprised of her complaints—and some time before the midwife could be procured.”<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that this was not the first time Lydia gave birth; we know that she had at least one other child because in an earlier diary entry, Manly mentions that Lydia was sent to Tuscaloosa with her daughter Hetty.<sup>15</sup> Because labor often progresses more quickly for women who have already had a child, Lydia may have assumed that this labor would advance at the same rate as her labor with Hetty. If this labor progressed more quickly than she was expecting, this could explain why Lydia waited so long to inform Manly that she was in labor. However, in a later diary entry dated October 31, 1846, Manly writes, “This afternoon, about 6 o’clock, my woman, Lydia, was delivered of a son. As usual with her, the child was born before the midwife could be got to her.”<sup>16</sup> That on two separate occasions Lydia waited so long to tell Manly that she was in labor indicates that she might have intentionally waited to notify Manly at the last minute so that she could give birth the way she wanted rather than put her child’s birth in the hands of a midwife that she did not know.

In addition to regaining control of their birthing experience, there is also evidence indicating that Manly’s enslaved women might have tried to regulate how many children they had as well as the frequency with which they had them. In another diary entry, Manly records the birth of Mary’s son on March 1, 1847. However, he later adds to this entry that the “little child, just born, died on Monday night, March 8, at about midnight. Dr. Haywood thought it was overlain and crushed.”<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that while many physicians in the antebellum period attributed enslaved infants’ deaths to smothering and overlaying, modern scholars have argued that these deaths were more likely caused by Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).<sup>18</sup> Because week-old babies were very unlikely to die from SIDS, however, it is possible that the death of Mary’s baby was the result of infanticide.<sup>19</sup> If Mary did commit infanticide, it would be impossible to understand her motivations for doing so. Although the source material is scarce, we know that some enslaved women did take this step as a way to control their reproductive authority in defiance of slaveholders’ expectations.<sup>20</sup>

Rather than commit infanticide in the case of an unwanted pregnancy, enslaved women more commonly resorted to using contraceptives and other preventative measures as a means to prevent or space out childbirth.<sup>21</sup> In looking at the birth spaces for three of Manly’s enslaved women—Sabra, Mary, and Lydia—it appears as though all three women typically gave birth around every two and a half to three and a half years. There are, however, some abnormal exceptions to this pattern in regards to both Sabra and Mary. In Sabra’s case, there was a five year and two month gap between the birth of daughter Julia and her son Samuel.<sup>22</sup> Similarly for Mary, there is a space of approximately six years and ten months between the birth of her daughter Binkey and the birth of a son who Manly does not name.<sup>23</sup> One

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<sup>14</sup> UALSC, Manly Family Papers, Diary Number 2, Basil Manly, Sr., 1834-1846, image no. 300.

<sup>15</sup> UALSC, Manly Family Papers, Diary Number 2, Basil Manly, Sr., 1834-1846, image no. 277.

<sup>16</sup> UALSC, Manly Family Papers, Diary Number 2, Basil Manly, Sr., 1834-1846, image no. 410.

<sup>17</sup> UALSC, Manly Family Papers, Diary Number 5, Basil Manly, Sr., 1847-1857, image no. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Todd L. Savitt, “Smothering and Overlaying Of Virginia Slave Children: A Suggested Explanation,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 49, no. 3 (1975): 400-404.

<sup>19</sup> Savitt, “Smothering and Overlaying Of Virginia Slave Children,” 400-404.

<sup>20</sup> King, ““Mad’ Enough to Kill,” 42-44.

<sup>21</sup> Sschwartz, *Birthing a Slave*, 70-71, 92-96.

<sup>22</sup> Julia’s birth: UALSC, Manly Family Papers, Diary Number 2, Basil Manly, Sr., 1834-1846, image no. 277.

<sup>23</sup> Binkey’s birth: UALSC, Manly Family Papers, Diary Number 2, Basil Manly, Sr., 1834-1846, image no. 186. Unnamed child’s birth: UALSC, Manly Family Papers, Diary Number 5, Basil Manly, Sr., 1847-1857, image no. 7.

explanation for these unusually long gaps between births could be that Mary and Sabra suffered from miscarriages or stillbirths that went unrecorded in Manly's diaries, but an equally possible explanation might be that Mary and Sabra used some form of contraceptive or other preventative measures to avoid getting pregnant. For example, there is evidence to suggest that enslaved women used cotton root as a contraceptive, and that this was effective in preventing pregnancy.<sup>24</sup> It could also be that Mary or Sabra consciously chose to abstain from sex to avoid getting pregnant. While the reason for these long birth spaces remains unknown, it is entirely conceivable that both of these enslaved women sought to regain authority over their reproductive experience by controlling when they conceived their children.

