

Keith Green

Menacing Authority: Imprisonment and Cherokee Slavery in *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave* (1849)”

Despite the incredible advances in the scholarship of the African American slave narrative over the last 40 years, beginning with John W. Blassingame’s monumental *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews and Autobiographies* (1974), the classic image of African American bondage in the antebellum era has remained essentially the same: blacks held in perpetual slavery by whites on a Southern farm or plantation. When scholars write about African American bondage, they routinely do so through the literary tropes, historical contexts, and ideological frameworks of chattel slavery to Southern whites. The setting of black subjugation is the farm or plantation; the signifier of black oppression is the whip or the lash; the geopolitical context is the agrarian South; and the fundamental markers of difference between captor and captive are whiteness and blackness.<sup>1</sup>

The inability of critics to rethink this paradigm can be traced to any number of sources. After the Civil War, interest in the slave narrative declined sharply and did not rise again until the 1920’s and 30’s. In response to paternalistic readings of black subjugation in accounts like Ulrich B. Phillip’s *American Negro Slavery* (1918), commentators like John Herbert Nelson, Vernon Loggins, and Richard Hofstadter defended the literary integrity of these accounts as well as challenged the model of slave historiography from the masters’ perspectives. Under the duress of such attacks and the relative silence that preceded it, literary critics did well just to establish the basic patterns

of the slave narrative and to insist on the incredible magnitude of its artistic achievement. Just as important, following an abolitionist hermeneutic in which the incongruous and elusive facts that made up the bondsperson's life were systematically condensed into a recognizable catalogue of "slavery's" wrongs, modern critics have too easily accepted the exclusive identification of slavery with every instance of African American bondage. As in much anti-slavery iconography, the suffering black subject has become synonymous with the slave subject, leaving little room to consider how other captivities – sometimes raced as "white" experiences of bondage – marked African American lives and life stories.

Yet, as re-membered in Henry Bibb's *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave* (1849), African American bondage is not just slavery – that is, labor in a Southern home, farm, or plantation – but a knotty tangle of overlapping and conflicting captivities. Specifically, slave incarceration and Indian slavery form two distinctive captivities that texture Bibb's rendition of American bondage. In contrast to its abolitionist formatted title, his *Life* is not just about "Henry Bibb, an American slave," but Henry Bibb, an American prisoner and Cherokee slave. What is more, representations of slave incarceration and Indian slavery paradoxically help Bibb to establish authority over his narrative. In the context of the slave narrative, John Sekora defines authority as the capacity of "begetting, continuing, and controlling a written text" (485).<sup>2</sup> Particularly as it pertains to "controlling a written text," Bibb's complex and multiple relationships to captivity help him to shape his textual self-representation positively, endear himself towards his readers, and counter the claims of proslavery texts and ideology. As I demonstrate below, his imitation of these alternative captivity

traditions advances both the abolitionist project of representing the bondsperson as a “man and a brother” as well as his personal quest to be seen as a “husband and father” (83).

The importance of incarceration and Indian slavery in *The Life and Adventures* has received sparse, if any, attention by scholars. In fact, there has been no sustained critical commentary on Bibb’s representation of incarceration in Covington jail, Bedford jail, Louisville jail, or the Louisville workhouse. Of Bibb’s Indian slavery only a little more has been said.<sup>3</sup> Charles Heglar, the scholar most responsible for the text’s resurrection from literary anonymity, for example, provides only fleeting commentary on Bibb’s bondage in Indian country. In his detailed chapter-by-chapter explication of Bibb’s *Life*, Heglar provides only two sentences regarding chapters 13-14, the ones which directly correspond to his remembering of Indian slavery: “Bibb functions more as a manager of his owner’s wealth than as a slave; in fact, he finds this to be the mildest of all his experiences with slavery. Upon the death of this owner in 1840, Bibb escapes like the old master of the ‘art of running away’ and finally returns to the North” (*Rethinking the Slave Narrative* 45). Though it is an otherwise astute analysis of the text as a whole, Heglar’s study fails to consider how even a “mild” representation of Cherokee slavery might serve Bibb’s will to personhood and critique of slavery.

In contrast, I argue that representations of imprisonment and Indian slavery are not episodic moments in *The Life and Adventures*, but, rather, are essential elements to understanding Bibb’s claims to selfhood, masculinity and his family. He achieves these ends most emphatically through two connected strategies: the invocation and imitation of the tropes, genres, and signs that marked white subjects’ imagining of imprisonment and

Indian captivity; and the pointed differentiation of himself from the racial, regional, and economic Others he encounters in bondage. In the former mode, Bibb's rehearsal of the conventions of prison writing translates slave suffering into the more palatable language of (white) prisoners' poor treatment by negligent institutions. Or, he reconstitutes the hardships of the slave as a species of white abduction to "savage" Indians. In the latter mode, Bibb's differentiation of himself from Others elevates him from the status of common captive to the status of an exceptional sufferer. In either case, Bibb's simultaneous likeness to and difference from white captives problematizes the conflation of him with moral deviance and racial difference, abetting the abolitionist project of framing him as a "man and a brother."

Bibb's simulation of these captive discourses might best be described as a species of what Homi Bhaba calls "mimicry," a technique of colonial power that necessitated the imperfect duplication of colonized subjects into the image of the ruling class so as not to undermine their own authority, a repetition that was "almost the same, but not quite" (122). Similarly, Bibb's appropriation presumes a likeness between his experience and those of prisoners and Indian captives, yet always and already contains a difference – his blackness – that often troubles the white privilege that underwrites these forms. Imitation tends here, not only towards flattery, but mockery, encoding a repetition that "is at once resemblance and menace" (123). Elaborating on the potential for menace in apparently hegemonic acts of cooptation and appropriation, Bhaba explains, "The ambivalence of colonial authority repeatedly turns from mimicry – a difference that is almost nothing but not quite – to menace – a difference that is almost total but not quite" (131). These required premeditated failures of colonial authority lend power to the colonized,

exploding “furiously” and “uncontrollably” (131) into what I would call a menacing authority, an authority that resembles even as it terrorizes the power structures it deconstructs.

Such a notion is especially apt in relation to a figure like Bibb who was, to use the antebellum lexicography, a “mulatto,” and so much so that he was mistaken for white (164). His “resemblance” to whiteness was quite literally a “menace” to white power inasmuch as it prevented his easy identification as black, undoubtedly aided his escapes from slavery, and problematized the racist premises of whites’ claim to inherent superiority. At the same time, the re-articulation of the tropes of captivity writing could also be menacing for other disenfranchised groups and even Bibb himself, as those genres presumed subject positions that were often at odds with the integrity and agency of disenfranchised groups. This functional ambivalence powers his narrative of captive life, menacing whites as much as it flatters them and menacing Bibb and Others even as it authorizes him.

In order to illuminate the dynamics of Bibb’s mimicry, I resituate Bibb’s *Life* within the alternative but connected literary histories of captivity surrounding his text, in particular, the ex-prisoner’s narrative, the prison reformer’s journal, and the Indian captivity narrative. They reveal how the methods of allegedly “white” captivity genres could be appropriated to meet the needs of the African American slave narrator. At the same time, the authority generated by captivity is not only that of the captives, but that of the institutions and groups that confined subjects as well. In the course of this study, we will see how two entities – an emerging Western Kentucky city, Louisville, and a dispossessed Southeastern Native American tribe, the Cherokee – had investments in

“reform” and “civilization,” respectively, and how their uses of confinement and bondage met economic needs and bolstered their relationship to those notions. These groups, too, were menaced by their (unintentionally) imperfect reproductions of power and mastery, a fact which Bibb uses to advantage in his narrative. Hence, foregrounding the representation of slave incarceration and Indian slavery in *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb* exposes the paradoxical centrality of captivity to the rhetorical authority of the slave narrator, the significance of a multifarious conception of captivity on the slave narrative, and the way that captivity infused and organized city organization and Native American sovereignty in the antebellum era.

