(Re)Addressing Redress Along the Diagonal: 19th Century African American Women in Missouri

By

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Professor Stephen Small
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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation argues that in order to better understand the actions and experiences of African American women in nineteenth-century Missouri, we must not only use an intersectional lens that accounts for race and class, but also consider the ways what I call *diagonality*, which relates to geography and spatial factors, impacted their lives. I use the story of an obscure, formerly enslaved African American woman named Agnes Evans, in Franklin County, to argue that African American women sometimes chose not to pursue redress through legal pathways, and instead redressed their grievances informally, based on a moral authority. Drawing on newspapers, probate cases, and court records, I analyze the case of Evans, who allegedly embezzled personal property from her deceased former enslaver in 1870. I situate this dissertation within studies of the racialized and gendered nature of Black women's archival silences and invisibility, examining the tension between moral and legal rights, and the ways intersectionality and diagonality shaped decisions around pursuits of redress.

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When I earned my master's degree from UC Berkeley in 2015, about twenty family members from southern California attended my graduation, along with my northern California cousins.

When I came out of the auditorium after graduating, I was greeted with huge letters spelling out my first name, and a large group of family cheering me on. That's my family! We not only roll deep, but we also roll hard for each other! No effort is spared to celebrate and support one another. As heart-warming as this greeting was, a message from my niece, London, typifies what it means to be a part of my family. The family made a large poster, and everyone signed it with messages of love and support. London's message was a reminder of who I was and what I meant to my family. She wrote, "Auntie, we love you whether you graduated or not. Congratulations!" I referred to the message so many times when self-doubt about my abilities seeped in.

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Introduction

In November of 1869, looking down on the lifeless body of her recent employer and former enslaver, Agnes knew her life was about to change. A range of emotions came across her as she considered the decades of legal oppression she endured at the hands of the dead man laying before her. The horror of enslavement sanctioned by the state of Missouri protected the now deceased, Fernando Evans,' violation of Agnes' body. Although a free woman for at least four years, due to Missouri's January 1, 1865, emancipation decree, the trauma of her experiences as "property" continued to coexist in her bones. These memories, combined with the centuries-old racialized gendered terror, sedimented into her DNA, delimited her ability to organize her emotions. The layered experiences she endured engulfed her like a swarm of honeybees.

For Agnes, overwhelmed with affect related to some form of mourning, and a sense of and desire for redress, the finality of Fernando's death triggered a myriad of concerns, possibilities, and relief. Had she mumbled or shouted out to him the words she always thought to say but did not. Sure, her long-term relationship as first his enslaved "property" and concubine, and then his employee, granted her opportunities to voice her opinion on occasion. But she understood the limits of her positionality, even as a freed Black woman. Maybe, while standing there alone with his dead body, Agnes slapped or punched him in a spontaneous act of liberation. With the expectation of Fernando's looming death, she must have thought about what it meant to gain permanent metaphoric freedom from him forever. In the context of her enslavement by Fernando, Agnes navigated her existence in the slavery state of Missouri knowing that her race and gender was central to her life chances and opportunities. She saw how her experiences were different from Black men, although she was also Black, and there was a clear difference in her versus white women's treatment, even as she too was a woman.[1]

Not only did her identities as a Black person and a woman impact her life but living within the boundaries of a state that legalized slavery, surrounded by "free" states on three sides, created certain types of limitations, on the one hand, and possibilities on the other. Agnes' life, like the region in which she lived, was complex. Living in a small town, required to labor as a domestic and field laborer, and connected to a prominent white man who "owned" her for many years, Agnes had more resources and privileges than many of her counterparts. Some enslaved women lived in regions where a culture of the "Deep South" and proslavery exacerbated day-to-day violence toward the women, such as in "Little Dixie,"[2] in the northwestern region of Missouri. Depending on their access to waterways, such as the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers, African American women like Agnes could take advantage of the rivers as sources of transportation for escape. But the rivers were notably spaces where enslaving traders of Black people setup auctions for incoming ships holding bodies for profit, and outgoing kin sold at such

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[1] Throughout this dissertation, gender is used and referred to through a binary framework. This is not to dismiss the possibility that individuals may have identified their gender in more expansive ways in this historical moment. However, given the limitations of what I am able to access in public records as a historian. I will use the gender terms of man and woman.

[2] The term "Little Dixie" refers to the northern section of Missouri that runs along the Missouri River where southerners mostly from Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia settled.

auctions. Some enslaved women used rivers to mark the liberation of their children, refusing to allow the start or continuation of the children's bondage.[3]

Agnes was aware of the many ways she and other African American women negotiated their existence in Missouri, and on the day of her former enslaver's death, a catalogue of these memories and experiences did not miss her. They may have helped her reconcile to the decision to take possession of certain pieces of property she would need following the aftermath of the end of her physical association with Fernando Evans.

To fully comprehend and engage with the story of Agnes Evans, it is necessary to provide a framework from which to encounter her. After contextualizing Missouri, African American women, and Agnes, alongside the story that brought me to her, I argue a framing for multidimensionality. Drawing from the theoretical scholarship of Black feminisms and what I term diagonality, I explore the agency and the possibility of redress during slavery and its afterlife.

Six Degrees of Separation and the Extraction of Family and Kin Folks

Growing up in South Central Los Angeles, I routinely heard my father proudly talk about a wealthy ancestor named, Isaac Renfro, who, according to my father, purchased his and his family's freedom from slavery. Family lore also claimed that Isaac established a small town in St. Clair, Missouri, replete with a church and school that he allegedly built with his own capital. The significance of building a church and school is paramount to the African American community, especially during the nineteenth century when African-descended people, enslaved or free, were often prohibited from learning to read and write. Of all the accomplishments Isaac must have made during his lifetime, my father was most proud of his ancestor's contribution of these two valuable institutions for the African American community.

The details of Isaac's story never went much further than his wealth, land accumulation, and self-made freedom. Isaac, my great-great-great-grandfather, also known as "Ike," was born in Virginia in 1830.[4] He was taken to Missouri at an early age, and "had lived there ever since he was a boy."[5] My father and his siblings loved to talk about Isaac's achievements, but there were gaps in the story. The local archives have left traces of Isaac's aspirations and success through newspapers and court records. For example, *The St. Clair Chronicle* reported, "The Silver Lead Mine, [was] discovered in 1858 by Ike Renfro, who named it for its hard silver-bearing ore,"[6] and in 1888, the Tribune referenced Isaac stating, "Mr. Renfro [was] an experienced miner."[7] He "purchased his freedom [and] also that of his wife (mother of Lee Generally) paying $1,000 in gold earned from [the] sale of lead mined on this section located in the north east corner of

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[3] I refer here to the ways enslaved women liberated their children through infanticide, where they killed their children so that they did not have to suffer a life of violence and terror as enslaved "property." See Harriet C. Frazier's *Slavery and Crime in Missouri, 1773-1865* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2001) for the trials of an enslaved woman named Annice who drowned her own two children and three others, all owned by her enslaver, Jeremiah Prior (page 168). Annice was executed by hanging in 1828 for her role in the death of the children. An enslaved woman from Callaway County "poisoned five children, four of them her own and the fifth a white child (page 169)." After confessing she killed the children and while in jail, she denied people in the judicial system's conviction and execution by consuming the same poison (arsenic) used in the death of their children.

[4] U.S. Census Bureau, Schedule 1. Inhabitants in Calvey Township, in the County of Franklin, State of Missouri, June 24, 1880.

[5] "Uncle Ike Renfro Dies" *St Clair Chronicle*, May 21, 1959, Page 8. https://www.newspapers.com/image/126538891

[6] "The Silver Lead," *St. Clair Chronicle,* July 14, 1966.

[7] "St. Clair as a Mineral Point," *The Republican Tribune,* Dec. 14, 1888.

section 16 by paying his master for his time while mining."[8] After Isaac's death, local newspapers eulogized him as "highly esteemed by all who knew him,"[9] "a respected colored citizen of this community,"[10] and "one of the wealthiest men in the county and was quite prominent."[11] I was still in elementary school the first time I heard my ancestor's name. My eight-year-old brain did not fully comprehend the significance of Isaac's alleged success, yet the thought of someone buying themselves and their family out of slavery sounded monumental to me.

My clearest recollection of discussions about Isaac came from the pride I heard in my father's voice and watching his face light up when he announced that Isaac paid for his family's freedom. My father claimed that while enslaved, Isaac found a mineral mine on his enslaver's land. The enslaver's son, with whom Isaac was said to be good friends, helped Isaac to profit from the mine by putting it into his name, according to my elders. Decades later, I learned that a side of the family I never knew existed, retold the exact story I heard from childhood. There were no details about the enslaver, his son, or how this transaction occurred, but eventually, Isaac used the money from the sale of minerals from the mine to purchase his freedom. When he saved enough for his wife, he bought her freedom and then their children's. Throughout my teenage years, Isaac's name came up repeatedly. As a self-proclaimed "family historian," I knew that one day I would investigate my father's assertions and learn the story of this legendary ancestor. In 2007, I invited three of my sisters to Missouri to assist me with the beginning of genealogical research on Isaac Renfro and his family. While Isaac was the focus at the start of our journey, a competing interest in the women of my family took hold as I became educated about Black feminisms and African American women's history.

Thinking back on the conversations I overheard from my father, I was unable to recall any mention of my great-great-great-grandmother, Berenthia[12] Renfro, Isaac's wife. In 1830, Berenthia was born as "chattel" in Tennessee. She was brought from the South to Missouri as a child, and after emancipation, she settled in St. Clair, Missouri with Isaac Renfro, marrying him in 1858.[13] I am left to wonder about her role in the maintenance, survival, and success of her family. While Isaac is credited for his business acumen that legend shows led to his and his family's wealth, we know nothing about Berenthia's contributions that aided in Isaac's success.

The obscurity of my great-great-great-grandmother's life is no surprise. As Black women scholars show, African American history has traditionally focused on men, and white women's experiences have always dominated women's history.[14] The limited knowledge available about Berenthia prompts me to wonder just how much Berenthia influenced Isaac's story, not just his financial success. What was Berenthia's story? The few located archives where Berenthia is

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8 "History of the Old Virginia Mines Near St. Clair," *The Republican Tribune*, Sept. 23, 1932, Page 2.

9 "Uncle Ike Renfro Dies," *St. Clair Chronicle,* May 21, 1959, Page 8.

10 "St. Clair Chat," *Franklin County Tribune,* May 27, 1906, Page 4, C2.

11 Ibid.

12 The spelling of my great-great-great-grandmother's name is found in the Franklin County Recorder of Deeds in several different ways. I use "Berentha" as that is the spelling in the Last Will and Testament for Isaac dated February 2, 1902; The Application for Letters Under a Will, as Executrix dated April 4, 1903, and the Certificate of Witnesses in the probate case after Berentha's death. Other spellings in the archives recorded her name as follows: "Berintha Renfro" See Warranty Deed 00Z Pge 452 dated Dec 14, 1866; "Barentha Renfro" See Warranty Deed 001 Page 571 dated July 12, 1867; "Brintha Renfro" See Deed of Trust Book Q Page 485 dated July 9, 1894; and "Brentha Renfro" Deed of Trust Book 50 age 430 dated Dec 23, 1897.

13 Isaac Renfro, "Last Will and Testament," (St. Clair, Missouri, 1902).

14 Gloria T. Hull, et al., *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are men, But Some of Us Are Brave* (New York: the Feminist Press at City University New York, 1993).

mentioned give little description of her characteristics or achievements. The most descriptive details about Berenthia come from a newspaper obituary that states, "Aunt Berintha Renfro, a very highly respected colored lady, died Friday, March 31st, 1916...She was a devoted Christian, being a member of the A.M.S. church."[15] Isaac became visible in the archives after emancipation because he purchased land in 1866 and then 1867.[16] Since Berenthia was a woman whose role as caretaker kept her tied to the home most of the time, the archives underrepresented and misrepresented African American women like her.

Generally, knowledge about white and African American nineteenth century women is less known and understood because focus was traditionally on men. Due to patriarchy, sexism, and racism, there was an expectation that Black women labored in whatever sphere white people required. Because of patriarchy and sexism, white women were expected to remain in the domestic sphere and stay out of the public sphere. However, some white women were equally part of the public sphere as men. These women usually became enslavers through inheritance or gifts from husbands or family. Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers' text, *They Were Her Property*, highlights the ways white women were just as cruel and transactional as their male counterparts, with the people they enslaved.[17] Although our knowledge about the women's complicity in the institution of slavery was limited until now, Jones-Rogers' study shows that white women's actions, characteristics, and experiences with business in the public sphere is not as limited as the search for knowledge about enslaved Black women. Searching for Berenthia led me to both tragic and interesting stories, which ultimately inspired me to seek out obscured Black women in the archives, and report on their unique narratives. In this sense, I join a long legacy of Black feminist historians working to offer our contributions to untold experiences that can enrich lives.[18]

Literature Review

From the slavery period until today, African American women are typically viewed as the "backbone" of their families, which informs my desire to understand how Berenthia fits into the story of Isaac's success. The term "backbone" refers to the core of a family or community, and as the "backbone," Black women's families and communities depend(ed) on them to take care of

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15 "Obituary," *Franklin County Tribune*, April 1916.

16 Franklin County Recorder of Deeds, Warranty Deed 00Z Pge 452 dated Dec 14, 1866; Franklin County Recorder of Deeds, Warranty Deed 001 Page 571 dated July 12, 1867.

17 Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slaveowners in the American South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

18 Deborah Gray White, *Arn't I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985/1999); Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labor After the Civil War* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1997); Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: the Transformation of the Plantation Household*. (Cambridge: University Press, 2008); Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1998); Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Darlene Clark Hine, *A Shining Thread of Hope* (New York: Broadway Books, 1999), & *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Reconstruction of American History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Kali N. Gross, *Colored Amazons: Crime, Violence and Black Women in the City of Brotherly Love*, 1880-1910 (Duke University, 2006); Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Marisa Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018); Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property.*; Erica Dunbar Armstrong, *Never Caught: The Washingtons' Relentless Pursuit of Their Runaway Slave, Ona Judge* (New York: 37 Ink, 2018); *She Came to Slay: The Life and Times of Harriet Tubman* (New York, 37 Ink, 2019).

household responsibilities like cooking and cleaning, and act as caretakers for those around them.[19] In their own homes, the expectation was that they care/d for children and the elderly, along with their fathers, brothers, and intimate partners. Their roles as caretakers also included white families. For this reason, Zora Neale Hurston called the Black woman, "de mule uh da world,"[20] which reflected the weight Black women carried, with the expectation that they can/could balance it no matter how treacherous the landscape.[21] Black women's roles as the "backbone" of the Black community highlights the burdens carried that are not clearly seen or understood by society, and therefore, leads to misinterpretation of the women's character or a lack of credit given to them for their physical or intellectual labor.

African American women are largely silenced and invisible in the traditional archives, especially in the nineteenth century and prior. Therefore, it is no surprise that as a Black man, Isaac was more often locatable in the archives compared to Berenthia. But, in the 20th century, Black women historians and other scholars wrote Black women into the archives on a deeper level than the way they were traditionally presented.[22] It took the efforts of Black women historians to make Black women's stories important for study. Deborah Gray White's seminal text, *Aren't I A Woman*, is the first book-length study of enslaved African American women.[23] Her text was one of the studies that changed the landscape of knowledge and interest around African American women's history. Prior to her examination of enslaved African American, slavery texts were male-focused, and there was no distinction between genders.[24] The Black men were proxy for Black people. The 1980s was also the period of third wave feminism, which brought about Black women scholars' writings on Black feminisms.[25] Third wave feminism critiqued white women's feminism because it ignored the marginalization and oppression of a diverse group of women with intersectional identities.

I analyze Agnes Evans' story and experiences to show how she resisted and advocated for herself during the Reconstruction period of Missouri's history. My project contributes to the ongoing practice of re-inserting Black women's voices and experiences into U.S. historiography in general, and Missouri history in particular. Drawing on the work of Noralee Frankel's *Freedom's Women,* and Tera Hunter's recent work, *Bound in Wedlock,* as well as other secondary literature on Black women's history, my project seeks to illuminate the broader issues

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19 White, *Ar'n't I A Woman.*

20 Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006).

21 Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

22 Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts" *Small Axe*, Number 26 (Volume 12, Number 2), June 2008, pp. 1-14, https://doi.org/10.1215/-12-2-1; White, *Arn't I a Woman.*; Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1998); Darlene Clark Hine, *A Shining Thread of Hope* (New York: Broadway Books, 1999); *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Reconstruction of American History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

23 White, *Aren't I A Woman*.

24 Stanley Elkins, Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), Eugene Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York:Vintage, 1976); Robert William Fogel, and Stanley Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of Negro Slavery* (Lanham, University Press of America, 1984); John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford Press, 1979).

25 Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2015); bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (New York: Routlege, 2015) Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (London: The Women's Press, 1994).

of resistance, memory, and archival silences through the story of an otherwise "unexceptional" African American woman. Both Frankel and Hunter's works provide a conceptual framework, as well as methodological approaches that guide my thinking. Including the voices and experiences of "ordinary" Black women, and the intimacies of their lives, allows us to capture nuanced perspectives and actions that help us to better understand the struggles and strategies of African American women.

Like these Black feminist historians who have produced interdisciplinary Black feminist historiography, my dissertation project examines the ways African American women pursue redress through moral pathways immediately after emancipation (1865-1880). The story of Agnes Evans highlights how the conditions of racialized gendered violence in the archives silence and distort these stories of African American women. I use Agnes to anchor the story of an "ordinary" woman who does something extraordinary in the context of her era and position as a newly freed African American woman.

The Border State Politics and Racial Markings of Missouri

Of the four main U.S. border states, Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, and Missouri, the latter is distinct because its Freedmen's Bureau operations were withdrawn only four months after its establishment. On March 3, 1865, the U.S. government established the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, also known as the Freedmen's Bureau. During the Reconstruction of the South, provisions were made to aid newly freed African Americans in transitioning from enslavement to freedom, as well as protection from harm by rebellious proslavery White society. Poor White people were also included because they too were impacted from the devastation of the war. The Bureau "issued food and clothing, operated hospitals and temporary camps, helped locate family members, promoted education, helped freedmen legalize marriages, provided employment, supervised labor contracts, provided legal representation, investigated racial confrontations, [and] settled freedmen on abandoned or confiscated lands."[26] Although Missouri, Delaware, Maryland, and West Virginia were border states that did not secede from the Union, each state had highly volatile pro-confederate populations, requiring the government to also send Bureau representatives. On October 16, 1865, Major General Oliver Otis Howard, the Commissioner of the Bureau appointed by President Andrew Johnson, ordered the Bureau's relocation out of Missouri. Howard "felt that the laws of Missouri afforded enough protection to freedmen for the Bureau's activities to cease there," and "operations of the Bureau were by-in-large withdrawn from Missouri."[27]

Agnes' experiences must be situated and understood in the context of the withdrawal of resources and protection from the federal government, as well as both discontented confederates and Union loyalists, who were no longer allowed legal ownership of a labor force. In addition, there were the non-enslavers who lost legal standing of superiority over the Black community. According to Historian Leslie A. Schwalm's study on northern Reconstruction in Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, ideas about race, power and privilege did not automatically vanish with the 13th and 14th Amendments, and were contested by both White and Black people.[28] Diane Mutti Burke supports this understanding for the Midwest, asserting that white Missouri enslavers

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[26] United States Congress and National Archives and Records Administration, *M1908: Records of the Field Offices for the State of Missouri, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872* 2004. M1908 1865–1872 (accessed July 6, 2021).

[27] Ibid.

[28] Leslie A. Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2009).

strategized during the Civil War to maintain slavery and retain their enslaved property.[29] She claims that, "Missouri slavery was often just as cruel and exploitative as anywhere in the South."[30] Therefore, it is necessary to disrupt the narrative that Missouri Reconstruction lessened the hardships of racial and gendered terror for Black women.[31] One way to determine the experiences of Agnes and other freed Black women is to examine the economies, local customs and practices of communities. Slavery in Missouri was small-scale, for the most part; therefore, most enslavers and their enslaved lived and worked in close quarters. Although the economy for much of Franklin County depended on agriculture, mainly hemp and cotton, where Agnes lived and worked, mining was a major industry. Additionally, as a state loyal to both the Confederacy and Union, families fought against each other in the Civil War. Howard's assumption that "Missouri afforded enough protection to freedmen," could not be further from the truth.

Absence of Black Women in Missouri Historiography

Historians of Missouri history rarely write about African Americans, and they write even less about African American women.[32] Most attention is given to St. Louis because of the various historical sites of the city. Its Gateway Arch is a significant symbol of Missouri being the "Gateway to the West," and the state also hosted the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in 1904. Notable natives of St. Louis, such as Daniel Boone and Marguerite Annie Johnson, commonly known as Maya Angelou, also brought attention to the city. One of the most important court cases in the U.S., and certainly in St. Louis, was the landmark Dred Scott v. John F. A. Sandford case.[33] Brought on by Harriet (Robinson) Scott and her husband, Etheldred Scott, it is commonly known as the Dred Scott decision. Harriet (Robinson) Scott was not *simply* the wife of Etheldred Scott, but the main plaintiff in her own Missouri freedom suit, before it was subsumed into her husband's case.[34] Although Harriet and Etheldred originally submitted individual suits for their freedom, the courts allowed their cases to be combined as one with Etheldred Scott as the named plaintiff. It is apparent to me that her gender is the central reason for her obscurity and speaks to the continuity of silencing and invisibility of African American women.

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[29] Diane Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border: Missouri's Small-Slaveholding Household, 1815-1865* (Athen: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 6.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Richard O. Curry, *Radicalism, Racism, and Party Realignment: The Border States during Reconstruction,* (John Hopkins Press 1969) xiii, xxiii.

[32] https://shop.shsmo.org/books/ According to The State Historical Society of Missouri website, it "has a variety of publications available that celebrate Missouri's rich history and heritage. In addition to a wide range of historical books on art, the civil war, slavery, and small towns, you will find publications that illustrate the history of eras and regions from all corners of the state." I counted 177 publications for sale. Of the 177 publications, 27 were specifically about Black/African Americans, seven of the 27 were specifically about Black men, and only one book is about Black women: Keona K. Ervin, *Gateway to Equality: Black Women and the Struggle for Economic Justice* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2017).

[33] 60 U.S. 393 (more)19 How. 393; 15 L. Ed. 691; 1856 WL 8721; 1856 U.S. LEXIS 472. The Scotts first tried to buy the freedom from their enslaver, Irene Emerson. After she rejected their request, both Harriet and Etheldred sued for their freedom. Prior to his death, John Emerson, Irene's husband, had taken Etheldred and Harriet into the Wisconsin Territory, where slavery was illegal. He had them both hired out in 1837, after he was reassigned to a military base in Missouri. Additionally, their first child, was born on a steamship while traveling on the Mississippi River between Illinois and Iowa, where slavery was prohibited.

[34] Lea VanderVelde, *Mrs. Dred Scott: A Life on Slavery's Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Historian Gary Kremer has written several texts on African Americans in Missouri but he often focuses on well-known African American men like George Washington Carver,[35] James Milton Turner,[36] or just African Americans in general.[37] Kremer's vast repertoire of texts neglects a central focus on the experiences of African American women, especially those "from below."[38] He devotes chapters on a club woman, Josephine A. Silone Yates, the Whitley Sisters, and on the Missouri Industrial Home for Negro girls.[39] All three of these chapters by Kremer, even the one on delinquent Black girls, limit or neglect an engagement with racialized gendered violence toward women.[40] Instead of interrogating the reasons Black girls find themselves in the home for delinquency, and how their experiences with societal marginalization informs their trajectory toward the criminal justice system, Kremer is more interested in showing how Black people in general have "made it' in Missouri. Clearly more work is required on more nuanced aspects of Missourian Black women's experiences.

Gladys Caines Coggswell's compiled stories from African American men and women in *Stories from the Heart: Missouri's African American Heritage*, while interesting, is a group of self-reflections and personal accounts of African Americans who grew up in Missouri that had never been enslaved.[41] These stories are useful for scholars seeking to support their work on aspects of African American men and women's postbellum experiences, and in some ways, extend the knowledge we gain about formerly enslaved African Americans in Missouri. The collection of interviews taken as part of the government's Works Progress Administration (WPA) provides interviews of formerly enslaved African Americans who lived and/or were born in Missouri. Compiled into the text, *Slave Narrative from the Federal Writer's Project, 1936-1938 Missouri,* these rich stories provide the details about the day-to-day struggles experienced and overcome by enslaved men, women, and children. We learn insights and thoughts from the men and women who were just children six or seven decades prior to their interviews. Both texts are useful for scholars and the general public, especially because the subjects are not well known, which allows us to see "typical" African Americans lives and experiences. However, most of the time, African American women must meet the requirements of a successful or spectacular feat.

When African American women are featured in Missouri, they are most often elite and/or well educated or associated with a significant family or sensational court case like Harriet (Robinson) Scott,[42] Elizabeth Keckley,[43] Celia the enslaved woman,[44] and Ester, the enslaved

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[35] Gary R. Kremer, *George Washington Carver: In His Own Words, Second Edition*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2017).