The few entries that Manly writes about enslaved women happens to be about the birth of their children. This indicates that Manly, like the majority of slaveholders, placed importance on his enslaved women's abilities to conceive and bear children. At the same time, these same diary entries also indicate that Manly's enslaved women may have worked to preserve some agency over their bodies and their reproductive experiences. In some cases, enslaved women like Lydia might have been able to subvert the slaveholder's attempt to intrude upon and control their birthing experience. While Manly and other slaveholders placed emphasis on their enslaved women's fecundity, there is evidence in the Manly diaries demonstrating that Manly's enslaved women may have endeavored to control their own fertility. Nevertheless, Manly's enslaved women not only had to navigate the demands that he placed on their reproductive systems, but they also had to find ways to balance their motherhood with the demands of domestic labor.

### **Balancing Service and Mothering**

To meet the demands that the Manly family put on their bodies, domestic enslaved mothers in the Manly household perhaps utilized more communal forms of care and mothering to make up for the exploitation of their time and energy. While Manly says very little about the labor his enslaved women performed in the Manly household, all of the women would have labored in a domestic capacity. For enslaved women like those who worked in the Manly household, their dual status as both slaves and women shaped the demands that slaveholders like Manly doled out to them. While mistresses were often responsible for running the household, the duties necessary for maintaining the welfare of the White family were often seen not as women's work, but as Black women's and Black children's work.<sup>25</sup> Domestic labor was often as backbreaking as plantation labor, and it was performed at a forced pace under the slaveholder's supervision.<sup>26</sup>

Enslaved women who worked in the slaveholder's house in a domestic capacity were typically on call at every hour of every day, often before the sun rose and well after sunset.<sup>27</sup> Their responsibilities as cooks, seamstresses, nurses, and waiting-maids were subject to the whims of the slaveholding family, and could very possibly lead to exhaustion or physical injury.<sup>28</sup> Tasks like preparing three or more meals a day over smoky fireplaces, hauling water and timber, building fires, and washing and ironing clothes proved to be as tiring as they were time-consuming.<sup>29</sup> Other than Sabra, who worked as a cook, and Nancy, who Manly hires as a nurse for

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<sup>24</sup> Perrin, "Resisting Reproduction," 260-63.

<sup>25</sup> Jones, "My Mother Was Much of a Woman," 246.

<sup>26</sup> Jones, "My Mother Was Much of a Woman," 248-50.

<sup>27</sup> Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 73.

<sup>28</sup> Jones, "My Mother Was Much of a Woman," 248.

<sup>29</sup> Jones, "My Mother Was Much of a Woman," 248-249.

his younger children in 1845, Manly makes no mention of the roles his other enslaved women filled, or what their duties in the Manly household were.<sup>30</sup> However, since all of the enslaved women in the Manly household labored in domestic capacities, their physical proximity to the Manly family could very well have positioned them to be vulnerable to the impulses of their slaveholder or their slaveholder's children.

The physically-taxing and time-consuming labor that slaveholders expected from their domestic enslaved women often conflicted with these women's responsibilities as mothers. Enslaved women could often be expected to care for their own children, the children of other enslaved women, and sometimes, their slaveholder's children. Not only were they expected to balance this childcare with their domestic responsibilities in the White household, they also had to care for their children while performing domestic tasks for their own households, as well.<sup>31</sup> From Manly's diary entries, it is clear that Manly's cook Sabra had at least eight children.<sup>32</sup> It is unclear whether or not Sabra was the only enslaved person cooking for the Manly household; however, if this was the case, she might not have had the time or the energy to take care of her own children. Cooks were often responsible for preparing and cooking food for the slaveholding family as well as other enslaved men, women, and children.<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that Mary, Lydia, and "Little Mary" also had multiple children, and while Manly only specifies Sabra's duties in the Manly household, all of these women may have had the same experience that Sabra had—not having enough time to mother their children due to the exploitation of their labor.