\*\*\*

Like its more famous sibling texts, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) and *Narrative of William Wells Brown, A Fugitive Slave* (1847), *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave* (1849) is part of the class of approximately 100 book-length, self-authored accounts of slave life produced from 1830 to the beginning of the Civil War. It dramatizes the life of Henry Bibb, known as “Walton” by his owners, a Kentucky bondsman who would rise up from slavery to find freedom and found Canada’s first black newspaper, *The Voice of the Fugitive*. The narrative, like Douglass’s and Brown’s narratives before it, emerged largely from Bibb’s retellings of his life on the anti-slavery lecture circuit and reflects the considerable influence of organized abolition in the introduction and addendums that preface the work. But though Bibb’s white editor, Lucius Matlack, is responsible for the arrangement of the chapters, the headings of the chapters, and corrections in spelling, Charles Heglar has convincingly shown that Bibb is overwhelmingly responsible for the content and style of the narrative

(“Appendix” 215). It is thus useful for understanding how African Americans understood and represented the various systems of captivity in which they were confined, albeit filtered through abolitionist rhetoric and imperatives.<sup>4</sup>

Bibb’s account is singular within the class of pre-Civil War, male slave narratives in its focus on the slave family and the subordination of the typical male individual quest to this project. His flight to the North is essentially a foregone conclusion, Charles Heglar explains, thus making “the suspense of whether he can successfully rescue his slave family” central (“Introduction” xxxii). In a work of twenty chapters, Bibb fully dramatizes his protagonist’s escape from Bedford, Kentucky to as far north as Detroit by the fourth chapter of his *Life*. Subsequently, Bibb makes repeated returns to the South in order to reclaim his wife, Malinda, and his daughter, Mary Frances, establishing “a recursive pattern” (Heglar “Introduction” xiii) of prolonged respites in the North followed by purposeful sojourns in the South.

Significantly, this “recursive pattern” – several smaller captivity narratives within the larger slave narrative – commences when Bibb first returns to Kentucky and is incarcerated in Covington jail in chapter 5; it ends when he experiences his final captivity at the hands of a Cherokee slaveholder in Oklahoma in chapters 13 and 14.<sup>5</sup> Two most important questions of the narrative – will Bibb be able to rescue his family and how will he be able to return to the North if he fails? – are bookmarked by the representation of imprisonment in chapters 5, 7, and 8; and Cherokee slavery in chapters 13 and 14. This organization demands a simultaneous reading of the two figurations of captivity in order to understand how slave incarceration and Indian slavery link the pieces of Bibb’s narrative as well as buttress his claims to masculinity, individual freedom, and family.

Bibb experiences his first formal incarceration in northeastern Kentucky's Covington jail, the same one-story building in which the fugitive slave Margaret Garner was allegedly detained after she killed her daughter during a failed escape attempt.<sup>6</sup> This imprisonment as well as his others should be understood within the context of slavery's intimate, but often overlooked, relationship to Southern jails, workhouses, penitentiaries, and other carceral institutions, by which I mean structures that were also used for the regulation and punishment of recalcitrant white subjects, not just slaves. I have limited my discussion to these sites in order to militate against the objection that what I am calling "slave incarceration" is no different than slavery; the presence, or even the likely presence, of whites suggests that incarcerated slaves were no longer simply in the disciplinary regime of antebellum slavery, but were now being simultaneously interpolated by other disciplinary systems.<sup>7</sup> To be sure, African Americans assumed a disproportionate number in America's prison system since its inception in the late eighteenth century,<sup>8</sup> but in the rural, antebellum South, slaveowners typically disciplined their own slaves, without the intervention of local or state authorities. As Mathew Mancini explains in *One Dies, Get Another*, whipping was the "preeminent" means of punishing slaves in the pre-Civil War South (25). Similarly, in Victoria Bynum's study of women and punishment in antebellum North Carolina, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South*, she notes that most slave women's alleged criminal behavior was addressed "within the household" (39-40).

But even if less pervasive than in-house punishment, imprisonment in jails and workhouses formed a regular component of African American enslavement in the South. Slaves were incarcerated for a number of connected reasons: to extort information,



punish recalcitrant bondspeople, set an example for other slaves, detain runaways, and hold them for “safe keeping” until sale further south. Indeed, slave imprisonment appears to have occurred most frequently in the context of the domestic slave trade, the interstate trading system in which nearly two million slaves, Walter Johnson speculates, were transported during the antebellum era mostly from the upper South to the lower South (7). Of course, slave traders frequently employed “slave pens” – the high-walled structures exclusively devoted to housing salable bondspeople (Johnson 2; Wade 200; Bancroft 129-30) – but as I will discuss further below in relation to Bibb, municipal penal structures could also serve as slave depots. Moreover, as almost any antebellum runaway slave announcement reveals, slaves were routinely imprisoned as the first formal step after their recapture as fugitives. Between 1837 and 1857 in Baltimore, for instance, nearly 500 slaves were imprisoned, many of whom were recaptured runaways (Wade 219). Similarly, slave traders lodged 452 slaves at the District of Columbia jail between 1824 and 1828 (Bancroft 53). Though the reason for their incarceration was specifically related to slavery, the site of their detention was no different than for whites who had committed offenses unrelated to “the peculiar institution.”

Equally important, the regular demands of slave discipline often necessitated detention, particularly in urban areas. As Richard C. Wade makes clear in *Slavery in the Cities*,

In the metropolis . . . official agencies took over large areas of [slave] control – and this was inevitable. The blacks were away from their master’s premises so often that their supervision was irregular; enforcement of ordinances necessarily fell to the local police and

municipal courts; the denseness of population made discipline a municipal rather than individual matter; and the concentration of large numbers of Negroes required consistent rather than sporadic attention. (97)

To wit, Mary Ann, a Louisville bondswoman, hired out her own time in 1850 and was sentenced to labor in the city workhouse for three months by municipal authorities (Lawrence Family Records). Slaveowners who wished to punish their slaves more stringently, and with the added bonus of not participating in such acts, repeatedly used local penal institutions. South Carolina plantation owner Charles Manigault frequently sent his slaves to the Charleston workhouse for “cooling,” that is, the use of intensive physical labor and confinement as a punishment for perceived misbehavior (Dusinberre 124). In the wake of more exceptional cases of disobedience, such as the revolts of Denmark Vessey and Nat Turner, dozens of blacks were imprisoned in local jails before exculpation, transportation, or execution (Bancroft 270; Christianson 153; Greenberg 21; 91-103). Certainly, such tactics were not the first or even the most desirable options in slave discipline, as it denied the owners of slaves (if nothing else) the labor of their bondspeople. But whether it was for disciplining wayward slaves, holding intransigent ones until sale, or housing them on the journey south, jails and workhouses had an important place in Southern slavery.