[36] Gary R. Kremer, *James Milton Turner and the Promise of America: The Public Life of a Post-Civil War Black Leader*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991).

[37] Gary R. Kremer, *Race and Meaning: The African American Experience in Missouri* (Columbia: Univ. Of Missouri Press, 2016); Lorenzo Johnston. Greene, Anthony F. Holland, and Gary R. Kremer. *Missouri's Black Heritage* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1980).

[38] Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 5.

[39] Kremer, *Race and Meaning.*

[40] Ibid.

[41] Gladys Caines Coggswell, *Stories from the Heart: Missouri's African American Heritage* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009).

[42] VanderVelde, *Mrs. Dred Scott*.

[43] Elizabeth Keckely, *Behind the Scenes, or Thirty year a Slave, and Four Years in the White House* **(**New York: G. W. Carleton & Co., Publishers, 1868).

[44] Melton A. McLaurin, *Celia, A Slave* (New York: Perennial, 1993).

woman of the Jacques Clamorgan family.[45] Taking for example, the actions and experiences of Celia and Ester, I show how race and gender shape their lives and decisions because of the regions where they lived. Although Celia, Ester, and Agnes were enslaved Black women in Missouri, it is important to understand that each of them had to navigate life differently. Both their identities and geographic locations allowed for possibilities or restricted their access to resources. Invariably, I show how access to resources, whether particular spaces or people with knowledge and/or power, the women could live longer, gain land, or independence. Juxtaposing Celia and Ester's lives with Agnes' life, where each woman lived in a unique region of the state, helps to illuminate the differences encountered by each woman. Ultimately, their proximity to resources shaped their mobility in their households and in society, which I discuss in detail in the following pages.

A significant point about telling the stories of African American women in Missouri, is that like Evans' experiences, the women's actions help us to approach the notion of redress particular to Black women, enslaved or "free." These women's stories come up because they are connected to White men. I aim to draw a narrative of redress out of these women's stories. Celia's an interesting story because like Evans, she takes illegal action that is ultimately, what I contend, a form of moral redress. As the sole enslaved woman among enslaved men, and her enslavers, Celia makes a decision that catapults her into the archives, just as quick as her execution. Unlike Celia, Harriet's fight was a protracted one that resulted in her and family's freedom. Can we rethink the Dred Scott case as an example of Harriet (Robinson) Scott claiming redress, even as her husband, a Black man, claims a part of it over her through the removal of her name in the case title? After gaining her freedom, Esther Clamorgan pursued redress through legal means to retrieve land given to her by her enslaver, Jacques Clamorgan, and although he stole most of it, she did retain her house and a large lot of land.

My study extends critical knowledge about African American women in Missouri to illuminate the experiences of women "from below" in the border state. Women's history in Missouri typically focuses on White women, with few details about more prominent or well-known Black women.[46] For example, Paulette Jiles writes a nostalgic novel about the perils of Adair, a young woman during the Civil War. Her race is obvious because it is not mentioned. Larry Wood details the stories of ten notorious women from Missouri like Ma Barker, the alleged leader of a crime gang, and Bonnie Parker, who partnered with Clyde to rob banks. Wood does not consider any Black women notorious enough to be worthy of inclusion. McMillen and Roberson, as well as Johnson, do include Black women, but only one each per text. LeeAnn Whites and Mary C. Neth's text has two chapters on Black women, and they are also women "from below," considering one woman, Eda Hickam, remained enslaved until 1889 when her enslaver died, and the other chapter is on prostitutes in the Sedalia area of Missouri. However, the Sedalia prostitution chapter is more about the middle-class capitalist sensibilities than Black women's experiences. Of the twenty-two women featured in *Hardship and Hope:*

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[45] Julie Winch, *The Clamorgans: One Family's History of Race in America* (New York: D & M Publishers, Inc., 2011).

[46] Paulette Jiles, *Enemy Women* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002); Larry Wood, *Wicked Women of Missouri* (Charleston: The History Press, 2016); LeeAnn Whites and Mary C. Neth, and Gary Kremer, *Women in Missouri History: In Search of Power and Influence* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004); Margot Ford McMillen and Heather Roberson, *In the Spotlight: Four Missouri Women* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004); Yvonne Johnson, *Feminist Frontiers: Women Who Shaped the Midwest* (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2010); Keona K. Ervin, *Gateway to Equality: Black Women and the Struggle for Economic Justice* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2017).

Missouri Women Writing About Their Lives, 1820-1920, only two were Black. Considering most Black people were illiterate during the 19th century, it makes sense that writings by women would not include many Black women.[47] Carla Waal and Barbara Korner's text does have two Black women, Elizabeth Keckley and Emma Ray, both of whom were born enslaved, but became professionals in their own right.

The previously mentioned texts have in common their neglect to draw attention to intersectional marginalization of Black women around race, class, and gender. More space is spent on the success of the women than the oppressions they endured to succeed, or the structures that were designed to ensure their failure. One author who addresses Black women's experiences exclusively, Keona K. Ervin, highlights their struggles for economic justice in St Louis.[48] Although Ervin features Black women, she examines them in the urban context, which is different from the rural, especially when looking at the resources and job opportunities from city-dwellers, versus living and seeking work in a rural environment like Franklin County, Missouri, where Evans lived and worked. In constructing the narratives about Black women in Missouri, it is not only that I am extending the knowledge about Black women's forms of redress, but also that I am looking at a particular group of Black women "from below."

Research Questions

Thinking through what we know, as well as what we do not know about Agnes Evans' experiences, my research questions are: In what way did African American women contest their racialized gendered conditions and pursue redress? How did African American women navigate the border state culture of Missouri, prior to emancipation and, especially, thereafter? What can we learn about the archives and their representations of women like Agnes? What can we learn about Agnes' actions, and African American women like her? This project is not just about the presence of women, or lack thereof, in the archive, but also their relationship to place and geography.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter one situates Agnes and other African American women within Missouri's geo-spatial temporal context and argues for the need to use a multidimensional lens to better understand the women's actions and experiences. By using what I term *multidimensionality*,[49] we can better understand the boundaries of African American women's lives in Missouri and see more nuanced ways the women must navigate their lives. I offer an interpretation of the ways African American women attempted to redress their circumstances through formal or informal pathways, and present my argument of how Black feminisms, intersectional, and diagonal lenses shape the women's possibilities and limitations. I engage the notion of agency to explain how I consider the term in the context of multidimensionality's framework in the lives of Missourian African American women.

Chapter two shows how diagonality operates to shape the actions and experiences of women like Ester Clamorgan and Celia, showing how they, along with other African American women, navigated Missouri's diagonal landscape. Delving into what we can and cannot know

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[47] Carla Waal and Barbara Oliver Korner, eds., *Hardship and Hope*: *Missouri Women Writing About Their Lives, 1820-1920* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997).

[48] Ervin, *Gateway to Equality.*

[49] Multidimensionality refers to the inseparableness of the combined frameworks of Black feminisms, diagonality, and agency that shape the boundaries of Black women's experiences.

about these two African American women, I engage the archives, using available source material, alongside my personal and professional experience as a "connected knower," to make sense of the women's lives, to show how Black feminisms, agency, intersectionality, and diagonality played roles in shaping their decisions.

Using Jennifer L. Nash's notion of "writing beautifully," which draws on Saidiya Hartman's *critical fabulation*,[50] Christina Sharpe's *wake work*,[51] and Patricia J. Williams' *her shape and his hand*,[52] chapter three opens spaces for a liberative writing and researching practice related to writing about Black women as a Black woman researcher. The chapter explores Agnes' possibilities and limitations based on patriarchy and white supremacy's overarching hold on Black women's lives. Combining my multidimensional approach, Black feminist historical framework, probate records, land deeds, local newspapers, and the Missouri Historical Review Journal, this chapter attempts to tell the story of Agnes from a revisionist perspective.

The fourth and final chapter is an autoethnographic meditation on my journey through the archives as a non-academic self-proclaimed family historian, a Ph.D. candidate researcher, and biracial African American heteronormative woman. Drawing on the archives, personal memory, and family accounts and experiences, this chapter weaves together 19th century through 21st century stories and experiences. The goal of this chapter is to consider how my personal and professional experiences intersect and juxtapose with the stories of 19th century African American women in Missouri.

Black feminisms throughout the centuries aided in shaping our identities and ability to use our agency in the context of patriarchy, sexism, and racism. This dissertation is a form of redress for myself, and a dedication to the millions of African American women who survived and did not survive the brutalities of slavery and racial gendered terror of the United States, including the archives.

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[50] Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*: *A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2008a); "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe* 12(2):1-14, 2008b.

[51] Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

[52] Patricia J. Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

Chapter 1
Multidimensionality: Shaping the Historical Boundaries and Theoretical Possibilities of Black Women's Lives

Excavating Agnes Evans and Her Pursuit of Redress

In 2015, after eight years of research on Isaac and Berenthia Renfro, the archives revealed something much more intriguing – the bold actions of an obscure African American woman named Agnes Evans. In an 1869 Missouri probate case, Agnes Evans, a formerly enslaved African American woman became both a witness in good enough standing to testify on behalf of a claimant, Isaac, and a criminal accused of embezzling from the estate of her deceased former enslaver, Fernando A. Evans. After Fernando's death, Agnes took possession of approximately $632.00 worth of personal property, and there was an assumption that she did not have the authority to make a claim to the property.[53] When asked to relinquish the property by creditors of the deceased, she refused to do so, much to her accusers' outrage.[54] Agnes' decision to retain the property demonstrates how a formerly enslaved African American woman pursued redress. Four years after Missouri emancipated its enslaved population, Agnes was free from bondage, and she remedied past unaddressed transgressions on her own terms.

Agnes used her agency to aid Isaac in benefitting from the estate of her former enslaver. She gave written testimony that she witnessed an oral contract between Isaac and her former enslaver, F.A. Evans.[55] An attorney for Agnes wrote Agnes' testimony and placed an X on the signature line, indicating she was unable to write her name. Although it is likely she was illiterate, this performance is not evidence of her illiteracy. Many enslaved persons maintained secrecy around their ability to read and write in order to protect themselves from punishment, since literacy was illegal for the enslaved in antebellum Missouri. In this way, literate enslaved men and women could write notes or passes and read documents, unbeknownst to their enslavers and overseers.

Agnes' testimony and X corroborated Isaac's account that he was an equal partner with F.A. Evans,[56] but it does not appear that Isaac acted in kind. It is possible that Isaac had to decide between loyalty to his race, patriarchy, and/or capitalism. There were consequences to not aligning with the powerful men of Franklin County with whom he regularly transacted business. Was there collusion between Isaac and Agnes? They both understood the need to navigate in a clever and cautious manner due to power relations that worked against African Americans in general, and women in particular. Were there extenuating circumstances that influenced Agnes to support Isaac's claim of an equal partnership with F. A. Evans? Did Isaac, or someone else, make Agnes an offer for money or other benefits for her testimony in favor of Isaac? We will probably never know, but what is clear is that Agnes made the decision to aid Isaac, and Isaac chose to align himself with powerful white men, which created additional challenges for Agnes.

After Fernando's death, and without her long-term connection to a prominent white man, Agnes struggled to earn income. Most of the property included in the alleged embezzlement was typical for the livelihood of farmers, which could aid Agnes in subsistence farming, and also making a living. A horse, three cows, and farming equipment were just some of the items

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53 Franklin County, Missouri, Probate Records, Box 30, Folder 19, Estate of Fernando A. Evans, 1869, *Missouri Secretary of State.*

54 Ibid.

55 Franklin County, Missouri, Probate Records, Box 30, Folder 19, Fernando A. Evans, 1869; Agnes Evans testimony, March 4, 1870, *Missouri Secretary of State*.

56 Ibid.

included in what she supposedly took. Although a formerly enslaved person, Agnes appears to be more than just an employee because there is no record of Fernando having a wife or children.[57] More than likely, Agnes "managed" the household while also a domestic and field worker. Her close ties to Fernando meant that she was acquainted with his family, friends, and associates, and at certain times, she took advantage of, or was taken advantage of, by those persons. We see this happening in 1888 when she transfers 40 acres of land in Section 27, Township 43, Range 1 East, to Amanda B. Evans for one dollar.[58] Amanda, the wife of Fernando's cousin, Walker Evans, was aware of Agnes' financial situation and took full advantage.

Knowledge about Agnes Evans and her embezzlement case is minimal, but the names of the men who accused her of embezzlement are not in question.[59] Apparently, Isaac was a wise and shrewd businessman who leveraged his relationship with the powerful white men around him. Yet, had those relationships cultivated a desire for profit at the expense of Agnes Evans? There is the possibility that Isaac chose capital alongside patriarchy. Patriarchy denied women equal opportunities with respect to mobility and employment, which lessened their chances to earn as much income as men. Without knowing her circumstances, Agnes probably wrestled with not having income once Fernando was dead, and any type of alliance with Isaac and her other accusers seems fraught. As one of her accusers, Isaac, along with James N. Inge, Walker Evans, and T. A. Lowe, sought to dispossess Agnes of the property to have it sold so that the men could add funds to the estate.[60] Additional funds aided the men in receiving payment for the debts they claimed from the estate.

The Contextualization of Multidimensionality: Shaping the Boundaries of Black Women's Lives

To better understand the life of nineteenth century African American women in Missouri, we must consider some angles of vision using specific lenses that help to frame the possibilities and boundaries in which the women operated. We are unable to depend on early scholarship about African American women with respect to their experiences and interiority, since white men were the original United States historians, blinded by white supremacy and patriarchal logics. For the most part, white men only saw and represented African American women's lives

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[57] Franklin County, Missouri, Probate Record, Box 30, Folder 19, Fernando A. Evans, 1869, "Case Notes: No heirs named."

[58] Franklin County Recorder 1 of 1 document# 6WD033-00211, September 28, 1888. "This indenture is made and entered into this twenty eight day of September A D 1888 and between Agnes, commonly known as Agnes Evans, formerly enslaved of the late Fernando A. Evans, all of Franklin County State of Missouri and Amanda B. Evans wife of Walker Evans all of the city of St Louis and State of Missouri witnesseth that the said Agnes Evans for and in consideration of the sum of One dollar to her in hand paid by the said Amanda B Evans…"

[59] Franklin County, Missouri, Probate Records, Box 30, Folder 19, Fernando A. Evans, 1869, Subpoena dated Dec. 1870, *Missouri Secretary of State*; Franklin County, MO, June 26, 1871, Court dismissal of case "In the case of T. A Lowe et. al Versus Agnes Evans, action: Embezzlement of Property, By agreement of Parties. Dismissed at the cost of Plaintiffs"

[60] We find Black women's actions, voices, and experiences through them, the key idea is that we don't get the full or whole person since they are not the ones speaking/writing. Their voices are not direct because they are filtered through the person who created/wrote the document that historians have to analyze. So, even though I do say that sources "originated by the power of patriarch and white supremacy," I do still use those sources. For example, I use the probate records extensively, as well as land deeds and newspapers to bring out what can be known about Agnes. I try to discuss how those sources deprive us of Agnes' fuller story.

as abject, deviant, and inconsequential "others"[61] who lacked agency[62] and intellect. Black women were inescapably trapped by a fictionalized identity based on stereotypes that continue today.[63] While there were foundational texts dedicated to correcting and contributing to African American histories, they focused on the male experience without balancing knowledge related to African American women.[64] For this reason, Black[65] women historians contributed to the building of knowledge about Black women.[66] It took women, particularly Black women, to see themselves and those before them, as worthy subjects whose lives and stories needed to be told as fully as possible. To gain knowledge about African American women, Black women historians created innovative archival methodologies that worked around the shallow and fragmented documents available to them in their search for Black women in early archives.

Therefore, I make an interdisciplinary intervention by scaffolding frameworks that draw from Black Studies for Black feminisms, and Post-Colonial Studies for my working definition of agency, and a term I call *diagonality*.[67] This dissertation project uses a three-pronged framework that I term the *contextualization of multidimensionality*. I use the concept to describe *the inseparableness of the combined frameworks of Black feminisms, diagonality, and agency that shape the boundaries of Black women's experiences.* I define each of these frameworks and

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[61] I draw on Edward Said's notion of "other" where he asserts that "Europe is powerful and articulate; Asia is defeated and distant." From Said's "Imaginative Geography and Its Representations: Orientalizing the Oriental." *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage, 1979). He asserts that the West produced "imagined geographies" which operated as a tool of power in order to control areas outside of the West. White supremacist thinking imagines that the West has the right to subordinate and control what and who they consider to be primitive.

[62] Agency here refers to making an intentional decision and having a free will to act in a way that attempts to achieve a goal.

[63] Marlon T. Riggs, Ethnic Notions. California Newsreel, 1987; Patricia Hill. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000). Harris-Perry, Melissa V. *Sister Citizen Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.

[64] Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: the Economics of American Negro Slavery* (Lanham: Univ. Press of America, 1984); E. D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan,Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage books, 1976); Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976); Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (Norwalk, CT.: Easton Press, 1995).

[65] Black and African American are interchangeable throughout this dissertation. However, I acknowledge that individual women of African-descent may or may not identify with either, both, or something else. There is a distinction in that African Americans were either born in the U.S., brought, or voluntarily traveled to the U.S., while Black people can be born in or live outside of the U.S. Yet, both are connected to the African Diaspora.

[66] Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves" *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 13, No. 1/2, Woman: An Issue (Winter - Spring, 1972), pp. 81-100; Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I A Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York, W.W. Norton & Company Ltd., 1999); Camp, *Closer to Freedom.*; Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Sarah Haley. *No Mercy Here.*; Gross, *Colored Amazons.*; Talitha L Leflouria, *Chained in Silence: Black Women and Convict Labor in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Cheryl D. Hicks, *Talk with You Like a Woman: African American Women, Justice, and Reform in New York, 1890-1935* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

[67] In naming the term diagonality, I owe thanks to Sima Belmar for alerting me to the mathematical term about diagonal lines during a conversation about Missouri's distinctiveness. She brought to my attention the similarity of the lines based on factors associated with the framework I conceptualized that seeks to better understand Missouri's geography and cultural uniqueness. Diagonality refers to the simultaneity of spatial and ideological factors that shape experiences for individuals, and lead to instability and ambiguity that determine possibilities available within given temporal moments.

explain further how they help to illuminate actions and experiences of 19th century African American Missourian women.

The principles and practices of Black feminisms opened spaces of empowerment for Black women and girls to use their agency toward their, or someone else's, liberation. Although nineteenth century Black women did not use most of the current language of Black feminisms, they practiced the art of resistance through their agency. How they enacted agency aligned with the contextualization of multidimensionality, which related to the geo-spatial and cultural factors at play, alongside their intersectional identities. Multidimensionality intertwines the three frameworks of Black feminisms, diagonality, and agency, and they cannot be separated from each other (like intersectionality) when looking at the experiences of individuals and how they use their agency. I contend that using the contextualization of multidimensionality framework allows me to see and highlight a more nuanced understanding of the actions and experiences of African American women.

I define diagonality as *the simultaneity of spatial and ideological factors that shape experiences for individuals, and lead to instability and ambiguity that determine possibilities available within given temporal moments*. Diagonality challenges, disrupts, counters, and destabilizes binary ideologies because of the confluence of people's spatial and temporal differences. Diagonality allows an examination of multilayered diverse experiences by accounting for relationality because it considers angles that are vertical, horizontal, those in-between, and those surrounding them all. In other words, the concept of diagonality refers to the ways that physical and cultural factors cut across each other simultaneously to impact the actions and experiences of society in general, and Missouri's African American women in particular.

The women's agency, resistance, and sometimes humanity, are obscured in traditional archives, which is why it is necessary to tell the stories of Black women from different time periods and geographic spaces. It is imperative that the archive represent the heterogeneity of Black women's characters, actions, and experiences. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's assertion that there is danger in a single story reflects the urgency to contribute a variety of stories to the archive so that the knowledge about Black women can enlighten us.[68] In that spirit, this chapter focuses on the pursuits of redress by African American women in nineteenth century Missouri, to examine the types of redress they sought, while also calling for the need to use particular lenses that help us better understand the women's actions and experiences.

Centuries of Black women have given us insights that contribute to revisionist histories and defy archival representations or controlling images meant to deny legacies of empowerment, intellect, and resistance to oppressions. The principles of Black feminisms, such as self-definition, self-determination, and social activism, aid in building empowerment and liberatory practices – namely, agency. Patricia Hill Collins asserts that "Black women's collective thought" emerges "from and/or on behalf of U.S. Black women and other historically oppressed groups aim to find ways to escape from, survive in, and/or oppose prevailing social and economic injustice."[69]

In the context of Collins' statement, I argue for the need to use a *contextualization of multidimensionality*[70] of three theoretical frameworks: Black feminisms, especially

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[68] Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," YouTube video, 18:32, TEDGlobal 2009, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript?language=en

[69] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought,* 11.

[70] I use the term multidimensionality to refer to the ways theoretical frameworks intertwine and cannot be separated from each other (similar to intersectionality) when looking at the experiences of individuals and how they use their agency.

intersectionality, alongside diagonality, and my working definition of agency, to gain a more nuanced understanding of African American women in nineteenth century Missouri. Multidimensionality is not a new term; however, my definition is different from its use by scholars in psychology,[71] medicine,[72] product development[73] and customer service[74] scholarship because I unite a unique triad.

Using the frameworks of Black feminisms and diagonality help to highlight the ways African American women performed agency. The empowerment and knowledge produced through Black feminisms, based on lived experiences, merge with diagonality's geo-cultural context to inform how the women perform agency. I draw on Ula Y. Taylor's two texts, *The Veiled Garvey,*[75] and *The Promise of Patriarchy*,[76] to show how Taylor opens up possibilities for a more nuanced understanding of agency and empowerment for women who were members of patriarchal organizations like the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and Nation of Islam (NOI). In reference to the women, Taylor coins the term "community feminism" to say that "their activism is focused on assisting *both* the men and the women in their lives - whether husbands or sisters, fathers or mothers, sons or daughters - along with initiating and participating in activities to 'uplift' their communities."[77] Taylor uses this term in reference to Amy Jacques Garvey, the wife of Marcus Garvey, to explain the way Garveyite women reconciled their commitments to both Black nationalism and Black feminism.

For the NOI, Taylor draws on Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety,* which argues that feminist scholars should not assume Muslim women in the Mosque Movement must resist patriarchy to enact agency. [78] Mahmood states that the women's agency is attached to subject formation, which originates with the historical and cultural circumstances that women exist within.[79] The women in Mahmood's study were determined to figure out how to maintain the goals of being pious and following Islamic religious guidelines, even though the guidelines were patriarchal in nature.

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71 R. D. Ashmore, Deaux, K., & McLaughlin-Volpe, T. (2004). "An Organizing Framework for Collective Identity: Articulation and Significance of Multidimensionality." *Psychological Bulletin, 130*(1), 80–114. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.130.1.80; Meinte G. Vollema, Ph.D., Robert J. van den Bosch, M.D., Ph.D., "The Multidimensionality of Schizotypy," *Schizophrenia Bulletin*, Volume 21, Issue 1, 1995, Pages 19-31, https://doi.org/10.1093/schbul/21.1.19; Reis H.T. (1984) "The Multidimensionality of Justice. In: Folger R. (eds) The Sense of Injustice." Critical Issues in Social Justice. Springer, Boston, MA. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4613-2683-0_2.

72 Zakrzewska, J.M. "Multi-dimensionality of chronic pain of the oral cavity and face." *J Headache Pain* 14, 37 (2013). https://doi.org/10.1186/1129-2377-14-37.

73 Dr. Asif Akhtar and Dr. Asma Zaheer, "'Service Quality Dimensions of Islamic Banks: A Scale Development Approach,'" *Global Journals Inc.* 14, no. 5 (2014). https://doi.org/https://globaljournals.org/GJMBR_Volume14/2-Service-Quality-Dimensions-of-Islamic-Banks.pdf.

74 Ali E. Akgu¨n, Gary S. Lynn, and Richard Reilly, "Multi-Dimensionality of Learning in New Product Development Teams," *European Journal of Innovation Management* 5, no. 2 (2002): pp. 57-72, https://doi.org/10.1108/14601060210428168.

75 Ula Y. Taylor, *The Veiled Garvey: The Life & Times of Amy Jacques Garvey*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

76 Ula Y. Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy: Women and the Nation of Islam*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

77 Taylor. *The Veiled Garvey,* 64.

78 Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. (Princeton University Press, 2011).

79 Ibid.

I complicate the notion of agency to say that it is not always visible because sometimes taking action in a material manner is not the most effective strategy. Therefore, agency can be inaction or invisible action manifested in a woman's mind, rather than physical movement. I consider agency through the lens of the intersectionality of race and class in the context of diagonality's spatial, temporal, and cultural factors.