Having to meet the slaveholder's demands, enslaved women might have relied on a couple of different methods to ensure that their children were taken care of. Manly had at least two older enslaved women: Molly and Nancy. From one of Manly's diary entries, it is clear that he purchased Nancy to be a nurse for his own children. With this in mind, it is possible that Molly served in a similar capacity with regard to the enslaved children. Given that an older enslaved woman's most common occupation was watching over the enslaved children while their mothers worked, it seems likely that Molly filled this caretaker role.<sup>34</sup> If Molly took care of the enslaved children so that the younger enslaved mothers could perform their assigned tasks, this meant that Sabra, Mary, Lydia, and "Little Mary," may have had to sacrifice time they could have spent mothering their children in order to meet the demands of the Manly family.

It is also conceivable that the enslaved women who had children perhaps utilized more communal forms of mothering as well. For example, Manly records his cook Sabra as giving birth to a son named Archy on February 25, 1840.<sup>35</sup> Not long after, Mary gives birth to a daughter named Binkey on March 23, 1840.<sup>36</sup> It is possible that in the event that some of Manly's enslaved women gave birth around the same time, one woman might have taken on the responsibility of breastfeeding both her baby as well as that of another enslaved woman. The practice of communal breastfeeding was not unique given that enslaved women may not have been able to

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<sup>30</sup> Sabra as a cook: UALSC, Manly Family Papers, Diary Number 2, Basil Manly, Sr., 1834-1846, image no. 277. Manly purchases Nancy: UALSC, Manly Family Papers, Diary Number 2, Basil Manly, Sr., 1834-1846, image no. 379.

<sup>31</sup> West and Shearer, "Fertility control, shared nurturing, and dual exploitation," 1013-1014.

<sup>32</sup> Manly refers to William as Sabra's 4th child: UALSC, Manly Family Papers, Diary Number 2, Basil Manly, Sr., 1834-1846, image no. 122. This would have made Kitty her 8th child. Kitty's birth: UALSC, Manly Family Papers, Diary Number 5, Basil Manly, Sr., 1847-1857, image no. 136.

<sup>33</sup> Jones, "'My Mother Was Much of a Woman,'" 246.

<sup>34</sup> White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 114-15.

<sup>35</sup> UALSC, Manly Family Papers, Diary Number 2, Basil Manly, Sr., 1834-1846, image no. 184.

<sup>36</sup> UALSC, Manly Family Papers, Diary Number 2, Basil Manly, Sr., 1834-1846, image no. 186.

dedicate enough time and care to their children in light of the demands they had to meet.<sup>37</sup> If one of Manly's enslaved mothers took on the role of breastfeeding another one of the enslaved mother's children, this could have allowed some of Manly's enslaved women to meet the demands of domestic slavery while also making sure that their children were properly nourished and cared for at the same time.

While it is impossible to know what responsibilities all of Manly's enslaved women had to grapple with on a day-to-day basis, the work they were forced to do for the Manly family would have inevitably interfered with their ability to devote most of their time and energy to their roles as mothers. Due to the priority placed upon their bodies as laborers, Manly's enslaved mothers might have utilized more communal forms of mothering to ensure that their many children were well cared for. On top of finding ways to balance the demands of the Manly household with their ability to care for their children, Manly's enslaved mothers also had to contend with the reality that they could be separated from their families.

### Resistance to Sale and Separation

In addition to exploiting their labor in his own household, Manly also sought to capitalize on his enslaved men, women, and children by selling them or hiring them out to other White households in Tuscaloosa. Selling and hiring out his enslaved people, often individually rather than as families, meant that Manly not only separated enslaved women from their husbands but that he also separated enslaved children from their mothers. In effect, Manly prioritized his enslaved people's roles as property that he could turn a profit from over their roles as friends, parents, siblings, and children. Despite this, there is evidence in the Manly diaries indicating that Manly's enslaved women resisted the selling and hiring out of their labor, especially if it meant separating them from their families.

While owning an enslaved person was an investment for a slaveholder, it was an expensive one; slaveholders had to feed, clothe, and pay taxes on their slaves. If an enslaved person could not bring in a profit, either because they were too young, too old, or because a slaveholder did not have anything for them to do, slaveholders would sell or hire out their enslaved property to ensure a return on their investment.<sup>38</sup> In a diary entry dated December 21, 1848, Manly writes that his "old woman" Nancy was hired out for the year (at three dollars a month) to Mr. William Miller, who is to provide Nancy with "clothing of the value of \$12 in the course of the year."<sup>39</sup> When Manly originally purchased Nancy in 1845, his wife may have needed extra help caring for their children given that the Manlys had five younger children with ages ranging from a couple months old to twelve years of age. Although Manly purchased Nancy to be a nurse for his children, it is possible that Nancy's services were no longer needed when he hired her out in 1848. By hiring Nancy out to Miller, Manly found a way to profit off of her labor while also saving money by having Miller clothe Nancy.