This is a truth duly reflected across a wide range of antebellum slave narratives. In one of the most oft-cited, but still overlooked, moments in the antebellum slave narrative, William Wells Brown recalls his evasion of a beating at a Vicksburg jail while traveling with a chain gang bound for New Orleans by fooling a free black man into receiving his punishment. Though Brown’s actions have been variously read as a tactic

of the African American trickster and as the corruption of the moral sense under slavery, scholars have been reluctant to draw one of the main conclusions that Brown does from the incident: “It is true that in most slaveholding cities, when a gentleman wishes his servants whipped he can send him to the jail and have it done” (57).<sup>9</sup> In Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, she relates her brother’s incarceration in Edenton jail for six months after a failed escape attempt, and her daughter, son, Aunt and Uncle’s imprisonment for another two months as a means of extorting information from them after Jacobs’s disappearance. Likewise, the narratives of Frederick Douglass, Solomon Northup, Henry Box Brown, and Lunsford Lane, to cite only the most recognizable examples, also reflect the frequency of slave and black incarceration in antebellum life.<sup>10</sup>

#### Henry Bibb, an American Prisoner

Bibb’s incarceration follows the general model outlined above. Each time he is imprisoned, it is as a fugitive and during an attempt to rescue his family from the Gatewood plantation. He is detained in Covington jail, for instance, after a failed rendezvous with his wife in Cincinnati, which is located across the Ohio River from Covington, Kentucky. Generally, Bibb puts his representations of Covington jail in the services of generating sympathy for himself and his family. Bibb rehearses this formula through his representation of Malinda’s grief on seeing him in the jail: “When she looked through the dungeon grates and saw my sad situation, *which was caused by my repeated adventures to rescue her and my little daughter from the grasp of slavery*, it was more than she could bear without bursting into tears” (88). He is only in jail on behalf of his family, the passage makes clear, and the reader should appreciate this fact, as

dramatically externalized in Malinda's crying. Using this same model of recognition followed by weeping, Bibb himself becomes teary-eyed when he contemplates his own diminished position inside the jail: "[Gatewood] then had me taken to a blacksmith's shop, and most wickedly had my limbs bound with heavy irons and then had my body locked within the cold dungeon walls of the Bedford jail. . . . My heart was filled with grief – my eyes were filled with tears" (87). Later, at the Louisville workhouse, this affective model of representing imprisonment is played out when Malinda is thrust into the workhouse, but without her daughter, Frances. After Malinda's many screams of remonstrance, Bibb reveals the prisoners' reactions: "This most distressing sound struck a sympathetic chord through all the prison among the prisoners" (98). In the reader, Bibb implies, imprisonment should strike a similar "sympathetic chord" that pangs for the slave and demands the end of slavery.

Jails are also spaces where Bibb can foil the imperatives of slave discipline. This is the case in Bedford jail, where his owner, Silas Gatewood, imprisons him after his second unsuccessful attempt to retrieve his family. Located not far from the Gatewood plantation, the structure still allowed Bibb limited interaction with his friends. "The second night I was in the jail," Bibb explains of the small, one-story structure, "two slaves came to the dungeon grates about the dead hour of night, and called me to the grates to have some conversation about Canada, and the facilities for getting there" (89). Bibb tells his companions, King and Jack, the way there and announces to the reader that they both "got clear to Canada" and, in fact, "I have seen them both since I came back to the north myself" (89). Anticipating the rehearsal of the prison as revolutionary think tank in George Jackson's *Soledad Brother*, for instance, Bibb paints the jail as a space

where bondspeople can resist white domination even despite and through the mechanisms of incarceration. Rather than acting as a barrier to freedom, the jail paradoxically acts as a conduit to it.

But, by far, Bibb's most revealing use of carceral institutions is his representation of Louisville workhouse, which stands as a striking symbol of the complex entanglements of the slave regime, economic utility, and penal-reform systems. After Bibb is recaptured and sent to Bedford jail, Gatewood decides to sell Bibb and his family down South to avoid any future escapes and also to prevent Bibb from showing any other slaves how to do so. Subsequently, Gatewood sends him and his family to the Louisville jail, where they are purchased by Madison Garrison, a prominent Louisville slave trader. Garrison detains Bibb, his wife, and child at the workhouse for approximately three months in the summer of 1839 while he collects slaves for sale in the New Orleans slave market.

Significantly, Bibb's abolitionist editor Lucius Matlack, who we know was exclusively responsible for creating the headers for each chapter, calls the workhouse a "slave prison" (84). But more than just a slave pen, the facility was a functional part of the municipality's penal system and economic infrastructure. Commissioned just two years after the city's original charter in 1828, the workhouse was established to punish misdemeanors and supply a steady stream of cheap labor for the stone quarry (on which the workhouse sat) that enabled various construction projects, like the paving of streets and the erection of buildings (Childress 951).<sup>11</sup> Such projects were often underway, given the town's meteoric rise from colonial outpost in the late eighteenth century to the largest industrial center in the South before the Civil War (Share 33). In this way,

workhouse inmates broke and cut the stones – as does Bibb during his stay (93) – that would literally lay the foundations for the city that would become known as the “Gateway to the South” (Share 37).

What is more, the workhouse was one, yet significant, tool in the city’s fight against an early image of itself as the “graveyard of the West,” a notion fueled by the fatal outbreak in the region of yellow fever in 1822 and Asiatic cholera from 1832-35 (Share 4). On the same tract of land on which the workhouse was situated, the City Pest House was also erected, a building designed to isolate those with contractible diseases. Not far from there, the town’s first hospital was established as well as a separate asylum for the mentally ill. In fact, in its early years, the workhouse housed the indigent as well as the infirm (Childress 951). In this way, the city’s workhouse, as well as the larger complex of penal, health, and benevolent organizations it was a part of, was emblematic of the reformatory impulse that David Rothman notes motivated the construction of penitentiaries, asylums, and almshouses in the Northeast at the beginning of the nineteenth century (76). Bibb adds another curious and paradoxical chapter to this tale, for while Louisville attempted to build its infrastructure and reform its self-image through the workhouse, Bibb uses his confinement there to reform his image in the eyes of his white reading audience.

Towards this end, Bibb is sure to note the considerable gap between the morals of the mass of mostly white prisoners and himself. “It would be astonishing,” he declares, to a Christian man to stand in that prison one half hour and hear and see the contaminating influence of Southern slavery on the body and mind of man – you may there find almost every variety of character to look on.

Some singing, some crying, some praying, others swearing. The people of color who were in there were slaves there without crime, but for safe keeping, while the whites were some of the most abandoned characters living. (92-93)

At the expense of the anonymous and presumably guilty mass of whites who populate the workhouse, Bibb elevates himself to the position of outraged, yet genteel, victim.

Following a move typical of antebellum prisoners' accounts, he frames his incarceration as a mark against the social order, not himself. "Rather than wallowing in guilt, or professing to wallow in guilt, about their crimes," H. Bruce Franklin reveals, "these convict authors began to turn a critical gaze upon society" (133). Such a change in emphasis is apparent, Bruce contends, in the transition from accounts by "convicts," those who presented themselves as rightly confined, from those of "prisoners," those who depicted themselves as wrongly imprisoned. Accordingly, he frames white inmates as unrepentant "convicts" and effectively casts himself and other blacks as unfortunate "prisoners." As he observes later of the workhouse, "In such company, and under such influences, where there was constant swearing, lying, cheating, and stealing, it was almost impossible for a virtuous person to avoid pollution, or to maintain their virtue" (94). Speaking through the voice of a hypothetical "virtuous person," Bibb decries the incommensurability of such living conditions for a just "prisoner" like himself.

Moving from the hypothetical to the historical, we see that Bibb's narrative voice mimics a model of moral authority practiced by prison reformers in the first half of the nineteenth century. In Dorothea Dix's "A Review of the Present Condition of the State Penitentiary of Kentucky, with Brief Notices and Remarks upon the Jails and Poor-

Houses in Some of the Most Populous Counties,” (1846) she makes similar remarks about the Louisville workhouse which call attention to the potential for authoritative self-fashioning embedded in prison reporting. During the antebellum era, Dix was the most well-known champion of improving the treatment of the poor and insane and specifically fought against the lumping of the mentally ill and poor with the regular jail and prison populations (Savitz 2), as was the case with the Louisville workhouse in its early years. She visited scores of jails, hospitals, and asylums throughout the 1840’s and 50’s and penned almost a dozen “memorials,” reports of her findings, for the state legislatures of Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Tennessee, and North Carolina, just to name a few.