The concept of agency cannot stand alone if we are to learn anything about people's actions and experiences. There must be an identity, a space, and a time period from which to analyze agency to understand the how and why of actions that people take. For example, to say that Agnes had agency is meaningless because every person has agency. Knowing how and why she used her agency can help us learn something about Agnes and her circumstances. Meaning, what are Agnes' characteristics that informed the use of her agency? And what was the geographic and cultural atmosphere that she navigated to make a decision to use her agency in a particular way? As an African American woman, enslaved in the state of Missouri, where there was a spectrum of ideologies and practices for and against slavery, Agnes used her experiences to determine how best to achieve her goals.

Early historians did not consider enslaved persons as having agency,[80] and as a result, "giving slaves back their agency"[81] became an important issue that Black historians felt compelled to correct.[82] All humans have agency. Whether enslaved or free/d, African American women's agency, prior to their emancipation, and during white supremacist usage of Black Codes and Jim Crow laws, remained an innate part of their ontology. What does it mean for enslaved women to enact agency, especially in the context of their oppression?

One must consider the context in which enslaved African American women existed to understand their engagement with, and performance of, agency, self-definition, and self-representation. Can agency look like cooperation with enslavers, employers, or officials? Just because one has agency does not mean they will act in a way that appears to display empowerment based on how historians interpret their actions or non-actions. We cannot assume that because Black women were not documented as using agency, that they did not take actions to resist or achieve personal goals. The general definition for the term resist is "to withstand, strive against, or oppose."[83] Resistance refers to making a psychological or material decision to remove oneself from an unwanted situation. To resist can come in the form of silently enduring oppression, openly opposing it, or any other method chosen as some form of offensive or defensive relief. Scholars studied the complexity and incongruence of enslaved people's lives that show "the ways in which they were both agents and subjects, persons and property, and people who resisted and who accommodated—sometimes in one and the same act."[84]

Resistance is expressed in multiple contradictory ways. Performing in whatever capacity helps the women to thrive or survive, based on their goals, is not something we should expect,

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80 Ulrich B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime* (New York: 1918; Baton 1966); Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery; a Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).

81 Walter Johnson, "On Agency", *Journal of Social History* vol. 37, no. 1, (2003): 113-144. Johnson argued that because historians discussed enslaved persons in a way that did not reflect their agency, historians wanting to ensure that enslaved people were understood as having agency with their humanity intact, rushed to prove what Johnson sees as an unnecessary discussion about resistance, agency, and humanity related to enslaved persons.

82 Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage, 1976); Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

83 *Dictionary.com*, S.V. "Resist" date accessed January 3, 2020, http://www.dictionary.com/browse/resist

84 Camp, *Closer to Freedom,* 1.

depending on the context of the situation and person involved in the action. In other words, agency not only involves taking action about something, but it can also mean inaction. Resistance does not always refer to action, and it does not require that the person advance toward freedom and emancipation. It can operate for mere survival or the progression of escape, but it is not necessary to attach resistance to a larger goal, such as attaining their freedom.

Given the positionality of enslaved women, how they enacted agency for themselves was sometimes explicit, but more often nuanced. For this reason, it is necessary to explore the different ways that agency is understood by scholars and performed by African American women. One explanation of agency comes from Bill Ashcroft who refers to it as:

> The ability to act or perform an action. In contemporary theory, it hinges on the question of whether individuals can freely and autonomously initiate action, or whether the things they do are in some sense determined by the way in which their identity has been constructed. Agency is particularly important in post-colonial theory because it refers to the ability of post-colonial subjects to initiate action in engaging or resisting imperial power.[85]

Ashcroft's definition begins with the general idea of a person's "ability to act." The question then becomes "whether individuals can freely and autonomously initiate action, or whether...their identity" informs their action. Walter Johnson's text, "On Agency," tells us that humans inherently have the ability to act on their own accord.[86] Responding to the scholarship that sought to prove the existence of agency within enslaved people, he wrote that there is no need to prove that individuals have agency.[87]

Consequently, there is no question about one's "ability," but rather, one's decision to act and how they perform the action. In other words, although enslaved women could not legally assert personhood or create change, they sometimes engaged their agency in unnoticeable ways. Thus, their actions were not always understood as agency. For instance, instead of resisting rape in a physically or vocal manner, some enslaved women turned their energy toward their daughters and other young girls to aid them in navigating the mental, emotional, and physical trauma of rape.[88] Aside from physical escape from their enslavers to pursue redress, African American women took extralegal informal measures. The story of Margaret Garner, an enslaved mother of three, is an example of agency through the act of infanticide, where the mother removed her young daughter from slavery's grasp by taking away her daughter's life with the use of a knife. To better understand the decisions Black women made in order to survive and reduce or eliminate suffering for their loved ones, requires vision through the lens of Black feminism.

Roots of Black Feminism

Although the term "Black feminism" was not yet coined in the nineteenth century, Black women used their lived experiences to ground their actions and knowledge. They understood that the interconnected nature of their race, gender, class, sexuality, and other identities, were key to

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85 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2007), 6.

86 Walter Johnson, "On Agency."

87 Ibid.

88 White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*

their oppressive treatment. Black feminism is a politic and way of knowing that critiques the way Black women are oppressed due to their identities. According to Ula Y. Taylor, "the historical evolution of Black feminism in the United States not only developed out of Black women's antagonistic and dialectical engagement with white women but also out of their need to ameliorate conditions for empowerment on their own terms."[89] Nineteenth century Black women abolitionists understood that they shared the common struggles related to their race and gender and worked to dismantle slavery and sexism.[90]

Early Black feminists were individuals whose knowledge and insights were written, spoken, or activated through performances toward the empowerment of Black women and/or Black people. While many unknown Black women contributed to Black feminism, very few were recorded in archives. One well-known Black feminist is Maria Stewart, who challenged nineteenth century Black women, calling them "fair daughters of Africa," and telling them to, "Possess the spirit of independence…Possess the spirit of men, bold and enterprising, fearless and undaunted. Sue for your right and privileges."[91] Her sentiment toward Black women has placed her, along with others like Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman, into a lineage of Black feminists who understood their multiple identities and the need to use their insights and intellect to become activists against the enslavement and brutal treatment of their race and genders. Centering Black women's voices and experiences by using a Black feminist epistemological approach is key to understanding the significance of Agnes Evans' actions and experiences.[92]

Black Feminist Epistemology versus Social Science Knowledge Production

The power to control the production of knowledge has always come from white elite men, which is the basis of Eurocentric western standards, but Black feminist epistemology is an alternative approach. Eurocentric standards of knowledge production reject the use of emotions and personal experiences. Social science traditions are based on notions of objectivity, which, according to Patricia Hill Collins, is not possible or necessary. According to Collins, we begin our research from who we are and where we are; our subjectivity informs how we approach every facet of our study. Rather than require a group of "experts" to validate knowledge claims, Collins views Black women's lived experiences as valid and credible sources of knowledge. The achievement of legitimate knowledge through the separation of the researcher from their subject is flawed as it fails to acknowledge the researcher's subjectivity. Collins encourages researchers to be "connected knowers" - those whose knowledge is gleaned from personal experience.

Collins' four tenets of Black feminist epistemology are an alternative to the "traditional" forms of social science inquiry. These tenets are alternate ways to produce knowledge that allow for a holistic approach inclusive of both the researcher and the subjects they study. Therefore, instead of distancing themselves from whatever or whomever they study, Collins calls for Black women researchers to draw upon their lived experiences. Collins asserts that Black women are "connected knowers" who experience/d marginalization and they are unable to disregard their lived experiences as researchers. "Connected knowers" have insight from personal experiences that inform, develop, and validate their knowledge. Consequently, the belief in maintaining an

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89 Ula Y. Taylor, "The Historical Evolution of Black Feminist Theory and Praxis" *Journal of Black Studies* Vol. 29, No. 2 (Nov., 1998), pp. 234-253.

90 Taylor, "The Historical Evolution," 235.

91 Maria Stewart, *Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart*. (Boston: W. Lloyd Garrison & Knapp, 1832) quoted in Beverly Guy-Sheftall ed. *Words of Fire,* (New York: New Press, 2011), 29.

92 Patricia Hill-Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1998); Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*.

unbiased viewpoint by the distancing from subjects in the production of knowledge is an unreasonable and unproductive expectation.

The second factor of traditional social science is the use of adversarial debate, which is designed to build knowledge and validate ideas through a process of debate that seeks to determine the strongest argument. Adversarial debate objectifies the subject of study and creates debate about ideas rather than about people. Debate breaks down another person's argument by finding the weaknesses and leaves what is believed to be objective truth. Collins proposes the use of dialogue rather than debate. She asserts that instead of seeing who they study as objects, researchers should see them as subjects with experiences and ideas that are important and valid. By understanding that people are the main factor in creating knowledge, based on conversations involving pronouns such as "I," the distance put between the researcher and the subject they study allows debate that invisibilizes them both. Collins asserts that through dialogue, a story is not "torn apart in analysis," which is what happens in the debate process.[93]

Personal experiences used by the "connected knower," and dialogue rather than adversarial debate, are what allow for an "ethics of caring." Since Collins believes researchers are not value-free, meaning, they are not able to remain objective observers, she argues researchers should determine whether knowledge contains empathy and compassion. She believes that an "ethics of caring" can heal the gap created by Eurocentric ideals that make claims about what is and is not valued with respect to knowledge. This holistic epistemology, therefore, shows that intellect and emotion must be acknowledged as living within the researcher to produce knowledge because it is impossible to sever the two.

Finally, the researcher must take personal accountability for the knowledge produced through their research. In other words, the researcher builds knowledge by considering their lived experiences and the knowledge they gleaned from it, along with that which they learned through their study. Their belief in the truth of the knowledge they produce is the basis of accountability. In contrast to the demand that truth be built without accountability, which distances the researcher from the knowledge, Collins believes personal accountability is key to creating an avenue toward social justice.

Black Women's Standpoint

Collins' standpoint is based on the idea that Black women's experiences help shape their thoughts and actions through collective conversations that allow them to realize shared experiences and create knowledge.[94] Discussions about their experiences give them a way of understanding or knowing about aspects of their lives, such as, for example, how race and gender impacts their socioeconomic progress or basic survival. The rape of enslaved African-descended women and the sale of their children and family members was always a looming threat. They were in bondage because of their race, and many were sexually assaulted and forced to birth children to increase their enslaver's profits through the addition of children as profitable laborers. Surviving slavery required the development of knowledge, insight, and skills that became part and parcel of what it meant to be an enslaved woman. These common ways of understanding their experiences create the development of group knowledge between the women. The development of these certain knowledges becomes what Collins considers a standpoint of Black women, which is unique to them because of common experiences. However, all Black women are not assumed to hold the exact standpoint since each woman has different experiences.

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93 Collins, *Fighting Words.*

94 Collins, *Black Feminist Thought.*

There are critiques from some scholars who say standpoint theory essentializes Black women.[95] Essentialism is the idea that there are social characteristics that are biologically natural and inherent for entire groups of people. For example, an essentialist view of Black women might categorize them as inherently "strong" or "loud" and that these qualities are what make Black women Black. This way of thinking is problematic in that it regards Black women as monolithic, and Blackness as biologically created as opposed to socially constructed. As Jasbir Puar points out, the meaning of Blackness varies within the context of the U.S., but also globally.[96] For example, in Britain and other parts of the United Kingdom people from South Asian ancestry are considered "Black" by native Europeans. African Americans' experiences as tourists, according to Saidiya Hartman's description of visiting slave ports in Africa, affirm that the meaning of Blackness is ever changing, and depends on the specific context in which one finds oneself.[97] In actuality, what Black and woman mean are socially constructed notions that shift and morph between geopolitical spaces as well as between individuals and the specific meaning they assign these words based on their lived experiences. Although Puar offers an important reminder as to why we cannot reduce Black women into a single group, Black feminists of the canon, such as Patricia Hill Collins, do not essentialize Black women in their theorization of Black feminism. Collins does not assert that the women experience situations in the same manner, or that the women believe in taking the same action to resolve their circumstances. Collins' take on standpoint theory with respect to Black women was a 1980s intervention that contributed to understanding Black women's actions and experiences and helped us think about how they moved through the world.

For enslaved women, their own identities and lived experiences played a role in how they navigated their environments and moment-to-moment surroundings. Collins' Black feminist epistemological framework gives the women's experiences, actions, and reactions (which may be inaction), a "voice" that speaks from their standpoint of subjugated and oppositional knowledge. Subjugated knowledges, which are standpoints, insights, and experiences of Black women that are not made accessible to dominant society, are one form of resistance and empowerment.[98] "Subjugated knowledges that resist oppression become oppositional knowledges."[99] Collins posits that, "oppositional knowledge, which is "developed by, for, and/or in defense of African-American women, should foster the group's self-definition and self-determination."[100] Their actions and reactions were informed by their identities in the context of uneven power relations, and "these self-definitions were designed to resist the negative controlling images of Black womanhood advanced by whites as well as the discriminatory social practices that these controlling images supported"[101] The complexity and challenges for enslaved women was to navigate the construction and re-construction of their identities within their enslavement. It is from this context that they understood and used their agency.

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95 Jasbir K Puar, "'I Would Rather Be a Cyborg than a Goddess': Becoming-Intersectional in Assemblage Theory,'" *PhiloSOPHIA* 2, no. 1 (2021): pp. 49-66, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315680675-86.; Jennifer C. Nash, "Practicing Love: Black Feminism, Love-Politics, and Post-Intersectionality" Meridians 11, no. 2 (2011): 1-24 Accessed June 26, 2021 doi:10.2979/meridians.11.2.1.

96 Puar; "I would rather be a cyborg."

97 Hartman, *Lose Your Mother.*

98 Collins. *Black Feminist Thought*.

99 Collins, *Fighting Words.*

100 Ibid.

101 Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 13.

One of the earlier examples of how the intersectionality of race and gender oppression is understood by Black women, is from Sojourner Truth's well-known 1851 Ohio speech, now referred to as, "Ain't I a Woman."[102] She deconstructs the white supremacist notion of who can be a woman, and although she makes claims of her own womanhood, she shows how her Blackness denies her the established practices granted to white women. In addition, she is marginalized by her gender, in the sense that she is forced to bear "thirteen children, and seen them most all sold off to slavery."[103] Truth exposes how her body, which is proven to be female through the birth of her thirteen children, is denied the concessions given to those under the category of woman. Yet, she is forced to "have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns," work largely performed by men.[104] Her analysis of racialized and gendered power dynamics reflects her understanding of how intersecting oppressions informed Black women's lived experiences. Consequently, Black women's positionalities inform the way they are documented, represented, and erased in archives. Uneven power dynamics frame any engagement with archives.

While Collins' assertion makes a point about "group location in hierarchical power relations,"[105] she does not specify that the group holding versus not holding the power, matters in how the process of group standpoint develops. The challenge for those holding the power is that of maintaining their position of power. Those subjected to domination use their common lived experiences to strategize individually, and collectively, when possible, to develop ways to survive and pursue aspirations. Private discussions allowed subjugated African American women to create the types of group standpoint Collins refers to that "are situated in unjust power relations."[106]

Intersectionality as a Framework

According to Kimberle Crenshaw, Black women have always confronted the dilemma of straddling the race/gender fence where they can feel forced to choose between advocating for their identity of either race or gender.[107] However, it is impossible for them to deny either identity without disempowering and negatively impacting the other, and ultimately their whole selves. The layers and complexity intensify because of the social construction of race and gender, for example, when the women are also poor, class factors into creating further multiply marginalization for the women. Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality to attend to the multilayered intersecting oppressions of race and gender.[108] She uses discrimination court cases to show how slippages in the criminal justice system allow Black women to fall through the cracks because they do not fit into either the racial or gender category.[109] Crenshaw draws on the

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102 Bert J. Lowenbert and Ruth Bogin, eds. *Black Women in Nineteenth Century American Life* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press,1976", 235, reprinted in Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (New York, 2009), 17.

103 Lowenbert and Bogin, eds. *Black Women in Nineteenth Century American Life* 235, reprinted in Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought,* 17.

104 Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 17.

105 Collins, *Fighting Words,* 201.

106 Ibid.

107 Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8. (1989)---. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, 6 (1991*).*

108 Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins."

109 Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing."

genealogy of Black feminist thinkers who understood and theorized about the inseparable identities of Black women and the impacts it had on their lives.[110]

Intersectionality is directly connected to power. While intersectionality and diagonality are similar frameworks that help us understand how and why African American women's experiences are shaped by identities, culture, and spatial contexts, the two terms operate in tandem. Intersectionality posits that African American women's multiple identities and oppressions overlap to create a set of constraints that are unique to them.

African American Women: Power and the Archive

Traditional archival methods silence, invisibilize, and hypervisibilize African American women.[111] White supremacy denies the humanity of African American women, and the lack of representation of women in the archive is one of the ways to accomplish this operation of dehumanization. In this way, the implication of irrelevance is produced through the power of silencing, invisibilizing, and making hyper-visible, grotesque (mis)representations of African American women. This denial of their relevance and value belies the physical, mental, and emotional labor that helped care for white enslaving families, increasing their wealth, and contributing to the wealth-building of the United States. Archival guardians inherently understand the goals of assemblage, and Saidiya Hartman's studies about enslaved and progressive-era African American women shows that nineteenth century archival gatekeepers preserved its culture of misrepresenting these women.[112]

Power is embedded in the archive in such a way that it is invisible to the uncritical eye.[113] The silencing of the women's voices does not allow us to easily hear their thoughts and strategies around how they navigated various spaces. Making the women invisible denies and distorts the existence of their labor, oppression, actions and experiences, and leaves the imagination open for interpretation, which inherently grounds itself on the stereotypical myths of Black womanhood.[114] Similarly, the hypervisibility of African American women works to present them as Venus - the symbolization of Black women rooted in their abjection and an assumption of their deviance.[115] Hartman tells us that "what we know of Venus in her many guises amounts to 'little more than a register of her encounter with power' and that it provides 'a meager sketch of her existence.'"[116] In other words, the archives could not possibly represent nineteenth century

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110 Nell Irvin Painter, "Representing Truth: Sojourner Truth's Knowing and Becoming Known," *The Journal of American History* 81, no. 2 (1994): pp. 461-492, https://doi.org/10.2307/2081168.; Angela Davis, "Reflections On The Black Woman's Role In The Community Of Slaves." *The Intersection of Work and Family Life*. doi:10.1515/9783110968835.44.; Gray White, *A'rn't I A Woman.;* Collins, *Black Feminist Thought.*; "A Black Feminist Statement." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (Fall, 2014): 271-280. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/wsq.2014.0052. https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/black-feminist-statement/docview/1616153009/se-2?accountid=14496.

111 I make this statement to refer to the ways traditional methods of archival research do not allow us to see the humanity of African American women because of their misrepresentation in archives. Because of the way sources in the 19th century and prior were created, assuming the inferiority of the women, using traditional methods of looking at archives in a straightforward manner, obscures what can be known about African American women's actions and experiences.

112 S. Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 12, no. 2 (January 2008); pp. 1-14, https://doi.org/10.1215/-12-2-1 ---.*Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments.* (N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Company, 2020).

113 Michael Omi & Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (Routledge: New York, 1994).

114 Collins, *Black Feminist Thought.*

115 Hartman, "Venus."

116 Ibid.

African American women and their experiences in any meaningful way. Archives were developed to preserve artifacts and information about people's lives that are seen as providing future value or benefit to larger society.

Saidiya Hartman helps us to see the operation of power wielded by white men in their disregard for the humanity of Black women and girls.[117] Hartman refers to their abject nature via Venus, the Black female body that, when presented, is inherently sexual and assumed solely responsible for her debased state of being. Hartman's analysis of Venus exemplifies Michel Rolphe Trouillot's analysis of power with respect to the archives.[118] Whether enslaved or free/d[119] Black women often appear powerless and without agency in traditional archives because of their objectification. The goal of nineteenth century archives was to hold the histories of powerful white men. Since Black women were objectified rather than humanized, their names and lives were not worthy of mention. The archives erase and silence the voices and lives of African American women, while simultaneously controlling particular images that represent the women as deviant, disturbed, disabled, criminal or perverse.

More than two-hundred-years after the emancipation of African Americans, Deborah Gray White's 1985 assertion that scholars were not interested in studying the experiences of African American women and did not see the necessity of a text about them, remains relevant to a degree in 2021.[120] The power of the archive remains intact, but the agency of African American women disrupted the original goals of the archival gatekeepers. African American women of the nineteenth century refused silencing and invisibilizing by taking action to meet their own needs and desires. They disregarded the expected performance of mythical racialized gendered women of African-descent, and instead, they made enough noise to be heard and seen in spite of archival power.

Power begins with the choice to decide whose life is worthy of preservation.[121] Michel-Rolphe Trouillot names four factors that reflect the power of the archive and how it silences the production of history: "The moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance)."[122] Using this lens helps to illuminate the invisibility of the power held by the guardians of the archive. Equally important and interconnected to power is profit. An enslaved baby's birth might be recorded in order to consider how the labor of the baby benefitted the enslaver, or it might not be recorded until the child reached a certain age.[123] The decision to record the birth connects to

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117 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts." Venus is any Black enslaved woman in the archives. Hartman says that she is not afforded the title of human, and therefore, she is not considered in the category of "womanhood" and not deserving of the representation of such.

118 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon Press: Boston, 1995). Trouillot does not analyze gender in his text, but his power analysis speaks to enslaved Black women's experiences based on the power dynamics inherent in both the archives, slavery, and contemporary white hegemony.

119 The assumption for white society was that African Americans were enslaved. I use the slash to indicate that African Americans were either already free or became freed at a point in time. Some were legally emancipated by their enslavers, others escaped and lived as free people, and others were given legal freedom by the 13th Amendment of 1865.

120 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past.*; White, *Ar'n't I A Woman.*

121 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past.*

122 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 26.

123 Edward E. Baptist, *Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).; Richard H. Steckel, "A Dreadful Childhood: The Excess Mortality of American Slaves," *Social Science History* 10, no. 4 (1986): p. 427, https://doi.org/10.2307/1171026. Since mortality rates for enslaved

economics and profit, which is why the central value of enslaved African Americans was profit.[124] The number and worth of enslaved persons, and who was superior in a particular skill, was also key to the documentation of an enslaved person's existence.[125]

The physical labor that African American women performed became part of an aggregated accounting ledger in the archive. The persons named on the ledger are that of the business owner, who profits from the women's labor. The violence that was part and parcel of the making of the profit, and the actual laborer creating the profit, is hidden in the ledger, and ultimately, the archive. This is how the power of silencing operates to deny the existence of African American women's value and relevance in archive.

The difficulty of narrativizing enslaved African American women is the challenge of locating their names or other distinguishing facts about them, providing evidence that they are the person we are researching. Excavating enslaved women's voices is even more difficult, if not impossible. Yet sometimes we can determine their actions in the archives by reading a journal left by a literate white person. More often, locating enslaved African American women is pursued through the excavation of sources like newspapers, business ledgers, land deeds, military, or prison records. Reading "between the lines,"[126] "against the grain,"[127] or "along the bias grain,"[128] is the most common way that historians of African American women's history use fragmented pieces of the women's lives to learn about their actions and experiences. Sometimes we are fortunate to find an interview from the Works Progress Administration of a formerly enslaved African American person that provides tangential or direct knowledge about the subject. This was the case for me when I located an interview in John W. Blassingame's *Slave Testimony*.[129] In the interview of Andrew Evans, we learn that Fernando A. Evans enslaved both Andrew and Agnes. The interview is lengthy and provides details and insights that help us understand what life was like for enslaved and freed African Americans on Evans' farm and the Evans Mine, and the impact it had on Agnes and others enslaved by Fernando Evans.

(Re)Addressing Redress through Morality

I reimagine actions by newly freed nineteenth-century African American women in Missouri as attempts to remedy grievances, rather than criminal acts that deserved punishment. The women took actions against former enslavers, current employers, and others who injured them mentally, physically, emotionally, and economically. Drawing on Missouri newspapers, probate cases, court records, and secondary sources, I analyze the case of Agnes Evans and

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infants was high, sometimes enslavers waited until the children reached an age that showed the children were likely to live and labor. The documentation of enslaved children's birth was not for the same purpose as recording the birth of white children, which was more of a memorialization of the birth than an economic transaction.

124 Eric Eustace Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).; Hartman, *Lose Your Mother.*; *Douglas A. Blackmon, Slavery by Another Name: the Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II (London: Icon, 2012).*; Daina Ramey Berry*, The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: the Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation* (United States: Random House Inc, 2018).

125 Daina Ramey Berry, *"Swing the Sickle for the Harvest Is Ripe": Gender and Slavery in Antebellum Georgia* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010).; Baptist, *The Half Has Never.*

126 Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here*.

127 Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

128 Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives.*

129 John W. Blassingame, *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998).

women like her to show that African American women sometimes chose not to seek redress against transgressors through legal pathways, choosing informal routes instead. By informal, I mean, unauthorized or unofficial actions that are not approved by a legal authority, such as the court, Freedmen's Bureau or an employer. For example, when Agnes takes possession of the personal property from the deceased man's premises, she does not make an official claim for it through the probate court. However, the probate record does not mention how she obtains possession. Whether Agnes resided on Fernando's property at the time she took possession, or she moved it to her residence elsewhere, she controlled it, and did not allow its removal.[130] We know this because the accusers state on the record that they made requests to Agnes to release possession, but she refused.[131] It is only because of her denial to the demands for the property that the case becomes a formal matter with the court, altering her informal demand for redress to a formal one.