Besides older enslaved men and women, enslaved children were often prime candidates for hiring out, as well. The work enslaved children could perform was often insignificant. Yet, enslaved children still had to be fed, clothed, and sheltered despite the fact that the labor they were capable of performing rarely justified their expenses. For example, in a diary entry dated December 26, 1850, Manly writes that he has hired the ten-year-old Hetty out to Mr. Agustin Lynch. Lynch is to pay Manly twenty-five

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<sup>37</sup> Emily West and R. J. Knight, "Mothers' Milk: Slavery, Wet-Nursing, and Black and White Women in the Antebellum South," *Journal of Southern History* 83, no. 1 (2017): 37-68.

<sup>38</sup> Jonathan D. Martin, *Divided Mastery: Slave Hiring in the American South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 75.

<sup>39</sup> UALSC, Manly Family Papers, Diary Number 5, Basil Manly, Sr., 1847-1857, image no. 79.



dollars for a year of Hetty's service, and he is responsible for feeding and clothing Hetty as well as paying her taxes.<sup>40</sup> Because younger enslaved children like Hetty were expensive to care for, slaveholders often hired out enslaved children as soon as they were able to obtain a decent price.

Despite Manly selling and hiring his slaves, there is evidence that points to some of Manly's enslaved women working to shape some of these transactions. In a diary entry dated July 26, 1849, Manly writes that he sold his enslaved woman Lydia and Lydia's youngest child Charity to Mr. Thomas H. Walker, which effectively separated Lydia from her mother, Molly, and two of her other children.<sup>41</sup> A couple months after Lydia and Charity were sold, Manly writes that he sold Molly to the same Mr. Thomas H. Walker for fifty dollars, reasoning that while he may have been able to get one hundred dollars for her on the market, he "took that some to let her be with her daughter, where she wishes to go."<sup>42</sup> Although Manly writes that he accepted a lower sale price for Molly so that she could be with her daughter, this could be an exaggeration on his part, as it fits Manly's perception of himself as a benevolent slaveholder. Molly would have been around fifty-six or fifty-seven years old, and older enslaved people did not always command a high purchase price. Even so, it is entirely feasible that what Manly writes about Molly is true. If this is the case, Molly was able to negotiate for her sale to Walker in order to be with her daughter and grandchild, essentially overriding another potential transaction that would have made Manly more money.

In addition to shaping the terms of a sale or hire, there is also evidence in the Manly diaries indicating that Manly's enslaved women may have resisted being sold or hired out. When Manly wrote on December 31, 1850 that he had hired "Little Mary" out to Mr. L. D. Duren, Manly makes no mention of sending Mary's daughter Margaret with her.<sup>43</sup> Less than a month later on January 20, 1851, he added to this entry that because Duren was "dissatisfied with her," Manly sent Mary (this time with Margaret) to be hired out to V. Hart.<sup>44</sup> Because Manly does not mention Margaret coming with Mary when she is hired out to Duren, but then writes later that he sent both the mother and child to Hart, perhaps Manly separated Mary from her daughter when he originally sent her to Duren. Slaveholders could often expect to make less money by hiring out mothers with small children: not only did hirers have to financially maintain small children (who provided no labor in return), but small children also demanded attention from mothers.<sup>45</sup> Wanting to be reunited with her daughter, Mary may have defied or withheld labor from Duren, believing this would get her sent back to Manly.

Although Mary and Margaret were hired out to Hart, this arrangement would not last long, as Mary and her daughter were sent back home just a few weeks later. In a diary entry dated February 28, 1851, Manly writes that "Little Mary came home ... threatened with miscarriage. Some accounts say that Mrs. Hart has beaten her on the back with a stick."<sup>46</sup> While it is unclear what the pregnant Mary did to provoke such a beating, the rest of Manly's entry indicates a possible explanation when he writes that Mary had to "bring all the water the family use[d] for drinking, cooking, washing & all purposes, on her head, up that high hill from the spring below."<sup>47</sup> On

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<sup>40</sup> UALSC, Manly Family Papers, Diary Number 5, Basil Manly, Sr., 1847-1857, image no. 185.