Visiting the Louisville workhouse and jail in 1845, six years after Bibb and his family’s detention in 1839, Dix makes clear how Bibb’s comments not only critique slavery and its refraction through penal institutions, but also mirrors a model of writerly authority embedded in prison reform writing. As Maryk Paryz notes in “Authorial/Narratorial Voice, Narrativity, and the Intricacies of Representation in Dorothea Dix’s Memorial to the Legislature of Massachusetts 1843,” Dix’s memorials necessarily encoded “attempt[s] at self-creation” in order for the female and untrained Dix to be heard by her male and upper class addressees in the legislature (69). Though Dix eschewed self-aggrandizement in representing penal conditions, she implicitly rehearsed “something of a parity between the legislators and herself” (72). Discoursing on prison conditions provides Bibb, too, with a framework in which to couch his claims to self-worth and respectability and, moreover, menace the claims that African Americans are inherently suitable for slavery.



Dix, for instance, notes that the association of prisoners actually breeds deviant behavior; she cites the rude stories prisoners tell in jail: “One or two were reading, but most were rehearsing mischievous histories, while little boys from eight years of age to fourteen, were eager listeners” (35). Likewise, Bibb laments that prisoners’ favorite pastime is rehearsing past exploits. “I have often heard them,” he reflects, “telling each other how they robbed houses, and persons on the high way, by knocking them down, and would rob them, pick their pockets, and leave them half dead” (95). But while Dix’s claims are clearly made in the name of providing constructive activities for inmates, Bibb’s are organized around making explicit the profound moral difference between him and the other white prisoners. He is more concerned with how the prisoner’s activities form a negative example of what he is attempting in his own narrative. As he notes in a passage included at the end of his narrative, “I intend to reward [my former master] by forwarding him one of my books, hoping that it may be the means of converting him from a slaveholder to an honest man, and an advocate of liberty for all mankind” (196). While the convicts tell stories that corrupt, Bibb tells stories that convert. Hence, Bibb lambastes the workhouse’s conditions so that he might make clear his unsuitability for such a place and, ultimately, for slavery. “No place or places in this country,” Bibb intones, “can be better calculated to inculcate vice of every kind than a Southern workhouse or house of correction” (94). In almost identical language, Dix concludes, “This establishment, take it all in all, could hardly procure worse influences, or effect less in the way of reformation” (35). Though Bibb and Dix draw the same conclusions, Bibb’s are clearly in the services of distancing himself from the other white inmates, relying on the Bhabbaian logic that he and they are “almost the same, but not quite.” For

while they are all incarcerated, Bibb has committed no crime, establishing him further as an upright and intelligent man.

Bibb is, in fact, fully aware of the intractable differences between the historical and representational apparatuses available to slaves and white prisoners, and how his difference from white inmates might menace him as well. Close to the end of his narration of his time in the workhouse, Bibb explains that a group of inmates plan a jail break and ask him to steal the key from the turnkey, who also happens to be, interestingly, a slave. As can be seen in that most famous early nineteenth century tale of thievery, *A Narrative of the Life, Adventures, Travels, and Sufferings of Henry Tufts* (1807), escape plots and prison escapes were staples of American picaresque writing. But Bibb senses that his own fate as a slave prisoner, and not just a prisoner, will not be so lucky and, moreover, feels uncomfortable taking advantage of a fellow slave. When the plan unravels, he notes, “I looked upon it as being a fortunate thing for me, for it was certainly a very dangerous experiment for a slave, and they could never get me to consent to be the leader in that matter again” (97). As a (white) prisoner, an escape attempt would have been disastrous, but for an incarcerated slave, such an escape might have been fatal. Bibb’s status as slave superseded his status as prisoner and shapes the kind of subjugation he experiences in the workhouse as well as the kinds of dramatic purposes to which he can put it. He is “almost the same, but not quite,” a failure of resemblance to white prisoners that menaces his own ability to be free. So while he frames himself strategically and authoritatively in relation to the prison system, he understands that relationship as always and already mediated by his status as a chattel slave.

Bibb's slave narrative thus displays multiple relationships to traditions of, and figures in, nineteenth century prison writing. On the one hand, he decries his indiscriminate and unlucky detention with the mass of lying, cheating, and stealing white convicts, rehearsing the famed depravity of the "convict" and thereby establishing his own moral vigor. In the process, he frames himself as a kind of political prisoner, a martyr whose only crime is virtue in an unjust society. On the other hand, Bibb also plays the role of the concerned, but impartial, prison reporter and reformer, objectively observing the failures of penal institutions and thereby simultaneously presuming and foregrounding his own rational subject position. Ultimately, Bibb pits these narrative traditions against each other – the depravity of the white convict, the virtue of the prisoner, the moral sense of the prison reformer, and the victimization of the embattled slave – and suggests how a heteroglossic model of captive discourse can articulate the humanizing imperatives of abolitionist ideology.

\*\*\*

After a little over three months, Madison Garrison removes Bibb and his family from the Louisville workhouse, transports them to Louisiana, and puts them up for sale in the New Orleans slave market. There, they are purchased by Louisiana cotton planter Deacon Francis Whitfield, who Bibb describes as more like "the devil, than he was like a deacon" (112). Not one to suffer even "kind" masters for long, Bibb packs up his family and alights again for the North, despite his and his family's location farther south than before. Unfortunately, they are unsuccessful, and upon their recapture, Whitfield decides to separate Bibb from his wife and child permanently and sells him to a band of travelling

gamblers. They in turn sell him to a wealthy “half-Indian” in Indian Territory and inaugurate Bibb’s experience with Cherokee slavery.

Structurally, this captivity constitutes a definitive moment in the organization of Bibb’s narrative. Just as imprisonment initiates his attempts to reclaim his enslaved family, Cherokee slavery marks the climatic end of that journey, for it constitutes his last captivity before he permanently leaves his wife and child in the South. Upon his sale to the gamblers, Bibb declares, “I have never seen Malinda, since that period. I never expect to see her again” (149). The narrator’s use of the present perfect construction, “have never seen,” and the present tense construction, “never expect to see,” make it clear that Bibb never reunites with his family up until the writing of the narrative. As a result, the beginning of Bibb’s Indian slavery essentially transforms the narrative from one in which familial reunion is an ever-present possibility to one in which individual freedom can be the only outcome. Accordingly, from this point forward, he proceeds steadily onwards to the North and never returns to the South. When he does return to as far south as Indiana – which is recounted in the anticlimactic chapter 18 – he is still in a free state, and it is not dramatized in detail as is his more colorful trek through Indian country. Instead, he merely sends a white associate into Kentucky to find out information about his wife. Though, as we will see below, his family still plays crucial rhetorical functions in this project, Indian slavery marks Bibb’s return to the individual, male-centered slave narrative.