African American women used their lived experiences and intellect to guide their decisions. They were cognizant that the law would never see them as innocent or deserving of protection and retribution, so they sometimes sought redress outside of the law. Missouri's history and practice of denying African American women human rights were clearly in place at the state's origin, even though the 1820 Missouri Constitution stated, "any person who shall maliciously deprive of life or dismember a slave, shall suffer such punishment as would be inflicted for the like offense if it were committed on a free white person."[132] Harrison Anthony Trexler states that "The general criminal law of 1808 punished rape, whether committed by a white or a black, by castration."[133] However, "no record of a white being so used has been noted, but several instances of negroes treated in this manner are on record."[134] These laws related to enslaved persons since it was prior to emancipation, but the records show that pre and post-emancipation laws did not protect African American women. According to Harriet C. Frazier, defendants brought into court for crimes against African American men or women had the benefit of white men as the jurors.[135] Therefore, "they never imposed any known felony conviction on any white person accused of any crime, no matter how heinous, against any African American, slave or free."[136] The extant records present every reason for enslaved and newly freed African American women to pursue redress in ways that were not authorized by legal authorities.[137]

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130 Franklin County, Missouri, Office of the Recorder of Deeds, 1 of 1 Document # 6WD033-00211). According to the 1869 probate record, Fernando employed Agnes for mining. However, her residence is not known. Her connection to Fernando appears strong because almost 20 years after his death and 23 years after emancipation, court records still mark her as "Agnes commonly known as Agnes Evans, formerly slave of the late Fernando A Evans." More than likely, Agnes resided on Fernando's property and helped manage his home since he was sick for a period prior to his death. It would be difficult to remove the farm animals, farming equipment, and other property that Agnes possessed.

131 Franklin County, Missouri, Probate Records, Box 30, Folder 19, Estate of Fernando A. Evans, 1869, *Missouri Secretary of State,* Citation December 17, 1870, by Probate Judge Thomas Crow.

132 Mo. Const. amend. art. III sec. 28. https://constitution.com/missouri-state-constitution-1820/

133 Territorial Laws, vol. I p. 210, sec. 8. See Harrison Anthony Trexler, *Slavery in Missouri, 1804-1865* (Baltimore, Hathitrust, 1914), 73.

134 Revised Laws, 1825, vol. I, p. 312, secs. 10, 11, 99. See Harrison Anthony Trexler, *Slavery in Missouri, 1804-1865* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1912), 73.

135 Harriet C. Frazier, *Slavery and Crime in Missouri, 1773-1865* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011), 127.

136 Ibid.

137 Frazier, *Slavery and Crime.*

African American women sometimes relied on informal approaches to redress based on a moral authority, instead of legal options. The term legal refers to established rules, policies and laws that govern its citizens. As long as citizens act within the guidelines of the law, they are theoretically safe from arrest or judicial punishment. In practice, legal pathways are taken by making claims through the judicial system. For nineteenth-century African American women, prior to and post-emancipation, that system might be a local court and/or the Freedmen's Bureau, respectively. However, established laws do not guarantee that what is legal is also moral, especially for African American women.

Morality is behaving in a way considered "right" and "good" for the well being of humanity.[138] Morality, unlike legality, is not specific, concrete, or necessarily stable. What and who is moral finds definition from the culture of societies. Many white Christians did not see a contradiction between their religious beliefs and practices alongside the institution of slavery. White enslavers used the scriptures from the Bible that benefitted them by trying to put the fear of God into their enslaved "property."[139] According to Angela Davis, "Christianity was used for the purpose of brainwashing, indoctrinating, pacifying."[140]

Enslavers used the Old Testament scripture, Genesis 9:18-27, to prove that African-descended people were punished because they were descendants of Ham and relegated to a life of slavery.[141] Another often-used scripture was Ephesians, 6:5-7 that states:

> Servants be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of men: knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.

These scriptures were preached without Biblical context leaving illiterate enslaved persons to hopefully accept their interpretation as the Word of God. Enslavers also left out the Bible's New Testament that requires all of Christ's followers to forgive and love one another.

The use of these particular scriptures reflects what some moral theorists contend about

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138 Mark Timmons. *Moral Theory: An Introduction*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012). ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/berkeley-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1077399. Created from berkeley-ebooks on 2020-10-30 12:50:21.

139 Angela Y. Davis, "Lectures on Liberation," *A Political Companion to Frederick Douglass*, 2018, pp. 107-134, https://doi.org/10.5810/kentucky/9780813175621.003.0005., 119.

140 Ibid.

141 Rae Noel Martin Douglas, *The Great Stain: Witnessing American Slavery* (New York, NY: The Overlook Press, 2018). Enslaver's used the Bible story of Noah's son Ham to allege a curse upon African-descended peoples even though the Bible does not mention the term race as we know it today. Although scholars do not know the reason Noah cursed Ham's lineage, the Canaanites, over time, the story of Ham became associated with darker-skinned people from Africa, where the Canaanites were said to originate. On November 6, 1956, Martin Luther King Jr. gave a speech at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, and told the congregation that he was going to read "an imaginary letter from the pen of the Apostle Paul." In that letter, King asserted that Paul opposed the idea that the Bible gave superiority over one race of people. Paul is said to have asserted, "I understand that there are Christians among you who try to justify segregation on the basis of the Bible….this is blasphemy…In Christ 'there is neither Jew nor Gentile, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus.'"

morality, which is that self-interest fuels one's desire to be moral.[142] Being moral is in the self-interest of individuals and it is because of the benefits inherent in being moral that people perform morality.[143] In this way, doing what is right and good always has underlying motives. Thus, white Christians used morality to justify the enslavement and exploitation of African Americans to get them to comply with their own oppression. It was in the best interest of white Christians to use their religion to legitimize their actions as though they were moral.

While we do not know the exact reasons Agnes sought redress, we know that her labor is part of what maintained Fernando's business, and she performed free labor while immorally enslaved. Additionally, we do not know what transpired between Fernando and Agnes, from her enslavement and after her emancipation and employment with him. While we cannot know the specifics of Agnes' demand for redress, we do know that it had far-reaching implications for her race and gender.

After emancipation, legality and morality still brush up against the intersectional identities of African American women, whose race, gender, and class or status positioned them as *always already*[144] immoral. Paula Giddings provides an example of white society's debasement of African American women from a writer in *The Independent* periodical that said the women were "steeped in centuries of ignorance and savagery, and wrapped about with immoral vices."[145] Another person from the same publication wrote that "the idea is absolutely inconceivable to me…I cannot imagine such a creature as a virtuous Negro woman."[146] The morality of the women was not restricted to only the uneducated and lower class women. Highly educated elite African American women found themselves unable to escape the grip of the mythical Jezebel no matter how "well" they represented themselves by following respectability politics.[147] In reference to women of the Black Baptist Church, Evelyn Higginbotham asserts that their actions reflected their "opposition to the social structures and symbolic representations of white supremacy," and the "politics of respectability" was a strategic approach to countering it.[148]

African American women had restricted access to legal remedies for their physical, mental, emotional, and economic injuries.[149] The fact that the women were no longer enslaved and also had citizenship status, did not change the way white society understood them. Whether the women were poor, upper class, or highly educated, the stereotyping of African American women as immoral by white society remained constant.[150] Elite class status and higher

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142 Thomas Hobbs "Morality and Self-Interest," 26-27 in George Sher, *Ethics: Essential Reading in Moral Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

143 Ibid.

144 Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)" *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London, NYU Press, 2001), 85-126. Althusser says that "individuals are always already subjects" based on ideological state apparatuses (ISA) and repressive state apparatuses (RSA). Meaning, individuals are born into an ideological structure and throughout their everyday lives, they are continually transformed into subjects by responding and acknowledging their subjecthood. "Ideology 'act' or 'functions' in such a way that it...'transforms' the individual into subjects."

145 Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: the Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 82.

146 Ibid.

147 Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920,* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1994).

148 Ibid. 186.

149 Frazier, *Slavery and Crime*; Trexler, *Slavery in Missouri*, 144.

150 Giddings, *When and Where*, 31, 83.

education did not alter white society's belief that the African American women were inferior and deviant, which meant they were incapable of morality. For example, in 1896, James Jacks, president of the Missouri Press Association, asserted that, "the Negroes in this country are wholly devoid of morality, the women are prostitutes and all are natural thieves and liars."[151] This assertion by Jacks, perpetuated the longstanding myths about the immorality of African American women without acknowledging their heterogeneity. He not only attacked African American's character, but also did so with animus powered by white supremacy.

Jacks reacted to Ida B. Wells' anti-lynching campaign, and a pronouncement by *Woman's Era,* a monthly newspaper published by elite Black women in Boston.[152] Wells reported that Black men were falsely accused of raping white women, and rather, the women sought out and enjoyed intimacy with Black men, some of them giving birth to mulatto babies.[153] Club member, Ida B. Wells, reported on the unjust lynching of African Americans by white supremacists in her 1892 pamphlet, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*.[154] She championed the anti-lynching campaign that sought to correct the false and misleading character assassinations of African American men by white society. Wells' statement that, "Nobody in this section of the country believes the old thread-bare lie that negro men rape white women,"[155] reflects a core myth that she believed so much so that she stated, "Somebody must show that the Afro-American race is more sinned against than sinning, and it seems to have fallen upon me to do so."[156] Even more disturbing to Jacks and other racists, was Wells' contention that, "If Southern white men are not careful, they will over-reach themselves and public sentiment will have a reaction; a conclusion will then be reached which will be very damaging to the moral reputation of their women."[157] Jacks' retort denigrating African American women, simply repeats the reliable white supremacist ideology that functions to maintain the oppression of the women based on their race and gender. His vitriol illuminates the challenges and reasons that Black club women worked so hard to improve their image and that of poor women of their race.

Woman's Era stated, "we have failed to hear from [Francis Willard] or the WCTU [Women's Christian Temperance Union] any honest, flat-footed denunciation of the lynching and lynchers."[158] The organization of women that wrote and published *Woman's Era* were called "club women,"[159] who were from the upper echelons of society. Also considered "race women," they were an integral part of the Black community's mission to improve the conditions of poor Black society, especially for the many who migrated from the south into northern urban areas for employment. The Great Migration, the period from 1916 to 1970, was the movement of African

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151 Darlene Clark Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 13.

152 Giddings, *When and Where. Woman's Era* was the first magazine produced *by* African American women *for* African American women. Produced by Bostonian Josephine Ruffins, a Black Clubwoman, and a leader of the National Association of Colored Women, the magazine was part of the broader movement to uplift the Black race.

153 Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (Ankara, Türkiye: Platanus Publishing, 2020).; Giddings, *When and Where.*

154 Wells-Barnett, *Southern Horrors.*

155 Ida B. Wells, "Free Speech" May 21st, 1892.

156 Wells-Barnett, *Southern Horrors.*

157 Wells-Barnett, "Free Speech."

158 Giddings, *When and Where,* 85-90, supra note 241, at 91-92 & n.16.

159 The Black women's club movement was part of the second wave of this movement that began with white women. Due to their exclusion from white women's clubs, upper-class Black women established their own clubs for the betterment of their race, and especially the women. See Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (W.W. Norton & Co, NY 1999).

Americans from the southern states in search of better political and socioeconomic opportunities.[160] Leaving the South with scarce amounts of food and clothing, when they arrived in the North, Black club women, along with churches and other members of the Black community, provided resources like food, clothing, and shelter for those who made the arduous journey.

The Black club women's motto was "Lifting As We Climb," which reflected their goals. According to Deborah Gray White, "race work became the means wherein black women could change their image, and from their point of view, the uplift of women was the means of uplifting the race."[161] Meaning, upper-class Black women's education and economic standing allowed them to use their time, energy, and finances, to establish institutions like schools and orphanages for the benefit of lower-class girls and women.[162] Through these beneficent activities, Black club women sought to improve the image of, and gain equality for, the Black community. However, the rebuttal from Jacks highlights how white people in Missouri continued to deny Black women's humanity.

I situate this dissertation within studies of the racialized and gendered nature of Black women's archival silences and invisibility, along with interpretations of their agency, by examining the tension between moral and legal rights, to consider newly freed African American women's pursuits of redress as a form of infra-political action.[163] Infra-politics, as defined by James Scott, argues that for subjugated people, there are public and private lives, and what they say to their enslaver or subjugator is not the same as what they say to their community.[164] Infrapolitics are the covert spaces where subordinated groups discuss grievances and plan transgressions, unbeknownst to their oppressors. Using an infra-political lens is an alternative way to understand Black women's decisions about redress.

Redress

Redress is commonly understood as a "remedy or compensation for a wrong or grievance,"[165] but for African American women like Agnes, this definition is not easily accessible because laws and customs denied them legal possibilities of redress.[166] In other words, African American women were not considered human, but rather, marked as "property." Property, such as furniture, land, or cattle, is not a given right. The sexual assault of enslaved African American women was not considered rape because enslaved women were seen as "other" rather than humans. Even after they became emancipated legal citizens, white men were not punished for raping African American women.[167] I argue that for African American women, redress refers to *actions taken in an attempt to remedy material and immaterial loss based on a*

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160 Isabel Wilkerson, "The Long-Lasting Legacy of the Great Migration," *Smithsonian Magazine* 2016; https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/long-lasting-legacy-great-migration-180960118/

161 White, *Too Heavy A Load,* 24.

162 White, *Too Heavy a Load.*

163 James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

164 Scott, Domination.

165 https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/redress

166 Frazier, *Slavery and Crime;* Aaron Trexler, *Slavery in Missouri;* Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street*, *Black Women, Rape, and Resistance--A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011).

167 McGuire, *At the Dark End.*

moral compass (rather than a legal basis), rooted in the knowledge of the unremediability of their loss. In other words, even though newly freed African American women took steps to remedy their grievances against, for example, former enslavers or white employers, the women, for the most part, understood that they could not be made whole. Yet, they pursued amelioration anyway, based on their moral right to do so.

Redress is a nuanced concept that scholars of African American history have debated for centuries. There are formal and informal types of redress. Formal redress is achieved through legal channels, and informal redress can take many forms, one of which is infrapolitics. James C. Scott defines infrapolitics as covert forms of resistance that subordinate groups use unbeknownst to the superordinate group. Scott uses the idea of "hidden transcripts" to explain how subjugated people maintain secrecy about how they might redress their situations by not making their actions or thoughts known to their subjugators. Drawing on Scott's term, Stephanie M. H. Camp asserts that, Black women used "hidden or indirect expressions of dissent, quiet ways of reclaiming a measure of control over goods, time, or parts of one's life."[168] For example, in Tera Hunter's *To 'Joy My Freedom*, a domestic worker named Nancy, originally employed for child-care, "faked illness on ironing days" because cooking and ironing were added to her duties "without her consent."[169] Domestic workers understood that even though they were no longer legally enslaved, redress for them had to be nuanced. Nancy's use of infrapolitics shows how African American women sought redress informally.

While infra-politics refers to a dominated group in general, Black women, specifically, developed what Darlene Clark Hine terms a "culture of dissemblance," which specifically sought to reduce myths about sexual deviance in Black women.[170] Dissemblance meant that Black women gave the appearance of revealing their inner thoughts and feelings, while actually concealing them from their oppressors. Rather than report the rapes and threats of rape they encountered by white and Black men, Black women hoped to quell the myth of their alleged promiscuity, if not eliminate it altogether. In this way, Black women sought to protect themselves by remaining silent about the violent assaults on their bodies and reputations. The stereotype of Black women's promiscuity which is rooted in slavery, led to the myth of Black women as "Jezebels." Agnes did not employ infrapolitics or the culture of dissemblance to gain control of the alleged embezzled property. Rather, she performed informal redress by making the decision to take possession of the property as her moral right to it. There are missing pieces to Agnes' story, and some will remain out of reach since archives do not hold enough data that provides the interiority of African American women's lives. However, using methodologies from Black women historians opened new possibilities for narrativizing African American women from the nineteenth century and prior.

Black Women and the Archive

Research on enslaved women by scholars, such as Marisa Fuentes and Saidiya Hartman, has given the field innovative methodological approaches to excavating and writing about archival erasures and silences, to construct narratives about Black women's experiences.[171]

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168 Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 2.

169 Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom;* White, *Ar'n't I a Woman.*

170 Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14, no. 4 (1989): pp. 912-920, https://doi.org/10.1086/494552.

171 Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts,"; Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*.; Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 51.

Therefore, they write them into U.S. and African American historiographies. Black women historians such as Sarah Haley, Kali Gross, Cheryl Hicks, and Talitha LeFlouria, have focused mainly on post-Reconstruction era Black women "from below" to generate new angles of approach towards locating forms of agency and gendered racial violence.[172] Similarly, Marisa Fuentes examines physical and archival violence, as well as violence in the historical production of enslaved Black women, while challenging the ways histories are written about vulnerable people.[173] In particular, I draw on these scholars in navigating the archive in order to see what is not seen and to interrogate what is visible. While some scholars study Black women "from below" prior to emancipation and in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, my interest is in the immediate post-emancipation Reconstruction period of 1863 to 1880. While I understand that many freedwomen made formal claims directly to the courts or Freedmen's Bureau to redress grievances, my research centers on those women's oblique paths to redress.[174]

In their article, "Fugitive Justice," Stephen Best and Saidiya Hartman interrogate the idea of justice for the enslaved and question if redress is even possible.[175] Thinking through Ottobah Cugoano's assertion that, "a just commutation for what cannot be fully restored'[176] is all that can be done for enslaved Africans, Best and Hartman conclude "redress [was] necessarily inadequate."[177] For Best and Hartman, the "impossibility of redress"[178] is based on a "too late" demand to repair the damage caused by slavery.[179] However, expanding redress in the ways we examine and interpret Black women's actions in the archives is not limited with this particular "impossibility," since we are concerned with the futurity of their actions. Black women's pursuits of redress were inherently affective. Whether they sought redress due to an in-the-moment injury or a past injury, collective memories of enslavement and white supremacist racial terror was encapsulated in their redress-based pursuits. In this context, this study examines the implications of Black women's actions. While Best and Hartman assert the "too-lateness" of redress for the enslaved, the actions of Black women during reconstruction show otherwise; although not legal, I argue that Missourian African American women like Agnes Evans, when unable or unwilling to petition the court for their grievances, used a form of infrapolitics as a means of redress. By resolving to ameliorate their injuries without legal authorities, they performed informal redress.

Drawing from and moving beyond the meaning of redress, this project argues for the need to broaden its definition to fill in a gap that disallows redress for African American women. Power rests with white elite society who created the idea of racializing groups of people in order to create a hierarchy placing themselves at the top. According to Michael Omi and Howard Winant, "racialization refers to the process of ascribing racial meanings to an individual, group,

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172 Sarah Haley. *No Mercy Here.*; Gross, *Colored Amazons.*; Leflouria, *Chained in Silence.*; Hicks, *Talk with You*.

173 Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives.*

174 See for example, Tera Hunter, *Bound in Wedlock* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2017) for the phenomena of the formerly enslaved making marriages official after emancipation, and Mary Farmer-Kaiser, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen's Bureau: Race, Gender, and Public Policy in the Age of Emancipation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010) for freedwomen's claims to the Freedmen's Bureau.

175 Stephen Best and Saidiya Hartman, "Fugitive Justice," *Representations* 92, no. 1 (2005): pp. 1-15, https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2005.92.1.1.

176 Ibid.

177 Ibid.

178 Ibid.

179 Ibid.

social practice, or institution that were not previously defined in racial terms."[180] The power to racialize a people, enslave them because of their presumed inferiority, and to institutionalize and maintain such an ideology, frames and informs the experiences of enslaved African American women in nineteenth century Missouri. Shedding light on the discursive practices of redress by African American women helps to show why it is necessary to redefine redress for African American women due to their racialized gendered positions.

While examining and disrupting U.S. society's moral compass around acceptable forms of redress, this study highlights the racialized gendered violence inherent in the archives that silence, distort, and invisibilize the experiences of African American women. A central aspect of this study is to interrogate how and why African American women's forms of redress must be understood and conceptualized distinctly from dominant society's criteria. In other words, redress for injuries that apply to white women are rooted in Victorian ideal womanhood, but Black women fall outside of this definition.

[180] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s 2nd Ed.* (N.Y: Routledge, 1994).

Chapter Two
Redress in Antebellum Missouri: Using A Multidimensional Lens

It was said that she was beautiful and loyal, yet beaten and deceived.[181] The other was just a child yet raped with no mercy.[182] Although enslaved and legally powerless, these two women sought redress in antebellum Missouri, and the sensationalism around their actions established their places in the archives. These women disrupted dominant social norms catapulting them into an archive that typically deprived African American women of agentic space. Using the stories of Ester Clamorgan and Celia, this chapter highlights the multidimensionality that impacted the women's lives, informing how they negotiated redress. Ester Clamorgan enters the archive as a thirty-one or thirty-two-year-old enslaved mother who, because of the diagonal spaces of Missouri, becomes the sexual "property" of a French enslaver in late eighteenth-century Missouri. Her exact date of birth is not known, but we know Ester she was of African and Spanish descent, and she was previously enslaved in Virginia and "helped care for the Camps' daughter, Stella."[183] Whether she was brought from Europe or born in the North America, is not known.

In 1784, Ester is transferred from one enslaver to another in Upper Louisiana, as it was called during Spain's rule.[184] Ester's enslaver, Ichabod Camp, was indebted to Jacques Clamorgan, an elite and well-connected landowner residing in what was then Spain's territory, which ultimately became St. Louis. Ester had a daughter approximately twelve years old named Siley, who Ester had to leave behind with her former enslaver, Camp, at the time of her purchase. But, less than a year after Jacques bought Ester, she persuaded him to purchase Siley.[185] According to Julie Winch, Jacques went into debt in order to buy Siley, paying five hundred dollars for her in 1785. In 1793, he emancipates Ester and in 1795, he does the same for Siley.[186] Jacques' home in St. Louis is the regional landscape where Ester navigated life as a mother, grandmother, and the concubine to her enslaver.

Moving away from Missouri's urban area of St. Louis, we find Celia, an enslaved teenager, whose life in rural Missouri highlights diagonality's usefulness in understanding how regional differences shape experiences. Spatial and cultural factors were key to Celia's brief life in Calloway County, because her racialized and gendered body became "sutured" to the physical land through the language of the "South." Suturing is the idea that Celia's body, upon the origins of her enslavement, became "stitched into" or a part of the space of her existence through white supremacist's belief in domination over her body. Whether she accepted her identity or not, she navigated within the confines of slavery, understanding that she was "owned" by and the "property" of her enslaver. Stuart Hall refers to these "unstable points of identification or suture…a positioning."[187] The language of the South denies her autonomy over her body or life because of her positionality as both racialized as an African American and gendered as a woman. Although not exclusively, white society in the U.S., even in the North, saw African American

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181 Winch, *The Clamorgans*, 40.
182 Melton A. McLaurin, *Celia A Slave*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991).
183 Ibid.
184 Ibid., 40.
185 Ibid., 42.
186 Ibid.
187 Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Jonathan Rutherford, Editor. *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990).

women as laborers designated to serve them. In this sense, Celia, and all African American women, enslaved or free, existed in a world where they had to negotiate spaces to survive and thrive based on their position at the bottom of the racial, gender, and social hierarchies.

Ester and Celia are more visible in the archives because of the extraordinary actions they took in the mid nineteenth century. Historians have always been drawn to the spectacular. There are many stories lost to history about African American women who fascinated their peers and communities. But those who caught the attention of a wider audience, impacting their own and the white community, gained notoriety valued for its newsworthiness, and ultimately, profit. Celia admitted to both burning her enslaver in the fireplace of her cabin and persuading her enslaver's grandson to unwittingly spread his grandfather's ashes around the plantation. Ester had the nerve to take her and her children's manumission papers and land deeds. Then, she began litigation against her former owner who fraudulently bought land in her name but denied her ownership of the land. Both women's acts of defiance are captured and marked them as spectacles in the white imagination. The court records have allowed historians to reimagine the two women's lives.