<sup>41</sup> UALSC, Manly Family Papers, Diary Number 5, Basil Manly, Sr., 1847-1857, image no. 117.

<sup>42</sup> UALSC, Manly Family Papers, Diary Number 5, Basil Manly, Sr., 1847-1857, image no. 136.

<sup>43</sup> UALSC, Manly Family Papers, Diary Number 5, Basil Manly, Sr., 1847-1857, image no. 185.

<sup>44</sup> UALSC, Manly Family Papers, Diary Number 5, Basil Manly, Sr., 1847-1857, image no. 185.

<sup>45</sup> Martin, *Divided Mastery*, 49-51.

<sup>46</sup> UALSC, Manly Family Papers, Diary Number 5, Basil Manly, Sr., 1847-1857, image no. 191.

<sup>47</sup> UALSC, Manly Family Papers, Diary Number 5, Basil Manly, Sr., 1847-1857, image no. 191.

## EXPLOITATION AND RESISTANCE

one hand, Mrs. Hart might have punished Mary because she was physically unable to perform her assigned duties at a fast enough pace due to her pregnancy. On the other hand, it is equally possible that Mary could have purposely labored slowly or even withheld labor altogether. Even though she was no longer separated from Margaret, she was separated from her husband, Ben, and she could have resisted her hirers in an effort to reunite her family. Another explanation might be that because the labor the Harts asked Mary to perform could have negatively impacted her pregnancy, Mary may have resisted their orders so as to remove herself from their temporary control. That “Little Mary” only lasted a couple weeks in both the Duren and Hart households, and that she was beaten over the back with a stick at one point, indicates that Mary resisted the exploitation of her labor on purpose.

The selling or hiring out of an enslaved man, woman, or child carried the risk of either permanently or temporarily breaking up enslaved families. For slaveholders like Manly, the financial incentives of these transactions were often prioritized over any attempts to keep an enslaved family together. However, despite Manly’s efforts to profit off of his enslaved women by selling them or hiring them out, Manly’s diary entries suggest that his enslaved women both explicitly and implicitly worked to influence these transactions. It appears that this might have especially been the case when a particular sale or hire meant that an enslaved mother would be separated from her children.

By applying historical scholarship to the lives of enslaved women and the ways they resisted the exploitation of their bodies, it is possible to read what Manly writes of his enslaved women in a new light. In this context, Manly’s diary entries suggest that his enslaved women found ways to navigate and, at times, resist the control and exploitation of both their bodies and their motherhood. Despite slaveholders like Manly having a vested interest in an enslaved woman’s pregnancy and childbirth, Manly’s enslaved women could have worked to counteract his exploitation of their bodies by reclaiming control over their birthing experience and by regulating how many children they had and when they had them. In addition to slaveholders exploiting enslaved women’s reproductive capabilities, slaveholders also exploited enslaved women’s labor—often at the expense of their roles as mothers. Because of this, Manly’s enslaved women may have been forced to come up with ways that they could ensure their children were well-cared for while they met the demands of the Manly household. Lastly, even though Manly attempted to maximize the profits he could make off enslaved women’s bodies by selling and hiring out his enslaved women and their children, there is evidence that at least some of Manly’s enslaved women worked against these transactions, especially if it meant they might be separated from their children.

The information that Manly chose to disclose in his diary entries dedicated to Sabra, Mary, Lydia, “Little Mary,” Nancy, and Molly were undoubtedly shaped by what Manly valued as a slaveholder—not by what his enslaved women valued as mothers. Unfortunately, enslaved women had very few opportunities to write about themselves and what they valued as mothers, daughters, wives, or friends. This means that historians are forced to reconcile the lack of primary sources told from an enslaved woman’s perspective by relying on the words of people like Manly, individuals who rarely (if ever) made attempts to better understand bondwomen’s experiences under slavery. However daunting of a task this may prove to be, it is worth undertaking if we wish to better understand a group of women relegated to the margins of written records—both inside and outside the university. Exploring the lives of enslaved women at UA reveals aspects of what life was like inside the President’s Mansion from the perspectives of Sabra, Mary, Lydia, Little Mary, Nancy, and Molly.

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It also reminds us that we cannot understand enslavement at institutions of higher learning or indeed, at The University of Alabama, without focusing on the experiences of enslaved women who lived and labored on campus.

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