As he does with imprisonment, Bibb re-members Cherokee slavery as an opportunity to increase his stature in the eyes of his largely white readership. This enterprise is especially ironic, considering that his captors were also involved in their

own projects of self-determination and self-fashioning. Known as the elite group of the “Five Civilized Tribes” – the Chickasaws, Choctaw, Creeks, and Seminoles being the other four – the Cherokees had been targeted by various “civilization” programs in the post-revolutionary era that tried to transform Cherokees from communal, hunter-gatherers into discrete, property owning subjects (Perdue *Cherokee Slavery* 49). The government’s efforts to transform and contain the Cherokee eventually culminated in the 1830 Indian Removal Act, which legislated the removal of Native American populations from east of the Mississippi to the West of it, and the 1838 Trail of Tears, the forced and bloody removal of approximately 12,000 Cherokee from their lands in present-day Georgia to what is now present-day Oklahoma (Naylor 1). One way in which the Cherokee responded to government aggression was through their own projects of self-definition and self-determination. They established their own syllabary in 1821, the first American Indian newspaper, *The Cherokee Phoenix* (later *Cherokee Advocate*) in 1825, and a Cherokee constitution in 1827 (Conley 105-6). And though this was true for a minority of the Cherokee population, they participated in that most American of antebellum pastimes: African American slaveholding. Operating both as a practical means of meeting the new demands of agrarian life and as a symbol of racial superiority over blacks (and, conversely, racial equanimity with whites), slave owning helped to solidify the Cherokee elite’s status as “civilized” (Perdue “Cherokee Planters” 110; Conley 103).

There were thousands of African American slaves held by Southeastern Indians in the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1825, for example, over 1200 African Americans were held as slaves by the Cherokee in Georgia (Halliburton 39). Then

during removal, black slaves facilitated the migration of many Cherokees from the southeast to the west, and afterwards they helped them clear land and establish new homesteads (Halliburton 39).<sup>12</sup> As the census of 1860 reveals, 384 Cherokees owned 2,504 slaves in the states west of Arkansas (xv).<sup>13</sup> Hence, in 1840, the year of Bibb's transfer from white to Indian masters, Bibb would have been one of hundreds of African American slaves of the Cherokee and other Southeastern Native American tribes.

Of all antebellum slave narratives, however, Bibb's is the only sustained representation of African American enslavement to Native Americans. Yet, if we consult the often overlooked slave narratives collected and transcribed under the Works Project Administration (WPA) in the 1920's and 30's of ex-bondspeople in their 70's and beyond, we see that the fact of his captivity is representative of the larger experience of nineteenth century blacks in bondage. As the research of Laura Lovett reveals, roughly 12% of all WPA slave narratives come from African Americans who identified themselves as Indians or were descendants of Indians (195), and many of these accounts relate tales of slavery to members of the Five Nations. Compared to Bibb's book-length slave narrative, of course, the WPA texts are generally shorter, less stylized, and relate the accounts of those who were born Indian slaves or spent much of their lives in that condition. They speak to what Celia Naylor identifies as an "African Indian" subjectivity forged in continued and complex relationships with Native Americans (5); as I discuss further below, Bibb, on the other hand, makes a point of distinguishing his identity and worldview from that of his captors. As such, the WPA accounts do not offer many useful parallels with Bibb's relatively brief encounter with Indian slavery, but they do corroborate the frequency of such bondage.

Bibb's contribution to our understanding of this complex connection is that he foregrounds yet another striking way that subjugation linked African Americans and Cherokees. Indeed, if the Cherokees laid their claim to "civilization" by holding slaves, Bibb lays his claim to "civilization" by being a slave to the Cherokee.

#### Henry Bibb, a Cherokee Slave

Beginning with the heading, "Character of my Indian Master," Bibb sets out to give his reader a "just" description of Indian slavery and Indian country, but with a particular view towards the "difference between the negro slavery among the Indians, and the same thing among the slaveholders of the South" (152). Working against the notion that similar cruelties obtained between white and Cherokee slavery (Haliburton 42-44; Naylor 26-34), Bibb represents slavery under American Indians as categorically milder than slavery to whites. In his capacity as a "kind of body servant" (150), he calls his owner "the most reasonable, and humane slaveholder that I have ever belonged to" (152) and, in contrast to his white ex-masters, refrains from revealing his Cherokee master's real name. Moreover, Bibb contends that the corn and wheat he harvests in Indian slavery is simply for "consumption," and not for the "market," which is probably the reason for the improved conditions of the African American slaves of Indians (152). He notes that he is allowed to eat as much as he pleases and that has enough clothes to wear (152), two perennial indictments of the slavocracy in the slave narrative. ". . . I have suffered much from . . . want of food and raiment" (15), Bibb declares of his earlier experiences of slavery in Kentucky. Additionally, Indian slaves, Bibb tells us, are not especially subject to the lash; rather, they have been known to whip their masters in

retaliation (153). And, most important for Bibb's argument, Indian masters do not divide slave families (153).

Clearly, this catalogue of kindnesses is meant to vituperate white and Southern adherents of the "peculiar institution" and thereby buttress his call for its demise. The perfectly neat opposition of the two forms of slavery here suggests that Bibb's remembering is influenced by what Michael Awkward calls "strategic nostalgia," or the romanticized remembering of past events in a way that highlights the ills of the present. So, although hardly approving of Indian slavery (he is just as eager to flee his Indian masters as he is his white ones), Bibb's depiction of Indian slavery appears less about a historically representative depiction of Cherokee slavery and more about critiquing the abuses of white, chattel slavery, the primary objective of all anti-slavery discourse.

Elsewhere, Bibb is not so kind to the Indians he encounters and employs the morally chauvinistic language he uses against his white prison inmates. In one remembering of an Indian dance, he explains:

Their dress for the dance was most generally a great bunch of bird feathers, coon tails, or something of the kind stuck in their heads, and a great many shells tied about their legs to rattle while dancing. Their manner of dancing is taking hold of each others hands and forming a ring around the large fire in the centre, and go stomping around it until they would get drunk or their heads would get to swimming, and they would go off and drink, and another set come on. Such were some of the *practices* indulged in by these Indian slaveholders. (154; italics mine)



On the one hand, Bibb's denigration of the ruling caste is unremarkable within the tradition of the slave narratives. Like so many other slave narrators, he upbraids his masters' class for vulgar and hypocritical behavior. But on the other hand, this lambast also intersects with the well-known tradition of "Indian hating" found in Indian captivity narratives and other nineteenth century cultural productions.<sup>14</sup> In particular, his remark that these are "practices" invokes the ethnographic and often culturally chauvinistic reports that marked Native Americans as degenerate, irrational, and violent. As Kathleen Sands reveals in "Cooperation and Resistance: Native American Collaborative Personal Narrative," the careful description of Indian life is often complicit with "establishing the 'authority'" of the white writing subject in interactions with Indians (135). Writing on the same passage, Rafia Zafar notes, "Bibb swings between the idea of the Indian as interesting foreigner . . . and that of the Native American as a debased individual" (75-76). In effect, Bibb becomes an ethnographic authority here through his masterful observations of Indian behavior. As he does with his representations of immoral and mischievous workhouse prisoners, the negative representations of dancing Native Americans, morally inferior for their complicity with slaveholding and culturally unsophisticated for their clothing, lend credibility to Bibb's character as a refined and civilized subject.