Drawing on secondary literature written about Ester and Celia, this chapter considers possibilities for the narrative of Agnes Evans. While the actions and experiences of two women cannot provide all of, or many of, the types of circumstances and encounters that shaped Agnes' life, they can help to frame some of the racial and gendered experiences that enslaved women endured. Using Ester and Celia's stories also highlight differing ways the women made meaning of their plights and/or privileges. For example, even though Celia was isolated without a community of other enslaved women around her, she did take advantage of the limited access she had to those around her, like her enslaver's grandson, who became Celia's unwitting accomplice. Her lived experiences contribute to a growing archive about African American women whose lives were not extensively documented, but just as important in helping us learn how nineteenth century African American women navigated the spaces in which they found themselves. I am intrigued with Ester and Celia's actions, however, for the purpose of this chapter, my interest is in the geography where their actions took place because it tells us much about how diagonality operates in each woman's life, and how it informed their choices for informal versus formal pathways of redress. By examining the regions where Ester and Celia lived, we can see the spatial and cultural factors that opened up or restricted possibilities for attempting to ameliorate their grievances. Although their actions became notable in the annals of Missouri history, more often, African American women's actions were seemingly insignificant, under the radar, and unspectacular. Yet, studying obscure women, can help us learn about the more nuanced routes of redress taken by some women. Therefore, Ester and Celia's narratives provide comparative and contrasting insights that are useful in developing Agnes' story and how she pursued redress.

African American women in Missouri share common experiences of racialized gendered terror and oppression. These experiences are attributable in part to their geographic location in Missouri, and part and parcel of their intersectional identities, albeit in varying degrees. By looking at Agnes' experiences, and juxtaposing her with Ester and Celia, we can see how each woman had different experiences based on diagonality, but similar based on their intersectional identities of race and gender. Since Agnes' life is the most obscure, Ester and Celia serve as diverse representations of African American women with whom we can consider the possibilities available to Agnes, and women like her, during antebellum and postbellum Missouri. What spaces did each woman cross over or break through in pursuit of freedom and/or redress? How

did they navigate the diagonality of Missouri in their respective regions? What were the geographic limitations thwarting their attempts at redress, and also, the possibilities made available to them? Answering these questions can provide clues to the experiences of urban versus rural, more privileged versus less-privileged, mulatto, mixed-race, or darker versus lighter-skinned Black women in Missouri and the nation.

The goal of this chapter is to situate African American women in Missouri during the nineteenth century in the context of slavery, and to show how diagonality operates to shape the women's actions and experiences. Thus, in this chapter, I explore the physical, political, and cultural geographic contexts of Missouri to illuminate some of the ways enslaved African American women like Ester and Celia, navigated the ambivalent terrain of Missouri. I consider Missouri an ambivalent space because of the way its physical landscape influenced the culture of and the diverse beliefs and values, especially related to African Americans and slavery.

Origins of Diagonality in Missouri

Leading up to its statehood, the Missouri Territory, as it was called after the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, included several different nations that claimed ownership of the area. Unlike Native Americans, who saw land as a collective space, white settlers categorized land that did not have what they considered "improvements," as "vacant" land. [188] Vacant meant unowned, which marked it as available for squatting or "discovery." Therefore, in the 17th century, the French put their flag into the ground that Native Americans had "resided" on for many years.[189] After their defeat in the Seven Years' War, France ceded the territory to Spain in 1762, through the secret Treaty of Fountainebleau.[190] After nearly four unsuccessful decades of trying to make the territory profitable, Spain secretly ceded the territory back to France in 1801, and Napoleon Bonaparte almost immediately sold it to the United States in 1803. Although the British engaged in trading with Native Americans and traveled within the Missouri territory during their "ownership" of the neighboring lands to the east, their influence was not as consequential as the French or Spaniards. Britain had a minimal hand in shaping the earlier Upper Louisiana frontier since they gained land from the Mississippi River to the Appalachian Mountains in the 1763 Treaty of Paris.

France, Spain, Britain, the U.S. and Native Americans shaped the culture of the Missouri territory, along with enslaved African-descended people, who labored building settlements for their enslavers. In this sense, the culture of Missouri is unlike the North, unlike the South, and actually, unlike other border states. Ranging from proslavery to antislavery-leaning, people settled in and traversed through Missouri, and especially the city of St. Louis, because it was the gateway to the western part of an emerging United States. White U.S. born men migrated to Missouri, mostly from the south and east, bringing their families, and also, for those that could afford them, enslaved men, women, and children.[191] The enslavement of African American women was fully embedded into the culture of the United States when Missouri became a state in 1821. The arrival of immigrants in the 1830's created a diversity of thoughts and feelings about slavery, adding more complexity to Missouri's ideological landscape. In this way, white

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188 Stephen Aron, *American Confluence: The Missouri Frontier from Borderland to Border State* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2005).

189 I refer to the idea that Native Americans "resided" on the land because they made use of it according to their culture. Whether for war, hunting, war, spiritual activities, or other forms.

190 Aron, *American Confluence.* France ceded the Upper Louisiana territory to Spain as compensation for supporting them in the Seven Years' War.

191 Burke, *On Slavery's Border.*

immigrants uniquely shaped the experiences and actions of African American women in nineteenth century Missouri. The Irish and Germans further contributed to the cultural fabric of Missouri, and the latter, in many ways, helped the advancement of the abolition of slavery.[192]

Yet, white U.S. born Missourian settlers and immigrants still found stability and "home"[193] in their racist beliefs about the inferiority of African Americans. In this sense, even white abolitionists and antislavery advocates did not believe in the equality between Black and white people.[194] Therefore, the terrain of Missouri required African American women to navigate spaces that were not always stable or defined. The women could expect to experience varying forms of treatment, from high levels of sympathy and support to extreme physical violence. It is because of the diverse groups of people, the complexity of their beliefs and values, and historical specifics of the Missouri territory, that diagonality is a useful framework.

Multidimensionality: Diagonality and Intersectionality

Identities shape experiences while diagonality frames geo-cultural contexts of those experiences. Consequently, enslaved African American women's race and gender were central to the labor they performed. Although they did not own the land, their labor helped improve it for their enslaver's profit. Because of their gender, procreation became a means to produce new enslaved laborers, and also a way for white men to gain sexual pleasure using the women's bodies. Physical spaces of the Missouri territory determined where people settled, what crops or businesses they established, and how white people engaged with African Americans. In this way, because of their forced connection to the land, diagonality framed the boundaries that African American women navigated as they sought redress.

Diagonality intersects and crosses lines, breaking the rules of linearity to both create and restrict possibilities for oppressed Black women living along the ambiguous landscape of Missouri. In the nineteenth century, the spectrum of division within Missouri ranged from staunch proslavery Confederate enslavers to antislavery Unionists. A key to diagonality's significance for studying enslaved African American women is the physical space and land that allowed them to think about their liberation differently. Put another way, liberation is also a form of redress. African American women considered the contexts of their lives in the current moments and determined how they might liberate themselves or seek redress.

From a diagonal lens, we can see how enslaved women might think and act differently about their liberation and pursuits of redress, depending on their proximity to certain individuals and regional spaces. For example, Mrs. Judge Graves of Kansas City, Missouri, speaks of the time an enslaved "house girl" and her children escaped, with the inadvertent aid of Mrs.

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192 Robert W. Frizzell, *Independent Immigrants: a Settlement of Hanoverian Germans in Western Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2011).; Robyn Burnett and Ken Luebbering, *German Settlement in Missouri: New Land, Old Ways* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996).; Kristen Layne Anderson, *Abolitionizing Missouri: German Immigrants and Racial Ideology in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016).

193 Home in this context refers to the ways that both U.S. born and white immigrants were comfortable and safe in their beliefs about the inferiority of Black people. They found comfort in the assumption that Black people were innately inferior to whites and there was a sense of safety in that no one would challenge it – making it a fact in their eyes. Whether white people disagreed on other aspects related to Black people, like whether slavery was moral, there was agreement about white superiority. See "Notes on the State of Virginia.," The Library of Congress, accessed July 17, 2021, https://www.loc.gov/item/03004902/.; Pauline Kleingeld, "Kant's Second Thoughts on Race." *The Philosophical Quarterly (1950-)* 57, no. 229 (2007): 573-92. Accessed July 17, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4543266, 576.

194 Emma Dabiri, *What White People Can Do next: from Allyship to Coalition* (London: Penguin, 2021), 4.

Graves.[195] The enslaved woman told Mrs. Graves that she wanted to take her children with her to visit her sister, who was in town. Mrs. Graves, speaking of the enslaved woman, said, "she dressed them [the children] nicely and brought them in for me to see."[196] Because it was raining that day, Mrs. Graves suggested the use of her "horse and buggy," which the enslaved woman probably foresaw, knowing her enslaver's personality.[197] Once the enslaved woman and her children left the property, Mrs. Graves says she "never saw them again."[198] Her horse and buggy were "left on this side of the river."[199] Certainly, enslaved women did not typically have access to a "horse and buggy," but her proximity to enslavers who were more trustful of their enslaved "property" is evident in the diagonal spaces of Missouri.

The way the enslaved woman showed a form of respect, or at least consideration for Mrs. Graves' property, by leaving the "horse taken out and hitched," speaks to the complicated relationship the woman had with her enslaver.[200] More than likely, Mrs. Graves allowed the enslaved woman other resources and what the enslaver considered "kindness," while continuing to hold the woman and her children against their will. She wanted her and her children's freedom, and took advantage of what she knew about Mrs. Graves, using the horse and buggy only for the purpose of transportation. There was no need for her to damage the buggy and let the horse run free after she accomplished her goal of getting to the river. For enslaved women, there was no space for sentimental thoughts because their lives were "always already" in danger because they were "property" subject to the will and whim of their enslavers. The escaped woman thought about the consequences of her escape and its aftermath. Adding insult to injury would not be wise, so she attempted to mete out her escape without creating further backlash for herself and children.

The intersectionality of race, gender, and other identities are prominently factored into the experiences of nineteenth century African American women, but we miss the significance of geography and culture without a diagonal lens. Intersectionality and diagonality are similar frameworks that help us understand how and why African American women's experiences are shaped based on identities, culture, and spatial contexts. However, the two terms operate in different ways. Intersectionality refers to the interconnected and cumulative ways Black women experience oppressions, which begin with race and gender, and can also include other identities like class, religion, sexuality, and age. Diagonality impacts the particular spaces women occupy based on temporality. As cultures evolve, people within those cultures must adapt to both the local dynamics and societal norms of the time period. Both intersectionality and diagonality show how African American women's identities and geo-spatial factors impact their actions and experiences.

Intersectionality does not analyze geography and how particular spaces create experiences. Intersectionality helps us understand social location and how a racialized and gendered woman, shapes and is shaped, by the physical space in which she finds herself. Using an intersectionality framework, an African American woman can have different experiences in divergent spaces, but only because of her race, gender, class and other identities. An intersectional lens does not always broaden its scope to understand the context of the particular

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195 Missouri Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, *Reminiscences of the Women of Missouri During the Sixties* (Morningside House, Inco. 2003), 255.

196 Ibid.

197 Ibid.

198 Ibid.

199 Ibid.

200 Ibid.

space and cultural factors involved. Both terms show how the simultaneity and multiplicity of identities and geo-spatial factors impact African American women's experiences. Therefore, I use both frameworks to parse out how pre and post-emancipation African American women navigated Missouri's ambiguous spaces.

What do we miss when we consider intersectionality without diagonality in relation to Missourian African American women? Paying attention to or centering racialized and gendered experiences of African American women in Missouri is important to understanding what Collins refers to as the *matrix of domination*. Similar to intersectionality, the matrix of domination is a web of interconnected forms of oppression that shape African American women's experiences through controlling institutions and images. Not only are the women defined by their race, class, gender, and other identities, but Collins asserts the power embedded in, and of, the matrix traps the women in a system designed to restrict and deny their socioeconomic advancement and sometimes their very existence.'[201] The matrix consists of four domains: structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal, which all work together seamlessly to maintain organization of the forms of oppression African American women experience.[202]

Each domain in the matrix functions as an extension of the other, playing specific roles through institutions. According to Collins, "the structural domain of power encompasses how social institutions are organized to reproduce Black women's subordination over time.[203] For example, laws changed to the detriment of enslaved Black mothers to state that their children were given the same status as the mother rather than the father, who oftentimes was their white enslaver. And after their emancipation, "Black women's long-standing exclusion from the best jobs, schools, health care, and housing illustrates the broad array of social policies designed to exclude Black women from full citizenship rights."[204] Basically, "the structural domain organizes oppression."[205] By enacting discriminatory laws during and after emancipation, the domain denied Black women rights to their own bodies and children, allowed rape, and other forms of violence.

The sustained oppression of Black women is managed through the power of the disciplinary domain. The goal is to develop "quiet, orderly, docile, and disciplined populations of Black women" through surveillance techniques.[206] Michel Foucault's theory of panopticism is useful here to explain how individuals are not only constantly watched and controlled but programmed to self-surveil and control their behaviors as a result of knowing their lives are under surveillance.[207] For instance, "within prisons, guards watch Black female inmates; within businesses, middle managers supervise Black women clerical staff; and within universities professors train "their" Black female graduate students within academic 'disciplines.'"[208] Consequently, Foucault argues that when people know they are under observation, they usually perform in ways they believe will benefit them, which is how those watching them require. In this way, subordinated groups of people learn to "police" themselves and each other while those dominating them rarely need to step in to show force.

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201 Collins, *Black Feminist Thought, 26, 109.*
202 Ibid., 21.
203 Ibid., 295.
204 Ibid.
205 Ibid., 294.
206 Ibid., 299
207 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Random House, 1977).
208 Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 300.

While the structural and disciplinary domains function "through systemwide social polices managed primarily by bureaucracies…the hegemonic domain of power aims to "justify practices in these domains of power."[209] Scholars assert that hegemony is an invisible form of control.[210] Drawing Karl Marx's idea of hegemony and the superstructure, Antonio Gramsci further developed the notion of cultural hegemony.[211] Gramsci identifies coercion through physical force, and consent, as subconsciously accepting beliefs, practices, and ideologies, used by, and for the benefit of, dominant society or the ruling elites.[212] In order to maintain the oppression of Black women, myths about their supposed inferiority and deviance became commonsense "truths." In this way, white men raping their enslaved women and girls transferred their immoral actions to the women, creating the trope of Jezebel, the promiscuous Black woman. Through one-dimensional characters like Mammy and Jezebel, white society scapegoated Black women, even as many of them saw the contradiction in their own homes with enslaved women giving birth to mulatto children resembling a man in the home. Rooted in slavery, the creation and maintenance of Mammy and Jezebel stereotypes is through what Collins calls controlling images, which help maintain stereotypes about Black women.[213]

Individuals participate in the oppression of others but can also subvert and resist doing so through the last domain, which is the interpersonal. Brief, discreet, and seemingly insignificant actions are what maintain the interpersonal domain of the matrix. Collins contends that it is easier for us to see the oppressive nature of our own lives, than seeing how our "thoughts and actions uphold someone else's subordination.[214] In this way, it is the quotidian practices where individuals learn to act and react to one another, and Collins says that although it is part of the matrix of domination, it is where possibilities for agency can operate. For the enslaved Missourian women that I focus on in this chapter, Ester and Celia, who sought redress in the context of the matrix, we can learn the nuanced ways they navigated it to pursue their own redress.

Ester Clamorgan

Stephen Aaron's text, *American Confluence*, informs us that prior to U.S.-born migrants' occupation of the Missouri Territory, native Americans roamed the wilderness without laying claim to any lands because they saw it as a shared resource that should not be privatized.[215] A divergent group of native American groups lived on the lands at any given time, such as the "Otos, Iowas, Quapaws, Missouris, and Osages," until they were eventually forced out by white settlers.[216]

Living in the wilderness frontier of what is now Minnesota, Ester, an enslaved woman descended from African and Spanish heritage, navigated life in the diagonal spaces of the Louisiana Territory prior to the 1821 statehood of Missouri. Ester existed within the diagonal,

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209 Ibid., 302.

210 Antonoi Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. (New York: International Publishers, 1971); Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*; "'Preface' to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," *Marx: Later Political Writings*, edited by Terrell Carver. 158-162. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511810695.009.

211 Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison*.

212 Ibid.

213 Collins, *Black Feminist Thought,* 79-89.

214 Ibid., 306.

215 Aron, *American Confluence,* 3.

216 Ibid.

not only because she lived in Missouri's ethnically diverse territory, but because her biology is indicative of diagonality's impact. The practices of imperialist white men from Europe raping enslaved women and girls, was common. Although many of the men kept the women as concubines, they married white women, while continuing to forcibly demand sex from the bodies of enslaved women and girls with impunity.

Ester's owner, Ichabod Camp, migrated from Virginia to the frontier of Minnesota and became a trader in the Missouri territory in the 1780s.[217] He left a ministerial position in the English colonies and moved his family and enslaved "property" until misfortune happened to him and he lost his ministerial position. Camp was an Anglican minister for almost two decades prior to his migration West, first from England, and eventually to the Mississippi Valley near St. Louis, Missouri. Accounts by persons that knew him state that he owned several enslaved people prior to arriving West.[218] It is unknown how many of the enslaved people he forced to travel with him during his trek Westward, but we do know that Ester, her daughter, Siley, and others were a part of his group. Records state that Camp departed Colonial East without substantial finances because of the elimination of certain benefits, including a church salary. He chose to leave for the West in search of a better way of living in order to feed his family and profit as much as possible.

Ester's former enslaver, Camp, was a frontiersman whose occupation as a trader sometimes required the movement of his entire household, which included those he enslaved. He maintained a home in the settlement of Kaskaskia, across the river from St. Louis in the Illinois Country, and upon settling on the east side of the Mississippi River, his enslaved people were put to work to create a farm and trading post out of the wilderness.[219] Ester and Siley avoided possible separation when Camp died in 1786, just two years after Ester and one year after Siley were taken by Jacques. As was the legal custom, the distribution of Camp's assets would typically occur through the sale of enslaved people so as to evenly allocate heirs with funds rather than bodies. The separation of mothers from their children, mothers, husbands and other kin is but one of the many consequences African American women like Ester experienced because of their race and gender and/or their enslaved status.

Ester defies many of the stereotypical understandings of what it was like for enslaved women in Missouri. Unlike her peer group who labored domestically in the homes of white people and on farms cultivating hemp and other crops, Ester mirrored the traditional definition of a concubine. In this sense, we see how diagonality's cultural element shapes Ester's life. While most enslaved women worked long hours and without enough to eat, Ester did not starve or perform extreme physical labor. Rather, she was more of a caretaker and manager of Jacques' home.[220]

Even though she occupied a sense of privilege in the belly of the beast, she still had to use the courts for personal redress because her enslaver's main concern was financial profit. Ester's emancipation by Jacques was not the result of altruism but rather his desire to purchase cheap land grants from the Spanish government and protect it for himself in case of legal confiscation by the courts.[221] His shady business dealings often put him at risk for bankruptcy, therefore, his goal was to protect some of the land he acquired from the Spanish government.

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217 Winch, *The Clamorgans*, 42.

218 Saunders, ed., Colonial Records of N. C., VI, 684, 688, 824; Johnson to the 5PG, 25 November 1760, in Schneiders, eds., Samuel Johnson, IV, 75; Camp's Journal, in Carter, Camp, Jones, 24.

219 Ibid.

220 Winch, *The Clamorgans,* 43.

221 Ibid., 45.

The government encouraged the wealthy to settle in the uncultivated lands west of the Mississippi, part of the future Louisiana Purchase, and gave landowners large tracts of land as an incentive to settle there.[222] Jacques did not inform Ester that she was a landowner because his plan was to transact business without her knowledge, using her status as a free woman to his advantage. When Jacques violently evicted Ester from his home, after he acquired a new chief wife, Ester took several documents that she knew were important, which included the freedom papers for her daughter and grandson, as well as the land deeds for her property.[223] Ester was illiterate, but she knew the documents were important to her and her descendants, although she did not know some of them were land deeds in her name. Upon discovering the value of the documents, and knowing she held the title to several properties, she sought redress through the courts with the aid of her former enslaver's associates who were sympathetic to Ester's circumstances. Although Ester died before the decision on her case against Jacques, she put land in her descendant's names and emancipated the family members that were legally considered her property, before her death.

If we think about Ester's life trapped by her race and gender, even after her emancipation, we can understand that the land she eventually acquires and retains through her death, does not shield her from the afterlife of slavery.[224] Her former enslaver, Jacques Clamorgan, treats her as his property although witnesses claimed they "lived like man & wife."[225] He physically terrorizes her through violence, and he emancipates her only to exploit her free status, rather than to establish her as an autonomous individual. As a free person in St. Louis, where they lived, Ester could own property. Jacques used her free status to put property into her name because he feared he might lose the property due to an impending court case against him.[226]

Although Ester Clamorgan was a concubine to one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in eighteenth-century St. Louis, which afforded her resources and benefits unavailable to most enslaved women in Missouri, it is inaccurate to say that her life was not difficult. Soon after she was sold to Jacques, she sought refuge with the widow of her former enslaver, Ann Camp, telling her that "her Master…had beat her and drove her out of his House."[227] Apparently, this type of treatment was common for Jacques. Due to his risky business practices, his temper flared easily as a result of financial troubles. Ester became the brunt of his anger on several occasions. In 1806, after Ester found out that Jacques put land in her name back in 1793, she refused his requests to sign her X (signature) on paperwork, which infuriated him.[228] She could not read or write and did not want to sign documents that might endanger her or her descendants, where Jacques might try to re-enslave them.

Ester did not trust him, yet, because she still cared about the welfare of his children, she remained somewhat loyal to him. When he needed Ester on occasion to assist with his new family's care, she obliged. Jacques planned a trip into the region owned by Spain in 1807, so he asked Ester to assist in his home with his favorite concubine, Julie, and her and Jacques' newborn baby. Winch asserts that Jacques offered to pay Ester for her services, but she did not

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222 Aron, *American Confluence,* 97.

223 Winch, *The Clamorgans,* 47.

224 Saidyia Hartman refers to the afterlife of slavery as the lingering impact of racial violence rooted in slavery that remains present in society.

225 Winch, *The Clamorgans,* 43.

226 Ibid., 46.

227 Ibid., 42.

228 Ibid., 50.

require payment because she was "genuinely fond of Jacques's children."[229] It is peculiar that Ester would not take payment for the time and labor of assisting Julie with the baby, considering Ester's status as a single woman without the support of a partner or person to share in expenses. Ester had to negotiate her actions within the context of her status. What seems more likely, is that Ester made a claim of fondness toward the children to maintain the type of relations with Jacques and his household to reduce possibilities of antagonisms and retaliation. Unfortunately, attempts to sustain a beneficial and cordial relationship with Jacques failed.

Upon his return, Jacques discovered Julie died from smallpox.[230] She contracted smallpox after Ester became infected with it, and it infected the household, but only Julie succumbed to it. Jacques and Ester argued about the situation and Jacques' wrath toward Ester increased even further than previously. Jacques and Ester's remaining years were engulfed with bitter legal battles over the land that was in Ester's name and land Jacques fraudulently took out of Ester's name and into his. He falsified documents stating Ester never paid him for Siley's freedom and tried to re-enslave her. His power as a prominent white man with many friends and associates allowed him to draw up other fraudulent documents, but Ester fought him in the judicial system battling to maintain the freedom of her descendants and the property Jacques had put in her name, while he ruthlessly tried to take both.

Ester constantly fought against the deceit of Jacques and other unscrupulous white men who took advantage of her illiteracy, yet the geo-cultural space allowed room for possibilities. William Carr, as Ester's attorney, drew up "fraudulent deeds showing she had given him virtually every piece of real estate she owned as payment for his legal services."[231] Although white supremacy was fully operational in St. Louis, Missouri, Ester trusted and regularly sought guidance from white men she knew, and "they assured her he [Carr] was 'an able counselor and [an] honest man.'"[232] Although Carr was "honest" with these men in previous dealings, he felt no fiduciary obligation toward his client Ester. He deceived her by telling her he only required one lot of her land for his services, but he requested all of her documents in order to understand everything for her case.[233] Meanwhile, since Jacques' threats to "take Siley and her children downriver to New Orleans and sell them," did not work to cause Ester to sign over her land, he fraudulently claimed he was their owner. Ester "was 'almost in despair,' if not for her allies.''[234]

There were other white men and women supporting and advocating for Ester throughout her life and the court trials. One of the men Ester trusted was Alexander McNair, and the other was James Cooms. McNair had been an invaluable resource Ester sought out when she needed funds and general guidance.[235] She met McNair through her former enslaver's family. Ester kept close ties to her former enslaver's daughter Stella, who married and gave birth to her own daughter, Marguerite. McNair married Marguerite, so Ester's relationship with McNair's new family reached "back decades."[236] Cooms was once Ester's neighbor after she acquired her own home. He testified on her behalf to say that he did not sign a document for Jacques as a witness, but Cooms died prior to the start of the trial.[237]

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229 Ibid., 49.
230 Ibid., 49.
231 Ibid., 52.
232 Winch, *The Clamorgans,* 52.
233 Ibid.
234 Ibid.
235 Ibid., 48.
236 Ibid.
237 Ibid., 61.

We see the operation of diagonality in several ways, and in the case of Ester's relationships with the white people around her, she had the benefit of those who were honest in their dealings with her, as well as the opposite. Although enslaved and mistreated by Jacques Clamorgan and others like him, the culture of the St. Louis region where Ester found herself, allowed for spaces of sympathy from some of the residents, and even her former enslaver, Mrs. Camp. Mrs. Camp and her daughters, Stella and Louisa, had apparently grown fond of Ester during her enslavement with them, which speaks to the way intimacy and proximity relate between the enslaved and enslaver. For Ester, because of her race, gender, and class, it made sense that she maintained a cordial relationship with her former enslavers. And, although they might have utilized their association with Ester to ask her to do care-work, it seems as though that was not the case. Rather, they provided Ester protection from homelessness, starvation, and the merciless Jacques Clamorgan. Both daughters told of how Ester escaped from Jacques' cruelty, and their mother allowed Ester to "remain there for a short time."[238] The women give the impression that as enslavers, their family had not "abused" Ester, although enslavement in itself is abuse.[239] In Ester's case against Jacques, the two Camp sisters testified that Jacques abused Ester "after she was traded to Clamorgan."[240] The author, Winch, does not clarify the meaning of abuse, and whether it refers to rape, physical injury unrelated to sexual assault, and/or verbal abuse. It is possible Ester had been abused in one of these ways, by the Camp family prior to her sale to Jacques. But, the Camp sisters' testimony just tells us about Ester's treatment after their family sold her to Jacques. It was within this ambiguity that Ester had to learn to navigate and attempt to redress the wrongs against her perpetrated by Jacques.

There are moments when we see Ester seek redress from Camp and Jacques both formally and informally. After being sold by Camp, she uses what might simultaneously be an informal and formal pathway to influence Jacques to "buy" her daughter, Siley. Since Jacques is a man who apparently desired Ester for her beauty, she used what Audre Lorde calls the power of the erotic. Lorde says that, "[r]ecognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world."[241] As a woman who understood white men's infatuation with her physical appearance, she learned to empower herself and strategically make use of what she could. She gained enough trust and some form of fondness from Jacques because visitors of his residence remarked that Ester and Jacques "lived like man & wife."[242] Yet, ultimately, Jacques was only in love with and loyal to himself. Therefore, Ester uses an informal method of redress by taking the documents she knows are important to her and her descendants.[243] The documents included "her and Edward's manumissions, and the deed for Siley."[244] Eventually, Ester is forced to seek formal redress through the St. Louis courts, but she dies before a decision was made.[245]

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238 Winch, *The Clamorgans,* 42.
239 Ibid., 54.
240 Ibid.
241 Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider,* 59.
242 Winch, *The Clamorgans,* 43. It was common in St. Louis for white men to maintain intimate relations with Black women while marrying white women, 102.
243 Ibid., 47.
244 Ibid. Edward was Siley's son, Ester's grandson.
245 Ibid.

Ceila, the Enslaved

I draw on Katherine McKittrick's notion of a *black sense of place* to contextualize Celia's life on a broader scale and consider how the culture of the "deep South" is embedded in the region of "Little Dixie" where Celia is enslaved by the Newsom family.[246] McKittrick refers to a *black sense of place* as the "process of materially and imaginatively *situating* historical and contemporary struggles against practices of domination *and* the difficult entanglements of racial encounter," showing how "relational violences...produce a condition of being black in the Americas that is predicated on struggle"[247] In this sense, Celia and young women like her, constantly battled to survive because of the racialization of the Blackness. They had to figure out how to counter the hostility of white supremacy that sought to oppress daily. Calloway County, approximately one hundred miles west of St. Louis, was Celia's space of enslavement, rather than a "home." While her enslaving family, headed by Robert Newsom, could enjoy the comforts of their home, Celia understood that her life was always in peril. Proximity to rivers and kin, and interpersonal small-scale households are key factors discussed here to consider possibilities for Celia, and restrictions on her life that give context to how she navigated a world in near isolation from the rest of society, other than the four men and boy child also enslaved by the Newsoms.

Diagonality: Regional Culture: Celia's Life Before Newsom

Seen through the framework of diagonality, Celia's actions, that resulted in the death of her enslaver, allows for the placement and contextualization of her racialized gendered body occupying a particular place. We do not know Celia's place of birth or whether she was born free or enslaved. We only know that she was approximately 14 years old when Newsom bought her in 1850.[248] Other than her first name, little is known about Celia prior to her purchase by Robert Newsom, a well-respected widower, father, and farmer. Newsom traveled about 40 miles to Audrain County to buy the teenager, and according to court records, Celia was to become his sexual partner and domestic laborer.[249]

Did Celia make a moral decision to harm and Did Celia make a moral decision to harm and ultimately kill the enslaver that attempted assault on her body? Her inner thoughts were not available for the archive, considering she was illiterate and unable to freely express how she thought and felt. Purchased by a wealthy yeoman farmer in 1850 as a fourteen-year-old-girl, the expectation for Celia's life was to labor as a domestic worker, a reproductive laborer, and property for her enslaver's sexual pleasure. Her life ended by execution approximately five years after she was taken to her enslaver, Robert Newsome's home. Whether she killed her enslaver because of her refusal to tolerate the repeated rape by him, or because of the threat of her then boyfriend, George, to stop having sex with Newsom, Celia made a decision that ended in her death.

Enslaver Newsom

Newsom migrated from his birthplace of Virginia to Missouri just as many of his fellow southeasterners had done, in search for fertile agricultural land and profit. Newsom, his wife, and two children arrived in Missouri "sometime between 1819 and 1822," early in the establishment of Missouri's statehood.[250] Most of the early settlers came from regions that grew hemp and

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246 Katherine McKittrick, "On plantations, prisons, and a black sense of place." *Social & Cultural Geography*, Vol.12 no. 8 (2011): 949.

247 Ibid.

248 McLaurin, *Celia, A Slave*, 11.

249 McLaurin, *Celia, A Slave*, 1.

250 Ibid.

tobacco in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia and they took up land in the central area of Missouri near the Missouri River's bottomlands where the soil was fertile.[251] Like Newsom, many yeoman farmers and their families retreated "from the overcropped lands of the east," to take advantage of the new Callaway County region that promised new opportunities.[252] "By 1830 some 6,159 souls were settled on the land – 4,702 whites, 1,456 black slaves, and a lone free black."[253] A decade later, the Calloway County population increased to a total of 11,765, with 8,601 whites, while 3,142 were enslaved African Americans.[254] The region was good for Newsom who, by 1855, had acquired 800 acres of land worth approximately $3,500, and five enslaved persons to work his land, four men and one young boy.[255] The addition of Celia, the only enslaved woman on the farm, was to benefit Newsom more personally, and it did until five years into Celia's enslavement, when she made her fateful decision.

Newsom believed enslaved African American women and girls were human chattel for the use and pleasure of white society, particularly, wealthy white men like himself. Newsom "had set out to purchase a replacement for his wife, dead now for nearly a year...A healthy sixty years of age, Newsom needed more than a hostess and manager of household affairs; he required a sexual partner."[256] He paid for the teenage girl from a trader in Audrain County, which was "approximately forty miles and required at least a day's ride" from his home. Apparently, he could not wait to violate her body, so he raped her on his way home the first day of her enslavement with him. Celia's "assigned task on the farm seems to have been that of cook, but the testimony at her trial suggests that throughout the period Robert Newsom regarded her primarily as his concubine."[257] We learn that Newsom sexually assaults Celia against her will regularly. Her cabin is close enough to the main house so that Newsom has nearby access to her.

Calloway County Culture

Calloway County is part of the "Little Dixie" region, which maintains the culture of its early settlers who migrated from the South. The name "Little Dixie" referred to "the midsection of Missouri, where Southern sympathies, slavery, and Democratic politics had been prevalent."[258] Consequently, enslaved persons living in the "Little Dixie" region could expect little to no sympathy from their enslavers or residents in the thirteen counties that made up the region. In fact, according to Milton D. Rafferty, "the greatest concentration of slaves in rural Missouri was in the Little Dixie region in the central part of the state along the Missouri River, because it was settled by Southerners before the Civil War, and a plantation economy based on slavery was installed there."[259]

Celia died by execution via lynching in 1855 after the judge and a jury of six white men decided that her life was disposable and had no justifiable meaning that called for the sparing of her life.[260] Missouri law stated that a woman (meaning white) could defend herself from a rapist. However, in Celia's case, the judge refused to state this fact when he provided jury instructions.

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251 McLaurin, *Celia, A Slave,4.*; Rafferty, *Historical Atlas of Missouri, 36.*
252 McLaurin, *Celia, A Slave*, 2.
253 Ibid. 8.
254 Ibid.
255 Ibid.
256 McLaurin, 21.
257 Ibid., 11, 28.
258 Rafferty, *Historical Atlas of Missouri*, 33.
259 Ibid., 42.
260 McLaurin, 21.

Instead, his actions highlight one of the ways culture shaped Celia's trial and ultimately, her life chances. Her jury was not of her peers, but rather all men and all white.[261] Celia's attorney attempted to use the extant law in her case to cast Newsom's actions as rape. From Celia and her attorney's standpoint, the trial was about how a young woman endured rape by Newsom for five years, and her defense of herself from her enslaver's violations. Celia testified that she warned Newsom she would "hurt him" if he tried to rape her again.[262] She informed him that she had been sick, but Newsom's actions highlight the fact that he owned her body and could do whatever he pleased without concern for her illness. Whether he considered her request or not, his final actions tell us that he leaned into his own desires. His desires were the priority and not her feelings or wellbeing. The guilty verdict handed down by the white male jury apparently agreed that Celia was not the victim of rape, and that Newsom was the victim of Celia's criminality.

The records show that Celia had no support in her actions, even from her boyfriend named George. We discover in the court documents that George told Celia that "he would have nothing more to do with her if she did not quit the old man."[263] We do not know for sure whether the threat made by George was a primary reason for her demands for Newsom to stop sexually assaulting her, but the fact that this threat became a part of the court record illuminates the power of patriarchy. George is an example of the masculine ego that was unable to reconcile the fact that Celia had no ownership over her body. Celia possibly asked Newsom not to rape her early on, but she understood that if she wanted to survive and care for her children, resisting Newsom's assaults would not accomplish that goal. As we learn from other experiences of enslaved women, children were one of the main reasons the women were less likely to attempt escape permanently versus temporarily.[264] George's threat that Celia had better stop allowing the "old man" to rape her seems unreasonable and questionable considering he himself, as her lover, could have made the demand to Newsom instead of demanding Celia to do it. We do not know how long Newsom enslaved George or whether he saw Celia's demand as more influential than his own. But George both denied guilt in Newsom's death and named his girlfriend, Celia, as the perpetrator, in order to save his own life.

Small-Scale Enslaving

The small-scale enslaving households typical of Missouri are evident in the Newsom farm when we look at actions taken by Celia. Newsom's ownership of six enslaved persons highlights a norm of less than twenty seen more commonly in the southern plantations during the antebellum period. Newsom's small-scale farm also shows how enslaved people had closer interpersonal relationships than southern plantations. The other residents in the Newsom household were his two adult daughters, the oldest, Virginia, and Mary, the youngest, aged thirty-six and nineteen in 1855, respectively. Virginia had three young children, James Coffee Waynescot, aged twelve, Thomas Waynescot, about nine, and Amelia Waynescot, about six years of age. Billy was born after Virginia moved to her father's home without her husband, so he and his father's last name is unknown.

Celia used her access to Newsom's daughters as a way to plead for support and navigate her circumstances of regular rape by Newsom and her relationship with George, an enslaved

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261 Ibid.
262 Ibid. 50.
263 Ibid., 30.
264 Camp, *Closer to Freedom,* 37.

man. Although Celia did not get the support she hoped for from the Newsom daughters to stop Newsom from raping her, we see that interacting and making requests to family members was not out of line with the culture of the Newsom household. Additionally, Celia's request for Newsom's grandson, James Coffee, to unknowingly assist her in getting rid of Newsom's remains, shows that she had certain forms of "privilege" that other enslaved women did not have based on the culture of their region and/or specific enslaving household environment.

After killing Newsom, it seems she would be distraught and intensely frightened about what would happen to her, and especially her children. While this might be true, she did have the wherewithal to gather her thoughts and figure out a plan to hide her actions in Newsom's death. She used her interpersonal relationship with the grandson and asked him to help her get rid of the body. As if she were a typical adult giving the grandson duties for the day, Celia got him to unknowingly spread his grandfather's cremated ashes around the plantation.

Diagonality: Regional Physical Space

We do not know for sure whether Celia had access to a community of enslaved people other than the five enslaved males on the Newsom farm. We know that her cabin was only yards from the main home, so it was less likely that she would have visitors from enslaved women or others, especially since Newsom frequented her cabin whenever he felt the desire to do so. As the sole young woman in isolation from other enslaved women, she must have longed to commune with other women for the type of support and wisdom that enslaved women created and maintained in their communities.[265] She might have passed on information or requests through the men who would have access to the outside world. Maybe if she were able to regularly converse with other enslaved women, she could better endure her torture. Maybe the threat from George would not have affected her so intensely had she been able to discuss it with other women who may have told her not to allow his ego to influence her decision. Maybe the other enslaved women would have tried to encourage her to think about her children and what would happen to them if she is imprisoned and executed because of her decision to disobey her enslaver.

Her children were in her cabin when Newsom tried to enter and abuse her. Surely, she tried to circumvent them witnessing another rape of their mother and the fear and trauma it caused them. Had she decided in that moment to not only shield herself from his violence, but also her young daughters? She knew the dangers that awaited them and must have wrestled with them. Did she take action to save her daughters from a life of terror? What would become of her daughters and her unborn child? Had she thought through the possibilities but still decided on death to her enslaver? We may never know the answers because her thoughts were not significant enough for the community and courts to record. And like her thoughts, her life was not valuable for saving either.

Diagonality is important to consider here in Celia's life because it highlights how the context of her physical space, and her proximity to or away from a community of enslaved women, shapes the actions and experiences of Celia and other women like her. Enslavement was a basic fact, so the women were accustomed to what it generally took to survive. However, additional challenges shaped the ways they had to negotiate life and having a community of women to help guide decisions was crucial, especially for Celia, who lived in an isolated environment.

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[265] Ibid., 30-31.

Diagonality and Rivers

T.S. McMillin speaks of the paradoxical nature of rivers, telling us that "rivers move…stay…connect…[and] separate."[266] This complicated nature of rivers also reflects how diagonality shaped the lives of the enslaved population differently than that of white society. The impact on enslaved African American men and women was also unique to each group because of the way gender determined their fates. Nonetheless, the (move)ment of rivers allowed them to flow "over land, through history, and among diverse groups of people, changing considerably from their source to their destination."[267] With the flow of river waters, there was the possibility of escape for the enslaved. However, because of the types of labor performed by African American men, such as working on steamboats, allowed for opportunities to travel, maintain a degree of autonomy, and – more importantly – develop a unique community out of sight of white eyes."[268] All of these factors benefitted the men, while they were rarely possible for most of women. But the rivers did enable enslaved women a kind of autonomy when it came to escaping enslavement for themselves and their children by allowing the rivers to carry them away from life altogether. An example is the well-known story of Margaret Garner, who, after being found by her enslaver's overseer, tried to kill all of her children, only succeeding with the death of her baby daughter.[269]

The movement of the rivers, like that of the migration of people and their ideologies, were also key to African American women's experiences, and highlight the rivers and diagonality's complexity. Witnessing the loss of loved ones being taken away from the shores forced the women to hold their families in memory because they rarely ever saw them again. But after their emancipation, whether before or after 1865, the women would use the rivers to go searching for their lost kin. The duality of losing kin to the river and finding them again through that same river transport, can be likened to how African American women experienced and utilized relationships with white individuals, sometimes gaining, and sometimes losing their ability to obtain access to things like freedom or favors, or simply food. When the rivers move, so do people. Whether people are connected or separated depended on the diagonal factors that intersected in the spaces and the moments that the women found themselves within. The meaning of rivers is never static, just as the elements of diagonality (culture and geography) are constantly changing depending on temporality. These are the aspects African American women like Celia, Ester, and Agnes, had to contend with in nineteenth century Missouri.

Celia's proximity to the Missouri River from Fulton was about twenty miles from the Newsom farm, and Celia probably considered it as a possibility for escape. But, with her two young daughters, three years-old and nine months, conceived from the rape of her enslaver, and with another baby on the way, escape was not much of an option.[270] Unless she left her children

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266 T.S. McMillin, *The Meaning of Rivers: Flow and Reflection in American Literature*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011), xii.

267 Ibid.

268 O. Vernon Burton, Troy Smith, and Simon Appleford, "African Americans in the Mississippi River Valley, 1851-1900," Northern Illinois University Digital Library, https://digital.lib.niu.edu/twain/liberty

269 l. Maria Child, *The Duty of Disobedience to the Fugitive Slave Act: an Appeal to the Legislators of Massachusetts* (Boston: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1860), 17.

270 Traci Wilson-Kleekamp, "Descendants of Celia and Robert Newsom Speak," *Genealogy* 4, no. 2 (2020): p. 49, https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy4020049. According to an interview with both Celia's descendant, and her

at the Newsom property, escape seemed futile. Being so close to the river must have given her ideas or hope for an escape away from her life of enslavement and the desire for reunification with her family. The Underground Railroad was "running" during Celia's lifetime of enslavement, and maybe she attempted to, thought of, or asked about how she might access the "railroad" prior to, and after giving birth to her children.

Significance

Celia's trial and execution, like the lynching of enslaved and free African Americans throughout history, must have frightened many in the community and caused them to abort plans for causing harm to their enslavers. It may have emboldened others.

The story of Celia is important because it shows the continuum of racialized gendered terror for African American women, and the African American community in general. It also shows Celia's agency and how she used it to pursue amelioration by putting a permanent stop to the sexual assaults of Newsom. She decided her own fate. Maybe her pursuit was not just to stop Newsom, but also to leave a legacy to her children and community. In the eyes of the African American community, it could be said that she died in a "blaze of glory," because she defied slavery's permanent hold on her life. She defied the belief that African American enslaved women had no agency and were content in their existence.

Ester, Celia, Agnes Evans' voices were barely audible or muffled in the archives. Diagonality shaped the ways each woman enacted agency for herself in pursuit of redress. The diagonal afforded Ester and Agnes more possibilities than it did Celia, but Celia did not accept the limitations of her existence. She redressed her grievances with Newsom on the fateful night that she held her ground against his attack. His arrogance blinded him to the idea that Celia had the courage to follow-through on her threats to "hurt him." The laws of Missouri had always protected his "property" rights so he had no reason to believe that a young, enslaved woman would deny him of those rights. Living along the diagonal in the region of "Little Dixie" did not stop Celia from pursuing redress. Although we cannot know how she expressed herself and the exact words she chose because the archives do not provide them, the archives cannot deny Celia's self-definition and self-determination that led her to replace her would-be archival silence and erasure with Newsom's literal silence and erasure.

For Ester and Agnes, diagonality allowed them more possibilities for social mobility, but it did not lessen their gendered forms of oppression. Like Celia, their bodies labored and reproduced laborers. Geospatially, they had access to resources, like free and enslaved Black women who could teach them how to negotiate in the enslaver's home. These three women were all concubines, and their proximity to their enslavers gave them peculiar and nuanced access to some of the enslaver's valuables, as well as to the enslaver's thoughts. This access is rooted in diagonality. Agnes' ability to take possession of a large amount of personal property from Fernando's land, tells us that her access to it was a key factor to redressing transgressions against her, whether from decades earlier or just prior to Fernando's death. Likewise, Ester's removal of manumission and land deed documents for her and her descendants would be related to her knowledge of documents' location. Important deeds are typically locked away or hidden to avoid someone stealing them. Consequently, the diagonal of geo-culture impacts the different pathways to redress. We do not know how they made decisions about redress, because of

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enslaver, Robert Newsom's descendant, Celia gave birth to children fathered by Robert Newsom. She had two daughters and was pregnant with another child, when she defended herself against and killed Newsom in 1855.

silencing, but if we consider the uniqueness of each woman's experiences through the lens of diagonality, we might just hear a bit of what they had to say.

Chapter 3
Navigating Patriarchy Along the Diagonal and Theoretical Musings Around the Archive

In her article titled "Writing Black Beauty," Jennifer Nash calls for Black feminist writing practices that are *beautiful*, which she defines in numerous ways, drawing on Saidiya Hartman's *critical fabulation*,[271] Christina Sharpe's *wake work*,[272] and Patricia J. Williams' *her shape and his hand*,[273] to name a few.[274] Beautiful writing is about taking risks to describe characteristics, experiences, and actions of Black women. It is necessary because of the exclusionary practices of the archive, and the ways Black women are erased on the one hand, and hypervisibilized on the other. The "historical possibility and violence, potentiality and trauma,"[275] are central to the archive, especially when "troubled"[276] by new ways of thinking and writing through its sources. Noting the history of academia's policing of Black women's nontraditional scholarship, Nash pushes for beautiful writing because of how it can enliven readers, and the writers themselves, as we "situate ourselves in the text."[277] Nash invites Black feminists to use our lived experiences and "long investment in doing justice to what can be sensed, but not named," in order to write what we do not and cannot know, while at the same time, intuitively affectively, knowing. [278]

Nash draws on the work of Williams in calling the practices of Black feminist theorists "an act of sacrifice" that requires "their prose" to be "often risky, personal, and sacrificial-to make readers feel, and even to make us feel."[279] This type of writing, Nash asserts, is what Ruth Behar considers "writing vulnerably."[280] Vulnerability opens the door to precariousness, yet allows writers to engage in conscientious social justice work that attends to the continuity of loss derived from the *afterlife of slavery*.[281] This afterlife remains part and parcel of Black life, life that is still haunted by a legacy of violence, loss, and trauma. The Combahee River Collective, a group of Black feminist activists, embodied and practiced work on behalf of Black women and all women of color, asserting that they were "actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression"[282] Their "Black Feminist Statement" is an example of beautiful writing because it seeks to speak on behalf of an oppressed group, in order to confront and denounce the systems of patriarchy, capitalism, and racism, that shape how Black women

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271 Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*.;..."Venus in Two Acts."

272 Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2016).

273 Patricia J. Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

274 Jennifer C. Nash, "Writing Black Beauty" *Signs, Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 2019, vol 45, no. 1, 102.

275 Ibid., 106.

276 Jennifer Morgan, 2016 "Accounting for 'The Most Excruciating Torment': Gender, Sexuality, and Trans-Atlantic Passages" *History of the Present* 6(2): 184-207 quoted in Nash, "Writing Black Beauty."

277 Nash, "Writing Black Beauty," 103.

278 Ibid., 104.

279 Ibid., 103.

280 Ibid.

281 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts."

282 Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith (Eds.), *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave,* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1982); "A Black Feminist Statement" was written in 1977, 13.

experience life.[283] Their group formed because of their shared intersectional experiences of marginalization, and their need to produce analyses and practices that could lead to the elimination of their oppressions.[284]

Black women historians are no less connected to, and subjected to violence, loss, and trauma, and drawing upon our own experiences can draw us closer to the women we study, informing our understanding of what it might mean to walk in their shoes. Nash proposes a type of writing that reflects upon the necessity to write affectively, using "strategies of writing…that reflexively grapple with the historian's own longings."[285] In this way, Sharpe asks what it means to unflinchingly assert our knowledge that is drawn from "sensual, spiritual, creative, and corporeal ways of knowing."[286] Writing affectively liberates. It empowers us to more confidently put ourselves alongside our subjects, drawing on our own loss while simultaneously attempting to feel and know the ancestor's loss from the past in the present.

When we take more informed risks, and reject the archive's assumed certainty, we gain insights that generate beautiful writing. It is important to underscore "informed risk," that is thinking with, alongside, and through documents. Surrounding these documents with context and content presumed or traditionally understood outside the archival scope, complicates historical methods and opens possibilities. Nash and other Black feminist writers acknowledge archival limitations, and at the same time, work within the limits using interdisciplinary methods and multiple theories. In this way, they benefit from a practice of care and defense of Black women ancestors.[287] Patricia Hill Collins' Black feminist epistemology uses "connected knowers," the tenets of "personal responsibility," and "an ethics of care," which allows Black feminists writers to maintain a connection to the ancestors through close proximity.[288] In other words, the afterlife of slavery congeals Black women's proximity to oppression and marginalization, both past and present. However, the ensuing care by contemporary Black feminists through beautiful writing, attends to Sharpe's requirement to care for the dead.[289]

Sharpe uses the idea of the term "wake" in what she calls "wake theory," referring to a disturbance, and a consequence of that disturbance. As a verb, to wake up is a disruption, as in awakening from one's sleep – disturbing sleep. Used another way, it is to wake up from ignorance and to become aware of something. This definition of wake is a movement from not knowing to becoming knowledgeable in order to gain better insight into a meaningful way of thinking and understanding. Wake as a verb requires action on the part of the person who becomes (a)wake, such that either physically or abstractly, the person enacts wakefulness. In this way, Sharpe develops the idea of "wake work" that "require new modes of writing," and for the historian, new modes of rigorously reading with and beyond archives.[290]

Black women and girls experienced violence during their lives, and again in the archive after their deaths, because of its power to enact the violence of silencing and erasure on their dead bodies. Hartman's critical fabulation[291] is another method of writing about Black women

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283 Ibid.
284 Ibid.
285 Ibid., 107.
286 Nash, "Writing Black Beauty," 105.
287 Ibid., 105-106.
288 Patricia Hill-Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1998); Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*.
289 Ibid., 113.
290 Sharpe, *In the Wake.*
291 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 11.

and girls' "encounter with power" that misrepresents or negates their existence in public memory. Invested in "laboring to paint as full a picture of the[ir] lives" as possible, Hartman uses informed speculation and a "critical reading" of the archive.[292] Her goal of "redressing the violence" against unnamed enslaved subjects, results in her assertion of "writing at the limit of the unspeakable and the unknown"[293] to "tell an impossible story."[294] However, she grapples with the idea of filling the empty spaces of dispossessed Black lives in a way that does not mimic the violence of the archive. In her attempts to develop an appropriate narrative, Hartman is not only telling an impossible story, but also "amplify[ing] the impossibility" of its telling.[295] In other words, she acknowledges the inability to develop a storyline about women and girls when there is no recorded documentation about them. And she magnifies the fact that there are details "we cannot know," not only because there is no documentation, but also because the archival sources originated from people who saw the women and girls as property, rather than humans. Thus, we cannot know the thoughts of those silenced in the archive. Hartman disrupts the unknowing to posit a method of risky, affective, and vulnerable writing, that is in line with Nash's notion of beautiful writing. It opens space for a Black women historian like me to imagine and critically speculate how Agnes Evans may have, could have, or possibly, thought about her life and decisions.