But Bibb's most innovative use of Indian slavery comes not in his representation of Indian country, but in his return to the slave narrative portion. After his Cherokee owner fortuitously dies, Bibb sets out on his way north early the next day (155). Before leaving Indian country, however, he notices three white men on horseback and suspects that they are slave catchers. Once he passes into the slave state of Missouri, he again

notes the white men's approach; this requires him to steal a horse from a nearby plantation. In the following passage, Bibb justifies his theft from slaveholders by a curious appeal to and appropriation of the rights of Indian captives. "But I ask," he wonders,

if a white man had been captured by the Cherokee Indians and carried away from his family for life into slavery, and could see a chance to get back to his family; should the Indians pursue him with a determination to take him back or take his life, would it be a crime for a poor fugitive, whose life, liberty and future happiness were all at stake, to mount any man's horse by the way side, and ride him without asking any questions, to effect his escape? . . . . Such an act committed by a white man under the same circumstances would not only be pronounced proper, but praiseworthy . . . . (163)<sup>15</sup>

The message is clear here: as an African American slave to whites, his theft would have confirmed the perceived baseness of his character, merely duplicating the misleading "advertisement" that will run ahead of him in Jefferson City; but as a white captive of Indians – whose status as "civilized" is already suspect – his theft is "proper" and even "praiseworthy." In comparing his act to that of a "praiseworthy" white Indian captive, Bibb effectively resists the derogatory readings that attend his own picaresque characterization, resolving what Raymond Hedin calls the "dilemma" of the picaro, "to keep himself clearly on the side of morality while depicting actions often hardly moral at all" (636). Equally important, coming immediately after his section on Indian slavery, Bibb actually extends the reading of himself as Indian captive into the "slave narrative"

portion of his account. Inasmuch as Missouri is a slave state, it is bound by the same rules of narration governing most antebellum slave narratives; the South is marked by scenes of deprivation, and the North is characterized by scenes of relative freedom. But as a kind of textual and cultural passport, his Bhabbaian invocation of the language of Indian captivity allows him to shape himself literarily and authoritatively, even in Missouri.

Moreover, Bibb's mimicry of the resourcefulness of Indian captivity narrators both menaces the material property of slaveowners – their horses – as well as the foundation on which apologies for black subjugation exist – the supposed lack of sentience of the bondsperson. If we recall, what defined slaves was not only their ownership by another, but their inability to own anything else, even and especially themselves. As was also true in American slave law, slaves were explicitly prohibited from owning property in the Cherokee nation. An 1833 Cherokee statute reveals, “no slave or slaves in the Cherokee Nation, shall have the right or privilege to own any kind of property whatever” (qtd. in Haliburton 89). But inasmuch as the crime of theft presumes that the offender can own their transgression, theft problematizes the bondsperson's status as a non-owner and inert being. Indeed, if only momentarily and covertly, to steal is to resist the rules and logic of bondage and to assume a disobedient subject position. In a rough play on Richard III's famous lament, we might say that Bibb gains his kingdom for a horse, for horse stealing threatens to unmake Bibb as a slave and into a free man.<sup>16</sup> For example, when Bibb half-jokingly tells his readers that he could not have “stolen” a jackass because both he and the donkey were property, he implicitly references this idea. There should be, Bibb surmises, “no more sin committed in this than

if one jackass rode off another” (122). Similarly, when he and his compatriots are caught and interrogated during an attempted escape, he tells his fellow rebels to “own nothing,” implying that the renunciation of all property (even thoughts) is fundamental to being a proper slave. And in the scene directly following his theft of the horse, Bibb feigns legal freedom through his talk of purchasing property, specifically “buying land, stock and village property, and contrasting it with the same kind of property in Ohio” (164). According to Bibb’s narrative, for a slave to possess anything besides the vice and stupidity that were associated with him is to disrupt his definition as a slave and forge a tentative freedom.<sup>17</sup>

Equally important, stealing not only problematizes Bibb’s status as chattel, but also authorizes the possession of his family and masculinity. Male Indian captives like John Williams and Daniel Boone, and even the murderous female captive Hannah Dustan, had access to a decidedly aggressive model of identity under the duress of Indian captivity. As represented in the sensational and fictionalized antebellum account of Indian captivity in Kentucky, *Nick of the Woods* (1837), white males in particular could indiscriminately kill and or mutilate Indian Others in the name of their families. Though Bibb does not go to such lengths to reunite his family, he clearly understands the invocation of the trials of Indian captivity as a fairly established ritual in defending actions on behalf of one’s freedom and family. What is more, inasmuch as the family is often the context for male captives’ expression of their gendered identity, Bibb’s stealing of the horse is also a defense of his masculinity. Hortense Spillers asserts in her foundational “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” “Legal enslavement removed the African American male not so much from sight as from

mimetic view as a partner in the prevailing social fiction of the Father's name, the Father's law" (462). In other words, male slaves could not participate in the social fiction of white masculinity, due to both their symbolic removals from the (often white) father's genealogy and their literal prohibitions from protecting and providing for their families. As Bibb notes generally, "It is almost impossible for slaves to give account of their male parentage," and as he explains of his own white father in particular, "I have no personal knowledge of him at all, for he died before my recollection" (14). Under the same duress as a white man "captured by the Cherokee Indians," Bibb is authorized to behave like the "white father" he could never know. He literarily recollects the adult masculinity that he cannot literally remember, thus giving an "account of his male parentage" by behaving like the father he never had.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that Bibb's authority to reclaim his family is made possible here through the objectification of his family. His collection of his wife and child like so many material possessions and corresponds to a vision of manhood which is, arguably, on a continuum with the paternalistic and possessive logics of chattel slavery. Equally important, his self-presentation as masterful is dependent on a master narrative of Indian inferiority and depravity. Bibb is sold into Indian Territory in 1840, just two years after the cataclysmic removal of the Cherokees from their eastern homelands in 1838. As Michelle Burnham notes of white captive suffering in the colonial Indian captivity tradition, sympathy for white captives' suffering often worked to elide the larger historical displacements of Native captors perpetrated by the captive group's ruling authorities (4). In the case of Bibb, of course, African Americans did not (nor could they) legislate or execute the removal of Southeastern Indians from the East,

but Bibb's representation of them in his *Life* certainly reinforces the notion of unmotivated Indian aggression – “if a white man had been captured by the Cherokee Indians” – without any consideration of Anglo-American culpability. Similar to how his descriptions of poor and uneducated white prisoners worked as negative examples of the upright and learned man he wished to be seen as, the conventions of Indian captivity narratives work here to displace – indeed, menace – Indian subjects and resituate Bibb as a member of civilized society. In the process, Bibb, the consummate racial chameleon, passes yet again, but this time as a “white man captured by the Indians” on his way to a masculinity and respectability that is largely dependent on, but exclusive, of the Cherokee.

In the final analysis, Bibb's representations of these alternative captivities point to an unacknowledged literary history in which multiple forms of captivity organized African American life and writing in the antebellum America. They are, in fact, indispensable to his framing of himself as “a husband and father,” moral and respectable, educated and objective. What is more, they are crucial to understanding how two apparently unrelated entities, an upper South city, and a Southeastern Native American tribe, used confinement and bondage as practical methods for organizing labor and identity. Institutions like workhouses and slavery brokered their relationships to prized categories like “reform” and “civilization.” Bibb's *Life* thus urges us to rethink the relationship between slavery, imprisonment, and Indian slavery not just in his slave narrative, but to consider how a multifaceted and complex definition of captivity shaped American cultural production across the board in the antebellum era.