In order to construct a narrative for Agnes, I utilize critical fabulation as a way of "reading against the grain."[296] There is a paucity of documents to represent Black women and tell the story of Agnes, and women like her. The way I read against the grain in order to carefully speculate is to use available fragmented primary sources. Black feminist scholars empower me to both connect archival dots and think beyond the hardcore understanding of verifiable evidence. This method has generated a genealogical connection in my exploration of Agnes' life, and of her descendants. Documents link Agnes with Fernando A. Evans, a powerful white enslaving patriarch in the nineteenth century. However, there is no direct paper trail to one of the people Fernando enslaved, a man named Andrew Evans. The relational connection between Fernando, Agnes, and Andrew happens when weaving together context, archival remnants, and theory, engendering informed speculations. The cross fertilization of method and theory is an effort to make lives like Agnes' whole. One way of not reinscribing the violence of the archive on Black women subjects is to try to make them fully whole and human. This can materialize with remnants and speculation.

In traditional historical methods there is resistance against speculation. I ask why do we resist speculation? For whom do we resist? I put in many labor hours to bring humanity to Agnes' life, to present it as more than just the few documents that mention her name. Therefore, I create a triangle between Fernando, Agnes, and Andrew showing the archival power that can occur when we use intuitive and informed speculation. It is intuitive and informed because we know that white men raped enslaved Black women, and from those encounters of terror the historical record is clear about the undocumented and silenced lineage of mulatto children. The continuity of loss and longing related to Black women's stories remains central to my experiences as a historian and Black woman. Consequently, if detailed narratives of Black women are not retrievable in the archives, I must *not* resist speculation. The design of the archive

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292 Ibid., 1.
293 Ibid., 1.
294 Ibid., 11.
295 Ibid.
296 Ibid.

may resist representation of Black women's humanity, but cutting-edge Black women scholars resist that resistance.

The use of primary sources that mention Agnes are but remnants that both present and under-present her full humanity and existence. Denied the ability to read and write and forced to draw her name as a singular letter, X, the archive marks Agnes as a singular, one-dimensional character. Although retrievable in the archive, we cannot know what her kin knew about her. This fact is why she remains "largely outside of the archive," while the attorney who wrote her testimony is the one "whose public life is well documented."[297] There is much complexity to her life that is inaccessible. I recognize and acknowledge "the limits" and the "impossibility of fully recovering the experience" of Agnes while enslaved and after emancipation.[298] I also understand that there are unlikely sources that contain enough information to spark new insights, either about Agnes or where more details can be found. Like Hartman, who uses numerous archival documents, one of which is the Works Progress Administration (WPA) interviews, my study specifically draws on an interview of a formerly enslaved mulatto man named Andrew Evans. Andrew provides knowledge and insight about his experiences with his former enslaver, Fernando A. Evans.[299] Other sources show that F. A. Evans enslaved both Agnes and Andrew, which fills in archival gaps about Agnes.

Writing about Agnes and other African American women requires the "forms of knowledge and practice not generally considered legitimate objects of historical inquiry or appropriate or adequate sources for history making."[300] Such that, what and who is studied is typically authorized by a white supremacist patriarchal standard that originally did not include African American women until the late twentieth century.[301] Power is inherent in patriarchy, which authorizes men to subjugate those who they deem as their inferiors.[302] Consequently, African American women who are positioned hierarchically at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder, simultaneously because of their gender along with their race, are perpetually impacted by patriarchal power. For example, their prominence within the "feminization of poverty" has its roots in slavery, Jim Crow, and neoliberal politics. All of which are linked to white supremacist imperialist capitalist patriarchal influence.[303]

The power of patriarchy has historically, and continues to, pit vulnerable Black men against vulnerable Black women, reinforcing and maintaining the women's oppression. Black

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297 Nash, "Writing Black Beauty," 102.

298 Ibid., 11.

299 Fernando A. Evans also shows up in the archives as "F. A. Evans." See Franklin County, Missouri, Probate Records, Box 30, Folder 19, Estate of Fernando A. Evans, (1869), Certificate of Publication, 4 December 1871; *Missouri Secretary of State.*

300 Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 11.

301 White, *Ar'n't I A Woman, 3-4*.; Davis, "Reflections," 81.

302 Persons who do not identify as men include children, women, and those who identify as non-binary and are not acknowledged by heterosexual/cis men. The latter is not a consistent status since depending on the space they are in, non-binary identified persons may "read" as cis men, and therefore receive treatment as such.

303 The feminization of poverty "refers to the phenomenon that women and children are disproportionately represented among the world's poor compared to men." Christensen M.A. (2019) Feminization of Poverty: Causes and Implications. In: Leal Filho W., Azul A., Brandli L., Özuyar P., Wall T. (eds) Gender Equality. Encyclopedia of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-70060-1_6-1; *The Feminization of Poverty: Facts and Figures*. Sacramento, CA: California. Commission on the Status of Women, 1983. https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cbibliographic_details%7C2509487.

feminist writers like Michelle Wallace,[304] bell hooks,[305] Audre Lorde,[306] Elaine Brown,[307] and The Combahee River Collective,[308] among others, provide analysis and examples of how Black women experienced sexism via Black men, in areas, for example, of family, community, employment, and Black nationalist organizations. From rape, harassment, domestic abuse, and gendered expectations of subordination, Black men exerted patriarchal power over Black women.

Although there are moments when the women have a form of power, especially within the institution of the family, women understand their power is fleeting. Ula Y. Taylor coins the idea of "trumping patriarchy" to interpret the performances of Nation of Islam (NOI) women who desire to maintain their male/husband-headed family power structure.[309] Trumping patriarchy refers to "using one's own ingenuity to manipulate social relations steeped in structured power."[310] NOI women believed in the patriarchal system that positions them with less power than their male partners. However, the women were not powerless, and they still navigated within the NOI system in the best interest of their families. Sister Belinda Ali, Muhammad Ali's first wife, tells how she improved her husband's public image by writing his speeches because that was an area where he did not shine, as he did in the boxing ring.[311] In the public sphere, Sister Belinda remained silent about her writing and publicist skills, allowing her husband to consume all credit and prominence, as the system of patriarchy required.[312]

I also consider Sister Belinda's writing beautiful. It does not reference Black women, or tell stories about them specifically, but I argue that Taylor's storytelling about this Black woman who writes beautifully in the interest of her husband, engenders the liberatory spirit of Black women's beautiful writing. Nash refers to beautiful writing as affective, and as a reader, Sister Belinda's story about Muhammad Ali empowers both of them differently. Beautiful writing allows Sister Belinda to see beauty on her own terms. These terms and others like them, often slip through the cracks of the archives because of patriarchal power. This fact pushes Black women historians to utilize interdisciplinary methods in an effort to capture human possibilities. There are times, however, when the unknown is unrecoverable.

Beautiful writing is also situated along the diagonal. These diagonal lines intersect from the writer to the reader, with the reader being moved by the prose, that are the base of the Black feminist practices, such as vulnerable and risky prose. According to Jennifer Morgan, the power of the archive positions Black women as "unsettle[d]" because of "our always-failed effort" to locate "verifiable truths."[313] But how can silence and erasure verify anything? The diagonal is where I am able to harness beautiful writing in an attempt to imagine "what cannot be verified,"[314] while simultaneously using the archives to incorporate what can be verified. Hartman's method of critical fabulation moves my writing along the diagonal in terms of the constant rotation of impossibility followed by possibility. My writing is always crossing

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304 Michelle Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Super Woman* (New York: Verso, 1990).
305 bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman: black women and feminism*, (Boston: South End Press, 1981).
306 Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, Crossing Press, 2007), 60-65.
307 Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992).
308 Hull et al., *All the Women.*
309 Ula Y. Taylor, *Promise of Patriarchy*, 120.
310 Ibid., 122.
311 Taylor, *Promise of Patriarchy,* 122.
312 Ibid.
313 Jennifer Morgan. 2016. "Accounting for 'The most Excruciating Torment': Gender, Sexuality, and Trans-Atlantic Passages." *History of the Present* 6(2):184-207.
314 Ibid., 106.

boundaries that intersect and move past the restrictions of traditional archival requirements of verification. Black feminist approaches always resist the power that attempts to deny Black women's liberation, whether in our material circumstances or writing and research practices.

Locating any fragments of Agnes' life allow me to exhale momentarily. Yet, knowing primary sources originated by the power of patriarchy and white supremacy exasperates my efforts to tell Agnes' story. I am unable to locate much of Agnes' life details, so there are moments of loss that I both feel and want to express in my writing about Agnes. Diagonality holds instability and ambiguity of uncontextualized sources together, and because of this complexity, it opens space for beautiful writing. In other words, the archives' presentation of sources gives little, if anything, about Black women's lives. These sources are unstable and ambiguous because they provide no certainty for historians, but these aspects, along with the spectrum of available sources, are what create the diagonality of beautiful writing possibilities. The crosscurrents of diagonal spaces that bring together "the aesthetic properties of contemporary black feminist theoretical work"[315] intersect to create beautiful writing. For example, "writing vulnerably" challenges writers to "sacrifice" certainty for uncertainty when they write in a "risky, personal, sacrificial" way in order to evoke affect in their readers.

Marisa Fuentes asks the question, "How do we narrate the fleeting glimpses of enslaved subjects in the archives and meet the disciplinary demands of history that requires us to construct unbiased accounts from these very documents?"[316] On the one hand, this inquiry speaks to the attempted containment of archival silencing of Black women, and on the other, it informs my Black feminist approach to taking risks and "imagining the ordinary."[317] Drawing on scholars mentioned earlier, like Fuentes and Hartman, I metaphorically move archival sources, looking at them from all angles, in order to create an avenue that leads to insights about the women I study. For example, I considered the 1882 "sheriff's sale" against Agnes' land, which is a very brief note in the Franklin County Record. It states, "for taxes claimed by the collector."[318] This source comes from the local courthouse, which tells me that Agnes clearly owned land. Locating this document opened up a new route toward Agnes because of the typical paper trail that accompanies transfers of ownership. However, after four years of excavation, I have not been able to locate the origins of Agnes' land. The mortgage deed showing the conveyance of 40 acres of land described as Section 27 Township 42 Range 1 East, previously owned by Agnes at one point, seems just as inaccessible as Agnes' birthdate. On the one hand I ask, why is it so difficult to locate her original deed when the same lot of land is easily found in the name of owners subsequent to Agnes?[319] From another perspective, I thought of another route leading to Agnes' character and actions.

Although I was unable to locate her original deed of purchase, Agnes shows her intellect and agency when faced with the loss of her 40 acres of land in 1882. Here is a moment where diagonality appears to open possibilities for her. Because of her relationships to certain people in

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315 Ibid., 102.

316 Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives,* 1.

317 Nash, "Writing Black Beauty," 111.

318 Franklin County, Mo. Sheriff. Wm. M. Terry. *Sheriff's sale of real estate...for taxes claimed by collector Robert M. Armstrong.* Franklin County, 11-16-1882.

319 Franklin County, Missouri, 1 of 3 Document # D00O-00485; John Meyers of the County of Franklin and S. C. [illegible] of town of Moselle and Amanda B. Evans of City of St. Louis, 5 August 1892; Office of the Recorder of Deeds. This deed of trust states that the land is "the same tract heretofore occupied by Agnes Evans (colored) deceased." It does not tell us that Agnes owned the land or whether she was renting it, nor does it provide the time period that Agnes "occupied" the land.

the community, Agnes learned to navigate business dealings. Officials in the court, attorneys, judges, and other people knowledgeable about land, were associates and friends with Fernando. But my great-great-great-grandfather, Isaac Renfro, was very savvy in business and owned several parcels of land. So, he may have also shown her how to retrieve her foreclosed land. The sheriff's sale that forced the auctioning off of Agnes' land due to nonpayment of taxes, proceeded accordingly. Agnes owed sixty-six and ninety cents, plus an additional twenty dollars and seventy-nine cents for costs. She owed taxes for the years 1870 through 1877, 1879, and 1880. While we do not know how she accomplished the transaction, we know that Agnes Evans re-purchased the very land that she lost on the same day it was auctioned. It was sold right back to her, and she only paid one dollar and fifteen cents, instead of the eighty-seven dollars and sixty-nine cents that she owed before losing the land. The amount that Agnes paid to repurchase her land is not consistent with the value, and the process to buy land at an auction is very specific and not typical knowledge for the general population. Therefore, I contend that Agnes was able to move through a gap in the space of St. Clair, Missouri, based on the geo-culture of the community.

When writers are not afraid to use risky ideas, personal information, and allow themselves to write vulnerably, these factors move within a spectrum of affect that the writer and their audience can experience in differing ways. This movement by risky, personal, and vulnerable writing, creates geographic lines (vertical and horizontal) that cross emotional lines that move along the diagonal. For example, the personal line crosses vertically, and the vulnerable line crosses horizontally. The writer experiences affect that evokes fear that can be minimal or cause them high levels of anxiety. Yet, simultaneously, the creativity of the writing and the ideas that compel the writer to express themselves vulnerably intersects with feelings of joy and excitement. These affective factors move *along* the diagonal and move *through* the personal (vertical) and vulnerable (horizontal) lines, shaping the ways the writer experiences their writing (as they write), and their own reading of their writing. In this way, the writer is not only a producer, but also a consumer of their beautiful writing. I see this process as a beautiful form of writing from the standpoint of the writer's experience.

Patriarchal Power

Nash began her article inquiring into her mother's past and the desire to understand what she "could not know and might not ever know," because her mother passed away, taking to her grave whatever Nash desired to know. Nash references Williams' experiences related to her enslaved great-great-grandmother, whom she says, "is largely outside of the archive."[320] In contrast, Williams' ancestor's enslaver was a white man "whose public life is well documented."[321] It is from this point that I expand the story of Agnes Evans by first providing context about her enslaver, "whose public life" was also "well documented," leaving Agnes "largely outside the archive" in terms of who she was, how she lived, and turning points that marked the milestones of her life. Considering the minimal and fragmentary primary sources available on Agnes, I begin with the story of her enslaver, who had a high level of patriarchal power vested in him. I use Nash's work to think through my writing practice in order to interpret and represent the life of Agnes Evans, using fragments from archives that deny the fullness of her voice, character, and experiences – in other words, her life as a human.

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320 Nash, "Writing Black Beauty."

321 Ibid.

Thus, Agnes Evans' documented presence is intricately linked to her patriarch, Fernando A. Evans. In order to flesh out her circumstances and experiences, living in a patriarchal society, it is important to explore the life of men who shaped and grounded how she would move through the landscape of Missouri. Every choice she made reflected the complexity of her environment. Her pursuits of redress were happening in this context. As mentioned earlier, Fernando Evans is a powerful patriarch. Meaning, he has the ability to control and dominate, and he also has access to essential channels of social, economic and political power. His access to these channels is the result of his race, gender, and intergenerational wealth, such as social prestige and legal rights. Slavery was legal in Missouri and wealthy men like Fernando owned enslaved people as well as hundreds of acres of land, cementing their elite status in the state of Missouri.[322]

Fernando's family lineage gave him socioeconomic resources beyond that of most Missourians.[323] Fernando's family was wealthy, and he and his sister, Cinthiana Bumgartner, inherited valuable assets upon their father Henry's death. Fernando inherited land, "fifteen shares of Bank Stock of Ohio"...Also ten shares of Rail Road Stock in the Pittsburgh Maryville and Cincinnati Rail Road."[324] Another indicator of Fernando's family wealth is the very expensive cemetery where all of the integral members of the family were buried.[325]

Born in Virginia in the year 1811, Fernando had an entrepreneurial spirit and socioeconomic resources that allowed him to pursue his ambitions. Following his wealthy uncle, Augustus E. Evans,[326] Fernando moved to Missouri in 1834,[327] and set his sights on real estate, iron making, and lead mining.[328] Because of his privilege, he was able to take advantage of the Public Lands Act of 1820.[329] This federal Act lowered the price of land from two dollars to one dollar and twenty-five cents per acre, required an eighty acre minimum, and purchasers had to pay in full. The previous law allowed the use of credit when purchasing land, but the 1820 Act no longer allowed that option. While there was an increase in land sales due to the reduced price per acre, only those persons with large sums of money could pay the minimum amount of one hundred dollars. Fernando acquired several acres of land from Missouri's General Land Grant Office between the years 1837 and 1860 and was able to increase his wealth by selling his land

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322 According to the United States General Land Office registry, Fernando purchased nine tracts of land in his name alone, and nineteen with George L. Knuckolls, his business partner. Fernando purchased four tracts in 1837, two in 1843, one in 1844, one in 1848, and one in 1860. Together with Knuckolls, they purchased the nineteen tracts from the government in 1849. Fernando apparently followed his uncle, Augustus H. Evans, a successful St. Louis land dealer and commission merchant. Augustus had also taken advantage of the privilege to purchase several acres of land through the U.S. General Land Office, buying one parcel each in the years 1837, 1838, 1840, 1844, 1860, and 1861.

323 Henry H. Evans, "Last Will and Testament," (Washington Guernsey, Ohio, 1834).

324 Ibid.

325 Fernando A. Evans, 1869; Burial, Saint Louis, St. Louis City, Missouri, United States of America, Bellefontaine Cemetery; citing record ID 177370704, *Find a Grave*, http//www.findagrave.com.

326 Jon F. Bergenthal, "It Takes More Than Just Ore: Making Iron at Moselle," *Missouri Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (April 2013): pp. 125-143., n9, Augustus Evans is listed on the 1860 Census with $500,000 worth of real property (land) and $100,000 of personal property, 139.

327 Bergenthal, "It Takes More," 126.

328 Ibid., 126. As an agent of the Missouri Mining and Smelting Association in 1838, Fernando engaged in mining activities, and he also worked in the surveyor general's office as a clerk. He "began purchasing ore land for himself in Franklin County," and after meeting George Nuckolls, they became business partners making iron in 1847 that eventually failed.

329 3 Stat. 566 (Chapter 51), Legisworks https://govtrackus.s3.amazonaws.com/legislink/pdf/stat/3/STATUTE-3-Pg566.pdf

as it increased in value.[330] The 1850 Census was the first to provide the financial holdings of persons, along with the head of the household, occupation, birth year and location. Fernando made the list, which only noted citizens with a minimum of one thousand dollars of property holdings. He was shown as an iron master with one thousand dollars of assets.[331]

One aspect of Fernando's life and a reflection of the extent of his power is the fact that he experienced financial ruin in 1856 and was able to regain wealth and elite status before his death. Upon his death, Fernando's estate went into probate because he did not leave a will. And the probate record states that he left no heirs. [332] However, as I will discuss, what we might ask is whether he had biological heirs from the rape[333] of enslaved women that he claimed as his children. Some enslavers acknowledged their mulatto children, but most did not. Even though enslaved women like Thomas Jefferson's concubine, Sally Hemmings, were common knowledge of the men and women in his circle, he still did not claim them as his children.[334] For that reason, Sally's descendants continue to fight for acknowledgement from Thomas' white descendants, while most of the white descendants deny that Sally's descendants are of Thomas' lineage. Therefore, we can see the precarity around mulatto children verifying their white father's lineage.

The record states that Fernando's assets included "220 acres in Sections 33, 34 Township 42 Range 1 East; books; drafting and surveyor's tools."[335] Considering the major land and financial loss from his iron making partnership a little over a decade prior to his death, Fernando had re-established himself as a wealthy and prominent citizen of Franklin County. It is critical to fully grapple with the extent of Fernando's power as a patriarch to appreciate the choices Agnes made living as an enslaved woman. Fernando's power expands beyond the domestic sphere into public institutions such as the courts, which carry significant influence over the lives of enslaved people like Agnes. It is important to bear this in mind when considering how much Agnes was up against as she sought forms of redress.

As an owner, Fernando's rights to Agnes as "property" became vested with the power of the state. His power resided in the fact that he was not just Agnes' legal owner, but he had the authority from the state to control her body. Fernando's power was ultimately mapped onto the

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330 Gregory A. Boyd, *Family Maps of Franklin County, Missouri: with Homesteads, Roads, Waterways, Towns, Cemeteries, Railroads, and More* (Norman, OK: Arphax Pub. Co., 2005), 39, 275, 287, 335, 344.

331 Kiel, *The Centennial Biographical Directory,* 22.

332 Franklin County, Missouri, Probate Records, Box 30, Folder 19, Fernando A. Evans, 1869.

333 The subject of sexual intimacy between enslaved women and their white male enslavers, or white men generally, is somewhat nuanced. While there were enslaved women who might have had voluntary sexual relations with white men, what is clear is that power is inherent in those relationships. We are unable to disaggregate power from those situations because it was a key dynamic of patriarchy generally, and the enslaver/enslaved relations. Sally Hemings and Jefferson are a prime example. Jefferson never freed Sally, which is an indicator that she was his property rather than a respected intimate partner. Ester and Jacques are another example. According to *The Clamorgans*, people who remembered the romanticized story of Jacques and his enslaved concubine, Ester, noted a common thread about how "he had cared deeply for her," 40. Yet, the author, Winch, says the statement is "doubtful," and "if love ever factored into the tempestuous relationship of Ester and Jacques, so did the equally powerful emotions of greed, fear, and revenge," 40. The reason that "love" is precarious has to do with unequal power that often compelled enslaved women to act in ways that were transactional for their own benefit. Be it survival or other benefits. This does not mean that the women did not and could not acquire strong intimate feelings for their enslaver or other man. It is just to say that power dynamics must be acknowledged.

334 Kathleen M. Brown and Annette Gordon-Reed, "Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy," *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (1999): p. 900, https://doi.org/10.2307/2651028.

335 Franklin County, Missouri, Probate Records, Box 30, Folder 19, Fernando A. Evans, 1869.

courts, increasing the community's understanding of his legal rights, and further complicated how Agnes could obtain redress. In contrast to the enslaved status given to Agnes, entitlement was imparted to Fernando due to his financial status. Just as the construct of race arbitrarily placed superiority with Fernando, and enslaved Agnes for her race, patriarchy categorized Fernando's gender as deserving to not only dominate Agnes, but women in general. Consequently, as a wealthy white man, Fernando had the legal rights to Agnes' labor, including the children that resulted from her reproductive labor. It is likely that Agnes birthed children during her lifetime, and as Fernando's concubine, I assert that Fernando was the father of at least some of her children. I return to Nash's call to write beautifully, as I consider probabilities and possibilities of Agnes' life.

Speculating that Andrew Evans is the child of Fernando and Agnes provides a rich point of entry to understand the complex power relations at play and how Agnes negotiated her life with Fernando as her legal owner. In 1840, Fernando lived alone and had no enslaved persons as property.[336] However, a decade later, his household accounted for at least six enslaved persons, including Agnes and her children.[337] I am not asserting that Andrew is Fernando's son or that Agnes is Andrew's mother in fact. I am connecting these three persons because it makes sense based on the historical records that show white enslavers raping enslaved women who give birth to enslaved children who become additional enslaved labor. I am not speculating to create a tight narrative, but rather doing it along the lines of the power of patriarchy, which is different.

Historical methods resist this connection because we are so deeply invested in archival verification. If historical methods resist speculating about Andrew possibly being the child of Agnes and Fernando, what is at stake in this resistance? Does this continue the power to extend patriarchal power because the archives during this period are largely penned by white men? What is at stake when Black women historians are forced to exclusively rely on the archival records? We know that it is impossible to locate the full histories, stories, and experiences of Black women, and especially enslaved women. Why do we need to resist making Agnes more than the verifiable archival evidence?