\*\*\*

## Works Cited

- Andrews, William. *To Tell A Free Story: The First Hundred Years of African American Autobiography*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986.
- Awkward, Michael. "The Philadelphia Sound and Family Values." Lecture given at the University of Michigan, Spring 2000.
- Bancroft, Frederic. *Slave Trading in the Old South*. Baltimore: J. H. Furst Company, 1931.
- Bhaba, Homi. "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994. 121-131.
- Bibb, Henry. *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave*. Ed. Charles Heglar. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001.
- Bird, Robert Montgomery. *Nick of the Woods or The Jibbenainosay: A Tale of Kentucky*. Ed. Curtis Dahl. New Haven: College and University Press, 1967.
- Brennan, Jonathan. "Speaking Across Boundaries: A Nineteenth-Century African-Native American Autobiography." *When Brer Rabbit Meets Coyote: African-Native American Literature*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003. 168-193.
- Brown, William Wells. *Narrative of William Wells Brown, A Fugitive Slave*. Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1847. Documenting the American South.  
<<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/>>
- Burnham, Michelle. *Captivity and Sentiment: Cultural Exchange in American Literature, 1682-1861*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997.
- Bynum, Victoria. *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old*

- South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992.
- Christianson, Scott. *With Liberty for Some: 500 Years of Imprisonment in America*.  
Boston: Northeastern UP, 1998.
- Conley, Robert J. *The Cherokee Nation: A History*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005.
- Couser, Thomas. *Altered Egos: Authority and American Autobiography*. New York: Oxford UP, 1989.
- Coynes, William Tynes. *The Slave in the Swamp: Disrupting the Plantation Narrative*.  
New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Drinnon, Richard. *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire Building*.  
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980.
- Davis, Charles T. and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., eds. *The Slave's Narrative*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985.
- Dix, Dorothea L. *On Behalf of the Insane Poor: Selected Reports*. New York: Arno Press, 1971.
- Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Eds. William L. Andrews and William S. McFeely. New York: Norton, 1997.
- Dusinberre, William. *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage, 1995.
- Franklin, H. Bruce. *Prison Literature in America: The Victim as Criminal and Artist*.  
New York: Oxford UP, 1989.



- Gephardt, Christine. "Border Ecology: The Slave Narrative of Henry Bibb, Nature, and the Frontier Myth." *Restoring the Connection to the Natural World: Essays on the African-American Environmental Imagination*. Ed. Sylvia Mayer. Munster: Forum for European Contributions in African American Studies, 2002. 11-29.
- Green, Tara. *From the Plantation to the Prison: African American Confinement Literature*. Macon: Mercer UP, 2008.
- Gross, Kali. *Colored Amazons: Crime, Violence, and Black Women in the City of Brotherly Love, 1880-1910*. Durham: Duke UP, 2006.
- Hadden, Sally E. *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Halliburton Jr., Richard. *Red Over Black: Black Slavery Among the Cherokee Indians*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977.
- Hedin, Raymond. "The American Slave Narrative: The Justification of the Picaro." *American Literature* 53.4 (1982): 630-45.
- Heglar, Charles. "Introduction." *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001: v-xxxv.
- . *Rethinking the Slave Narrative: Slave Marriage and the Narratives of Henry Bibb and William and Ellen Craft*. Westport: Greenwood, 2001.
- Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Eds. Nellie Y. McKay and Francis Smith Foster. New York: Norton, 2001.
- Jackson, George. *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*. New York: Bantam, 1970.
- Johnson, Walter. *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market*. Cambridge:

- Harvard UP, 1999.
- Childress, Brad. "Louisville Workhouse." *The Encyclopedia of Louisville*. Ed. John E. Kleber. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2000. 971-2.
- Lawrence-McIntyre, Charshee Charolette. *Criminalizing a Race: Free Blacks During Slavery*. New York?: Kayode, 1993.
- Lovett, Laura. "African and Cherokee by Choice." *Confounding the Color Line: The Indian-Black Experience in North America*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002. 192-222.
- Macpherson, C. B. *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism, Hobbes to Locke*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969.
- Mancini, Matthew. *One Dies Get Another: Convict Leasing in the American South, 1866-1928*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996.
- McBride, Dwight A. *Impossible Witness: Truth, Abolitionism, and Slave Testimony*. New York: New York UP, 2001.
- Miles, Tiya. "Uncle Tom Was an Indian: Tracing the Red in Black Slavery." *Confounding the Color Line: The Indian-Black Experience in North America*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002. 137-160.
- . *Ties That Bind: The Story of Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom*. Berkley: University of California Press, 2005.
- . "'His Kingdom for a Kiss': Indians and Intimacy in the Narrative of John Marrant." *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*. Ed. Ann Laura Stoler. Durham: Duke UP, 2006. 163-188.

- McLoughlin, William G. *After the Trail of Tears: The Cherokees' Struggle for Sovereignty, 1839-1880*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993.
- . *Cherokee Renaissance in the New Republic*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986.
- Minges, Patrick, ed. *Black Indian Slave Narratives*. Winston-Salem: John. F. Blair, 2004.
- Northup, Solomon. *Twelve Years A Slave*. Documenting the American South.  
< <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/> >
- Paryz, Marek. "Authorial/Narratorial, Narrativity, and the Intricacies of Representation in Dorothea Dix's Memorial to the Legislature of Massachusetts 1843." 19 (2001): 69-79.
- Patterson, Mark. *Authority, Autonomy, and Representation in American Literature, 1776-1865*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988.
- Perdue, Theda. *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society, 1540-1866*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1979.
- . "Cherokee Planters: The Development of Plantation Slavery Before Removal." *The Cherokee Indian Nation: A Troubled History*. Ed. Duane H. King. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1979. 110-128.
- Runyon, Randolph Paul (Researched in collaboration with Albert Davis). *Delia Webster and the Underground Railroad*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1996.
- Sale, Maggie Montesinos. "Critiques from Within: Antebellum Projects of Resistance." *American Literature* 64 (1992): 695-718.
- Sands, Kathleen. "Cooperation and Resistance: Native American Collaborative Personal Narrative." *Native American Representations: First Encounters, Distorted*

- Images, and Literary Appropriations*. Ed. Gretchen M. Bataille. University of Nebraska Press, 2001.
- Sekora, John. "Black Message/White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in the Antebellum Slave Narrative." *Callaloo* 10 (1987): 482–515.
- Spillers, Hortense. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *The Black Feminist Reader*. Eds. Joy James and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.
- Starling, Marion Wilson. *The Slave Narrative: Its Place in American History*. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981.
- Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. A Norton Critical Edition: Authoritative Text, Backgrounds, and Contexts, Criticism. Ed. Elizabeth Ammons. New York: Norton, 1994.
- The United States Census, 1850.
- The United States Census, 1860.
- Wade, Richard C. *Slavery in the Cities: The South 1820-1860*. New York: Oxford, 1964.
- Wallace, Maurice. *Constructing the Black Masculine: Ideality and Identity in African American Men's Literature, 1775-1995*. Durham: Duke UP, 2002.
- Zafar, Rafia. "Capturing the Captivity." *MELUS* 17 (1992): 19-35.
- . *We Wear the Mask: African Americans Write American Literature, 1760-1870*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

<sup>1</sup> Scholars are more likely to recognize the variety of African American captivity both before and after the antebellum period, as in Rafia Zafar's study of African American Indian captivity texts in the colonial period, "Capturing the Captivity," and Mathew Mancini's study of African American bondage in Reconstruction, *One Dies Get Another: Convict Leasing in the American South, 1866-1928* or Tara Green's study of twentieth century black American prison writing, *From the Plantation to the Prison: African American Confinement Literature* (2008). For examples of works that recognize an alternative tradition of African American captivity writing in the antebellum era, from historical and literary-critical perspectives, see Richard C. Wade's *Slavery in the Cities: The South 1820-1860* (1964), Fredric Bancroft's *Slave Trading in the Old South*, William T. Coynes's *The Slave in the Swamp: Disrupting the Plantation Narrative*, Patrick Mingos's *Black Indian Slave Narratives*, Tiya Miles's "Uncle Tom Was an Indian: Tracing the Red in Black Slavery," and Jonathan Brennan's "Speaking Across Boundaries: A Nineteenth-Century African-Native American Autobiography."

<sup>2</sup> For more on the significance of the notion of authority in nineteenth century writing, see Thomas Couser's *Altered Egos: Authority and American Autobiography* and Mark Patterson's *Authority, Autonomy, and Representation in American Literature, 1776-1865*.

<sup>3</sup> The most sustained discussions of Bibb's Indian slavery can be found in Rafia Zafar's *We Wear the Mask* and Christine Gephardt's "Border Ecology: The Slave Narrative of Henry Bibb, Nature, and the Frontier Myth." Most other discussions of Bibb's bondage in Indian Territory are cursory. William Andrews notes the fact of Bibb's Indian slavery in *To Tell A Free Story* but does not consider the ways that its representation might have advanced the project of free telling (101). And Marion Wilson Starling in *The Slave Narrative* makes no comment on Bibb's illustration of Cherokee slavery at all.

<sup>4</sup> For a sensitive account of the politics of telling in the slave narrative, see Dwight A. McBride's *Impossible Witness: Truth, Abolitionism, and Slave Testimony*.

<sup>5</sup> Rafia Zafar argues that "Bibb never says definitively whether his last purchaser hails from [the Cherokee Nation] (205). But Bibb's account states: "[The gamblers] went from thence to the Indian Territory among the Cherokee Indians, to attend the great races which were to take place there. During the races there was a very wealthy half Indian of that tribe, who became much attached to me..." (italics mine 150). This is the same Indian that buys Bibb, and it is clear here that Bibb identifies him as a member of the Cherokee Indians. What is not as clear is if Bibb is always referring to the Cherokee in his other descriptions of Native Americans in Indian Territory. At the end of his narration of Indian Territory, he notes that he had been in great danger while "passing through the various half civilized tribes" of that region, suggesting that he may have come into contact with more than one kind of tribe. Because Bibb's use of "tribe" here appears imprecise, I have, as a result, used the more generic terms Indian and Native American when referring to Native subjects other than his owner.

<sup>6</sup> It is not conclusive that Garner stayed in Covington jail, though at least one contemporary newspaper report (*Cincinnati Daily Gazette* April 11, 1856 ) notes that Garner was held there. The difficulty of making this claim is exacerbated by the uncertainty surrounding Garner's destiny after the trial. Some believe that she was never held there, and that her owner immediately sold her south after the trial. Others hold that she was held there, per the request of the Ohio judge who ruled that Ohio should have the opportunity to try her for murder. For my purposes here, the fact that it is plausible that Garner could have been detained at Covington jail points to the regularity with which slaves were detained there and throughout jails in the antebellum South. Equally important, the Garner case points to the way in which slave incarceration pitted the rights and meanings associated with slaves versus those of enslaved prisoners, which is also happening in Bibb. For more on the legal aspects of Garner's flight, see Julius Yanuck's "The Garner Fugitive Slave Case."

<sup>7</sup> It is important to note here that, despite the line I am drawing between the two, the prison system, in fact, owes much of its methodology to the practices of slavery. See Charshee Lawrence-McIntyre's *Criminalizing a Race*.

<sup>8</sup> From the very beginning of the American prison system in the northeast, African Americans were disproportionately incarcerated. As Charshee Charlotte Lawrence-McIntyre explains in *Criminalizing a Race: Free Blacks During Slavery*, blacks constituted 44% of the prison

population in the first class of prisoners at Walnut Street Prison (170-171). Out of 123 convicts in New York's first state prison in 1797, 25 were black inmates, most of whom were slaves or former slaves (Christianson 97). The proportion of blacks in prison to blacks in the free population in the year 1826 is perhaps most telling of the extent to which early prisons consolidated African American disenfranchisement. In *Colored Amazons: Crime, Violence, and Black Women in the City of Brotherly Love, 1880-1910*, Kali Gross notes that in Pennsylvania, blacks constituted 1/34 of the population, but 1/3 of the prison population. In New York state, blacks made up 1/35<sup>th</sup> of the free population, but 1/4<sup>th</sup> of the prison population. And in New Jersey, blacks constituted 1/13 of the prison population, but 1/3 of the prison population (Gross 154). Gross continues, "State prisons in New York, Pennsylvania, and elsewhere were not created exclusively for blacks, but they were designed to arrest and counteract slavery's traits without ending slavery itself" (104).

<sup>9</sup> See Gates and Zafar. The glaring exception to this is Scott Christianson who paraphrases Brown's admonition in his seminal *With Liberty for Some*.

<sup>10</sup> In the 1845 version of his narrative, Frederick Douglass records his detainment for an unspecified amount of time (but at least a couple of weeks) in St. Michael's Easton jail after a failed escape attempt by him and three other compatriots (60-1). Also see the curious case of Native Americans who assist whites in the recapture and eventual imprisonment of fugitive slaves in Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* (242).

<sup>11</sup> For more on how workhouses regulated the lives of the poor and disenfranchised in Southern cities, see Elna Green's *The Business of Relief: Confronting Poverty in a Southern City, 1740-1940*.

<sup>12</sup> For more on the unique tensions created by differing groups of Cherokee émigrés, see William G. McLoughlin's *After The Trail of Tears* and *Cherokee Renaissance in the New Republic*, John Ehle's *Trail of Tears: The Rise and Fall of the Cherokee Nation*, and Thurman Wilkins's *Cherokee Tragedy: The Ridge Family and the Decimation of a People*.

<sup>13</sup> The 1860 Census reveals that the "Choctaws held 2,297 negro slaves, distributed among 385 owners; the Cherokees 2,504, held by 384 owners; the Creeks 1,651, owned by 267 Indians; and the Chickasaws 917, to 118 owners" (xv). The same census estimates that throughout these tribes, "there are nearly eight Indians to each negro slave, and that the slaves form about 12 and ½ per cent. of the population, omitting the whites and free colored" (xv).

<sup>14</sup> See Ricahrd Drinnon's *Facing West* for a more elaborate discussion of Indian-hating.

<sup>15</sup> See Harriet Beecher Stowe's reappraisal of this passage, through the words of George Harris, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

<sup>16</sup> See Tiya Miles's "'His Kingdom for Kiss': Indians and Intimacy in the Narrative of John Marrant" for an alternative handling of Richard's plea in the context of John Marrant's Indian captivity account.

<sup>17</sup> See C. B. MacPherson's *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* for a further discussion of the centrality of self-possession to liberal models of freedom and identity.

Slaves frequently had spouses who resided on other plantations or farms, often some distance away, and ties between husbands and wives were looser and fragile. masters acquired great leverage over the behavior of slaves by invoking the threat of family break up through sale. slaves would ask to be sold with their family member or to the same neighborhood. This period is also known as the "antebellum era." Caste system. 1. Large planters were 4% the dominant class, owned 20 or more slaves. Blacks were a race of perpetual children requiring constant care+supervision by superior whites. white planters take care of them. American Colonization Society. Blacks had no such contracts. They were brought to America by ships' captains who sold them to the highest bidder. In the early 1600s, the buyers and sellers sometimes agreed on a period of servitude for black indentured servants. That helped support the feeling that the buyers and sellers were trading in labor not people. However, the black servants had no voice in these dealings. And since the buyers wanted to get the greatest value for the price they paid, it became commonplace that black servants were indentured for life. It also became customary that the children of black indentured

People & Events Conditions of antebellum slavery 1830 - 1860.

Resource Bank Contents. By 1830 slavery was primarily located in the South, where it existed in many different forms. Though slavery had such a wide variety of faces, the underlying concepts were always the same. Slaves were considered property, and they were property because they were black. Their status as property was enforced by violence -- actual or threatened. The standard image of Southern slavery is that of a large plantation with hundreds of slaves. In fact, such situations were rare. Fully 3/4 of Southern whites did not even own slaves; of those who did, 88% owned twenty or fewer. Whites who did not own slaves were primarily yeoman farmers.