Marisa Fuentes' discussion of Molly, the enslaved woman accused of poisoning a white man that was not her owner, speaks to Hartman's method of critical fabulation, as she delineates how she reads "along the bias grain of traditional archival sources…and…creates space for imagining the experiences and perspectives of enslaved women in all their, and our, uncertainties."[338] Like Nash, Fuentes argues that because of the archival violence toward Black women, "such records require this work."[339] One of the ways Fuentes accomplishes her work for enslaved Barbados women, is to speculate about "circumstances typical in urban slavery" in relation to "Molly and many enslaved women."[340] Similar to Fuentes, I consider what may have occurred to the subjects in my study, and how they may have felt or thought, in an attempt to write beautifully. When attempting to triangulate archival records, nineteenth century African American data is scarce. Consequently, I imagine intuitively with an eye toward re-presenting Agnes' life with slightly more detail than the archive allows.

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336 Kiel, *The Centennial Biographical Directory*, 22; In Kiel's directory, the 1840 Franklin County Census lists the head of household, name of the township, the number of white residents and enslaved persons. Fernando is listed without any enslaved or other persons in his household.

337 See Franklin County, Missouri 1850 Census. I assert that Agnes was part of the enumerated enslaved persons on the Slave Schedule based on my informed conclusion.

338 Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives,* 123.

339 Ibid.

340 Ibid., 112.

Connecting Agnes, Fernando, and Andrew Evans

As I mentioned in the introduction, it is an intuitive and informed speculation that Andrew was Agnes' son with Fernando Evans. Although limited, the historical record suggests that this is a possibility. John W. Blassingame footnotes the connection of Fernando A. Evans and Andrew Evans using the Franklin County 1850 Slave Schedule to verify the enslavement of Andrew by Fernando.[341] The schedule lists "F. A. Evans" as the owner of six enslaved persons: a twenty-seven year-old Black woman, an eleven year-old Black girl, a nine year-old Black boy, a six year-old mulatto boy, a four year-old Black girl, and a 2 year-old mulatto boy.[342] Throughout the archives, either F. A. Evans or Fernando A. Evans are used to identify the man that enslaved Andrew Evans, Agnes Evans, and others.[343] Andrew referenced "Mr. Evans" in his interview as his enslaver, stating,

> Mother and her considerable brood lived in a cabin a short piece away from Mr. Evans' home. Mother worked in the house and as we boys grew up we helped with farm work in the summer and in the winter in the mines which Mr. Evans had on his place…Mr. Evans himself was a grand gentleman, always kind and considerate. But, unfortunately, he had a driver – a man directly in charge of slaves…a regular Simon Legree, mighty handy with the whip and free with his words which sometimes cut as much as a whip.[344]

Andrew's name is not listed as the two-year-old mulatto boy on the Slave Schedule. However, Blassingame's text notes Andrew's 1932 Works Progress Administration interview that provides enough information to verify that Fernando enslaved Andrew and his family. Interviewed at the age of eighty-four, Andrew was born and enslaved in Missouri in 1848, and worked as a "field hand."[345] In the Census Slave Schedule, Andrew is the two-year-old mulatto boy, and based on his statements, the other children are his siblings and the one woman was his mother.

An analysis of Andrew's statement that his enslaver, Fernando, sought to send "all" of his property away for safekeeping, indicates Andrew and his family were the only enslaved "property" that Fernando himself owned.[346] It is also noted in the 1850 Slave Schedule that "the Evans Nuckolls & Co" had eight enslaved persons, in addition to the six owned by F.A. Evans, and one owned by his business partner, George Nuckolls.[347] The co-owned enslaved men and women range in age from twenty-three years to fifty years old for the men, and two women, aged twenty-five and forty years old. But these co-owned enslaved persons were not included in Andrew's description when he mentioned that he and his family were sent to Lincoln County in the care of Webb Houston.[348]

In his article, "It Takes More Than Ore: Making Iron at Moselle" by Jon F. Bergenthal,

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341 Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 585.

342 Slave Schedule, Franklin County, Missouri, 1850 Census, 635.

343 Slave Schedule, Franklin County, Missouri, 1850 Census, 635; memorial page for Fernando A. Evans (1812–Nov 1869), Find A Grave Memorial no. 177370704, citing Bellefontaine Cemetery, Saint Louis, St. Louis City, Missouri, USA.

344 Ibid., 585-586.

345 Ibid., 584.

346 Blassingame, *Slave Testimony,* 585.

347 Ibid.

348 Ibid.

writes about Fernando A. Evans and his business partner, George L. Nuckolls, explaining the reasons for their failed iron-making venture.[349] The factors contributing to their failed business were due to inexperience in iron-making, which created the issue of inadequate finances, along with not being in close proximity to a viable transportation system. Fernando and George added four additional partners from Kentucky for financial backing, but financial demands became too great. While debt accumulated quickly, profit did not materialize to offset the costs of building and operating the furnace blast that manufactured the iron. Of the six partners, Samuel Wheeler was the only one with experience in the iron business.[350] Fernando and George began their partnership February 10, 1848, and within two years, their business was struggling. By December 1856, the six partners had amassed losses of seventy thousand dollars. Fernando and George owed twenty-seven thousand dollars to their four partners and were unable to pay any of their debtors.[351] For Fernando, it was an extraordinary loss of not only cash, but several tracts of land that he acquired prior to his partnership with Nuckolls.[352]

Wealthy people commonly use legal loopholes to avoid consequences that negatively impact them, and Fernando was no different. Taking into consideration Fernando's business losses, it makes sense that he sought to protect the interests of his property. In his interview, Andrew stated that "he, his mother and his brothers and sisters were sent by Evans to Lincoln County for safe keeping in the family of Webb Houston due to conditions which threatened to sever Evans from all his property."[353] We can surmise that Andrew's statement was correct about "all" of Fernando's (human) property being sent away and "returned home" after "a hiatus of seven years being recorded."[354] Considering Fernando was "broke" and fighting a lawsuit that he eventually lost in 1856, it makes logical sense that he sent Andrew and his family away to avoid losing them to men seeking a financial judgment against him.[355]

Sending away his human "property" was not the only tactic Fernando used in an attempt to lessen his losses. He also transferred "his interest in the remaining lands [he owned] to his father, Henry, and his uncle, Augustus. He did this with the intent of placing his interest in the property beyond the reach of the [four] Kentucky partners."[356] The lawsuit filed against Fernando by the four partners ended in their favor, which left Fernando with no land. Lack of land does not mean lack of property during the slavery period, however.

Here is where I want to make a distinction related to Andrew's assertion that Fernando sought to avoid the loss of "all his property." Andrew is only referring to Fernando's human "property" as opposed to his land and non-human personal property. The fact that he uses the word "all" says that Andrew, "his mother and his brothers and sisters" were the total sum of the human "property" that Fernando owned.

I make note of Andrew's family as Fernando's human "property" in its entirety to assert that Agnes is Andrew's mother. According to the 1850 Census Slave Schedule, the sole enslaved woman "owned" by Fernando was twenty-seven years old, which is old enough to have given birth to all of the five children listed on the schedule.[357] In addition, a deed transferring

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349 Bergenthal, "It Takes More."
350 Ibid., 127.
351 Ibid., 134.
352 Boyd, *Family Maps*, 39, 275, 287, 335, 344.
353 Blassigame, *Slavery Testimony*, 585.
354 Ibid.
355 Bergenthal, "It Take More Than Just Ore," 134.
356 Ibid., 133.
357 1850 U.S. census, Franklin County, Missouri, slave schedule, district 31, 635.

ownership of land previously owned by Agnes' states, "(Agnes Evans former slave of F. A. Evans).[358] The parenthetical note is a glaring reminder that Agnes was formerly enslaved by Fernando. Although free, the afterlife of slavery insists that her body was controlled at one point and needed to continue to be part of the public record twenty-seven years after the emancipation of Black people. Thus, the archive refused to relinquish Agnes as a free subject, despite her legal freedom.

Agnes' relationship with the Evans family is intricately tied into slavery during freedom. It crosses slavery and freedom diagonally. There are times when it is impossible to think of her as a free subject. It is an incredibly complicated relationship that, like diagonality, is not linear. She moves in and out of the archive depending on her whether she was an eyewitness, laborer for whites, or her fungibility as an African American woman - what Hartman calls Venus. Outside of her serving capability to white society, Agnes is unnamed, or misnamed, as we see happen in the land deed that reminds us that she was once enslaved by Fernando.[359] She labored as a domestic and field laborer, and must have regularly engaged with Fernando's local family, which included his cousin, Walker Evans, and his wife, Amanda B. Evans, and Walker's father/Fernando's uncle, Augustus Heaslip Evans. The fact that Amanda B. Evans acquired land owned by Agnes for one dollar tells us that there are extenuating circumstances related to the conveyance of the property. Even more intriguing is the fact that Agnes acquired forty acres of land that was in the same area where Fernando owned land.[360]

As an enslaved woman, Agnes is connected to the family as a concubine, and from this position, she holds some form of privilege. It is possible that Fernando gave her the land she owned and eventually lost due to slavery's afterlife. Maybe she was able to earn an income during or after slavery, and she saved enough to purchase the land lot next to Fernando's land. There is no record of Agnes' original purchase or receipt of the land, however, there are several deeds and other evidence that she did own the forty acres. Agnes had a form of "privilege" as Fernando's concubine. The fact that she is a key witness in the probate record for the deceased Fernando Evans, regarding the oral contract between Fernando and Isaac Renfro, tells us that she has a long-term relationship with her former enslaver that gave her access to the disputed personal property in the embezzlement case against her. Although Agnes was no longer "owned" and became a landowner herself, patriarchy and white supremacy rendered her mute and disposable throughout her life. It is impossible to understand the varying angles that shape her relationship to the Evans family, but she negotiated it in ways that gave her access to resources that most formerly enslaved women could never imagine.

Who Was Agnes Evans?

Although we will never fully know who Agnes Evans was, her life, like so many other Black women during the nineteenth century, is worthy of speculative engagement. Agnes Evans exemplified intellect and agency, as well as beauty. Born around the second or third decade of the nineteenth century, Agnes knew that her life meant more than her legal status - "slave." Her kinfolk raised her to believe in herself and her abilities. She rebuked the idea that her body was someone's property, and she would eventually demonstrate this belief through her actions of

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358 Franklin County Recorder 1 of 1 document# 6WD033-00211, September 28, 1888.

359 Ibid.

360 *Atlas Map of Franklin County, Missouri*, *Atlas Map of Franklin County, Missouri* (Saint Louis Atlas Publishing Company, 1878), p. 27. The 1878 map shows Agnes Evans' property in Section 27, T42, R1E, which is just northeast of Fernando A. Evans' mine called "Evans Lode" in section 27.

agency. Not one to back down from her principles, Agnes defied the labels that marked her body at birth. Her date and place of birth are possibly lost forever - filed under "unfit for history,"[361] but the fragmented shadows that she left behind contribute to the ongoing excavation and understanding of African American women's narratives.

The ways she used her intellect and agency as a woman in a white man's world, highlights how this ordinary woman accomplished the extraordinary, becoming a landowner. We do not know if Agnes was born into Missouri slavery or forced to leave family and kin to walk from the southern states like Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee, like many other enslaved people brought to Missouri. What is clear is that she lived most of her life in Franklin County, Missouri. The total population of Franklin County in 1860 was only 18,085. Of that number, 16,465 were white, 1,601 were enslaved, and 19 were "free colored." Maybe Agnes was freed prior to Missouri's emancipation of their enslaved population on January 1, 1865. More than likely, she remained enslaved, forced to expend her labor as another person's property. Agnes lived in a rural city called St. Clair. Many of the businessmen must have known Agnes, because Fernando was a prominent citizen who owned the Evans Mine also known as the Evans Lode. In 1849, Evans and his business partner, George L. Huckles *(sic)* built the Moselle Iron Furnace "in the interest of parties residing in Kentucky."[362]

Agnes' status and position as an enslaved Black woman is always already an "outsider within" because of her race and gender. According to bell hooks, as an outsider within, she "developed a particular way of seeing reality."[363] We also learn that "Black domestic workers stress the sense of self-affirmation they experienced at seeing white power demystified." As her enslaver's concubine, Agnes acquired privilege as an outsider within in ways that benefitted and traumatized her. Access to key members of society was one benefit that she would use in her business transactions. It is within reason to also speculate that she learned the weaknesses of her enslaver who is her employer after emancipation. Viewing and overhearing Fernando's conversations about his failed business with Nuckolls,[364] land purchases, arguments with family, friends, and associates, and importantly, any transactions or issues related to herself and her children, gave Agnes audible and visual insight.

As an *outsider,* because of her gendered and racialized position, she is forced into legal bondage. Like the other property that Fernando owns, Agnes' value is linked to what she can produce. That is to say, Agnes' significance is attached to her production and profit, for and to Fernando. In this way, Fernando can completely dominate, abuse, and control Agnes, without legal recourse. Agnes' life was shaped around Fernando's legal rights. Nevertheless, Agnes', like most Black women who lived in the midst of slavery, relied upon her own ingenuity to do more than just survive. In fact, the information she gathered from being Fernando's concubine, she ultimately uses to pursue redress.

Working in the Evans mine, while enslaved and after emancipation, Agnes engaged with men regularly because of the gendered nature of the mining industry. The main laborers were men. Therefore, although some women hauled wood and other materials in the mines, the

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361 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*.

362 Bergenthal, "It Takes More."

363 Patricia Hill Collins, (1986) "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought" Oxford University Press, *Society for the Study of Sociological Problems*, S14.

364 The spelling of Nuckolls varies. See footnote 8 in Jon F. Bergenthal, "It Takes More," 139. "'Nuckols' is the spelling of the family name in Kentucky. The spelling of George's name while in Missouri was most often 'Nuckolls.'" After leaving Missouri, George went to Iowa, where he adopted the spelling of 'Nickolls.' Later, while living in Colorado and Tennessee, George used the original spelling of 'Nuckols."

majority of mining workers were men.[365] Agnes could observe the type of treatment she and other African American women received versus white women, and also versus African American and white men. She could observe interactions by white and Black men and hear their conversations. For example, she testified to witnessing the oral contract between Renfro and her former enslaver, Evans. More than likely, Fernando did not request she be present during the conversation. And she may have secretly listened in without Fernando's knowledge. Agnes does not provide the location of the conversation or how she came to witness it. And the detail that she provides tells us that the time it took to hear all of what she testified to would not be from her walking past the two men. More than likely, the men were inside the house discussing the contract, and Agnes was inside as a domestic worker. She explained intricate details about the Evans/Renfro contract: Renfro's labor fees, duties, where and how long he was to work in and around the Evans Mine, who he supervised and paid for labor, and that each was a 50/50 partner in the arrangement. Since men in general considered women insignificant and inferior in business affairs, neither Fernando nor Isaac probably thought about Agnes' presence during the contract negotiations.

This position of invisibility is where we can envision her empowerment as an "outsider-within." The knowledge of the partnership arrangement gave her insight into the relationship between the partners, which she could use to her benefit. Collins explains that the "outsider-within" position allows Agnes and other subordinated African American women to "foster new angles of vision."[366] Agnes' ability to move across the gender line empowers her because she is able to observe how different people are treated, and over time she would be able to strategize the most effective way to deal with those people. It also allowed her to pass on her insight to other African American women, and from these interactions, Audre Lorde's, James Scott's, and Patricia Hill Collins' assertions about the outsider-within, [367] hidden transcripts,[368] and oppositional knowledge,[369] respectively, are key to survival. From the conversations among African American women like Agnes, theories about power and how to resist and subvert it comes to fruition. Resisting power does not always translate to not being powerlessness.

In a Missouri newspaper, the *Union Record*, dated November 10, 1887, it is on record that eighteen dollars was given to Agnes Evans as one of twelve persons listed under the section entitled "Allowances to paupers."[370] On February 9th of the following year, the same newspaper records Agnes Evans' receipt of eight dollars while on the pauper's list.[371] It is likely that Agnes Evans died a pauper, which was not an uncommon occurrence for formerly enslaved African American women in Missouri. Although the end of her life seems to fit the narrative about African American women in Missouri and the U.S. generally, Agnes disrupts the typical trajectory of lifelong poverty that most African American women experienced.

Who was Agnes Evans, and why is her story worth learning about? Agnes had not taken actions that were seen as newsworthy by white people in her community. From all accounts, Agnes Evans lived the typical life of an African American woman. Unlike Harriet Jacobs, Ester Clamorgan, and Celia, whose lives were captured and historicized, Agnes' life is

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365 Barbara Green, "Slave Labor at the Maramec Ironworks, 1828-1850," *Missouri Historical Review* LXXIII, no. 2 (January 1979): pp. 150-164.

366 Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought,* 14.

367 Lorde, Sister *Outsider.;* Collins, "Learning."

368 James C. Scott, *Domination.*

369 Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought,* 13.

370 Leiser, Wilson, "County Court Doing," *Union Record,* November 10, 1887.

371 Leiser, Wilson, "County Court Minutes," *Union Record,* February 9, 1888. Vol. xiv. No. 24.

not celebrated or sensationalistic. Yet, an analysis of her actions provides valuable insight about the ways "ordinary" African American women contributed to the larger goals of the African American community in challenging and disrupting racism and patriarchy.

Looking at Agnes' life through the lens of diagonality helps us to understand how her circumstances occurred. After Fernando's death, she had to find another source of income. The precarity of her position eventually forced her to begrudgingly sell her land. We know this because after she lost it in 1882 due to several years of unpaid taxes, she somehow immediately bought the land back at the auction for less than the cost of the taxes she owed. Agnes shows her intellect and agency here because she negotiated buying back her land and temporarily retained it. However, in the post-Reconstruction Era, she could no longer hold onto the land or maintain enough income to take care of her needs. Therefore, she eventually became a pauper.

Adding to the layers of cultural factors, interpersonal relationships allowed the family of her former enslaver to end up with the land. The culture of Franklin County developed in part because of small-scale enslaving households where enslavers and their enslaved laborers spent many hours working alongside each other. Over a long period of time, watching each other work, eat, become injured physically and emotionally, and interacting with other people outside of the household, created a more intimate relationship between white and Black people. Agnes applied for money through the government as a pauper and the archive recorded her receipt of funds twice.[372] Some local and/or state entities, or private organizations did not give African Americans access to funds just because of poverty. That's why Black churches became the entity that supported African Americans during hard times, and the great migration when southern Blacks made the trek north and west away from their former enslavers and the Deep South's oppressive governments and society.

Missouri, although proslavery and anti-Black, because of the spectrum of ideologies, did have some regions that were more helpful to African Americans than others. Here is where many of the state's German immigrants had a hand in taking pressure off of African Americans by advocating for abolition. Isolating themselves in their own towns, like Hermann and Dutzow, Germans sought to create a German state within the U.S., but it never came to fruition. Once they realized that the fate of African Americans impacted their lives, some Germans became involved in the abolition movement. Slavery's conflict for Germans, putting their income-earning potential at risk, was the catalyst for their advocacy. Putting this knowledge in context, illuminates how the spaces were violent that African Americans existed within.

Agnes understood that she had to create her own "black sense of place"[373] within the borders of a white supremacist patriarchal space. Katherine McKittrick refers to a "black sense of place" as the process of materially and imaginatively situating historical and contemporary struggles against practices of domination and the difficult entanglements of racial encounter."[374] It didn't matter whether Andrew Evans was correct when he claimed that his enslaver was "a good kind master" because he still enslaved Agnes, Andrew, and several other men, women, and children. As noted by Andrew in his interview, while Fernando was a "good kind master," the overseer was a Simon Legree whose words hurt as much as the lashes that scarred Andrew's back until the day he died. Andrew's assessment of Fernando versus the overseer is part and parcel of the WPA narrative patterns. Andrew's description of Fernando as "good" and "kind" is consistent with a pattern of formerly enslaved interviewees by the WPA. Not wanting to "make

372 Ibid.; Leiser, Wilson, "County Court Doing," *Union Record,* November 10, 1887.

373 McKittrick, "On Plantations."

374 Ibid.

waves" and create animosity between him, his family, and his former enslaver's family and friends, Andrew placed slavery's cruelty onto the overseer, rather than the man who was responsible for his enslavement. For Andrew to link abuse to Fernando would implicate him further in the domination. It is only human nature to distance oneself from horrible truths.

I found Agnes through my great-great-great-grandfather, Isaac, and to this day I know very little about my great-great great-grandmother, Berenthia. Isaac is a heroic legend. Berenthia is an archival silence. In studying and writing about African American women's lives, the archives is where I have spent a lot of time, and I have a story to tell. As discussed in this chapter, African American women's silencing and erasure in the archives, and the consequent impossibility of telling their stories, is part and parcel of the work of historians. In the following chapter, I combine the story of my archival journey with that of Ester, Celia, Agnes and other African American women to elucidate the challenges and traumas of telling impossible stories.

Chapter 4

Redressing the Dangerous "Single Story" of African American Women in the Archives

The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Introduction

I view archives as diagonal spaces because, although the archivists are usually helpful and kind, within the space of the one or more rooms, I experienced a spectrum of intersecting possibilities and restrictions. For example, my visits to the Washington Historical Society and Museum in Washington, Missouri, are always productive, pleasant, and fun, even when I did not locate pieces to the puzzle of my research study. I was not only welcomed by the Director, Marc Houseman, may he rest in peace, but Marc and his staff were always eager to assist me in locating documents upon my arrival. While I did not feel a sense of belonging in the city of Washington, within the walls of the archive, it felt more like "home."[375]

At other archives, I experienced frustration and a sense of nonbelonging, not only because of the challenge of excavating women that were not considered worthy of history, but because my presence in archives was not always acknowledged. In one Missouri archive that I will not mention by name, I stood waiting at least fifteen minutes to ask a simple question about where to locate records. I am not sure whether the person that I waited for was an archivist or staff member, but they never acknowledged me as I waited. They glanced at me periodically but never said anything to me as they held a conversation with another visitor. After finishing the conversation, they left their desk while my head was turned, as I tried to make use of my time while waiting. Was the person intentionally dismissing me? I am not sure. But I know that they knew I was waiting for assistance. Interestingly, I have never seen a Black person working as a staff member or archivist in any of the Missouri archives I visited. Not having the representation of an African-descended person in the archives always feels violent to me. It is another form of erasure that continues to inform my sense of nonbelonging in archives. Consequently, I am unable to locate Black people in the archival physical space, and rarely able to locate nineteenth century kin within the records of archives. For an African American woman researcher in Missouri, the archival space holds many opportunities for trauma.

The Missouri State Archives in Jefferson City is an unremarkable diagonal space, and that is where I found myself in the spring of 2018, haunted and imprisoned by the legacy of slavery, and a renewed sense of nonbelonging. It was a typical Friday in the archives with me seated at a microfilm machine surrounded by boxes of microfilm, and a rare one or two other visitors doing their own research. All of a sudden, unable to contain the water welling up in my eyes, the indescribable pain gripping my chest, and the sunken feeling within my stomach, I sat silently affected by manifestations of the *afterlife of slavery*.[376] Saidiya Hartman defines this afterlife as a place "where black lives are still imperiled and devalued," because of the continuity of "racial calculus and a political arithmetic…entrenched centuries ago."[377]

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375 I refer to home as a welcoming place where a person can be who they believe they are without feeling shame or judgment. Home is not always a happy or welcoming space, as for some people, home can bring about experiences of trauma.

376 Hartman, *Lose Your Mother,* 6.

377 Ibid.

The operation of the afterlife of slavery impacts the lives of Black people like myself in immeasurable ways. One key factor, as discussed earlier in Chapter one, is the scarcity of primary sources that better represent the humanity of African American women. It is common knowledge that nineteenth century white people were not concerned with recording the experiences and narratives of enslaved or free African American women. The power of archival gatekeepers who denied African American women continues to impact our lives and the telling of our stories.[378] During slavery in the U.S., white patriarchal literate persons created incomplete sources that also misrepresented all groups within the archives, including white society. Wealthy property-owning men were prominently displayed in archives, while poor whites and those who were not white, received little or no attention to detail related to their humanity. Because of this erasure and misrepresentation of African American women, many Black women historians and scholars seek to fill in gaps where possible. Additionally, most enslaved and free Missourian African Americans were illiterate because of the 1847 law that stated, "no person shall keep or teach any school for the instruction of any negroes or mulattoes, in reading or writing in this State."[379] Therefore, most of them could not leave written documentation detailing their lives as proof to their descendants of their existence. Consequently, what I witnessed and experienced in the archives was no surprise.

Yet, I was not prepared for the level of trauma that overcame me. Bearing witness to the disproportionate number of hours that it took me to find a nineteenth century relative compared to the white woman was painful. Although I had not timed the woman's entry and exit, her proximity to me, using a microfilm machine to my immediate left, allowed me to hear her conversation with the woman archive staff member. I was jolted when I noticed the woman leaving so quickly, thanking the staff person for assisting her in retrieving her ancestor's record. I had to stop my own search and take a few moments to breathe, conceal my watery eyes, and remind myself that what I was feeling reinforced my commitment to excavating African American women's stories. I started the search for my ancestor on a Monday and was at the archive daily from its 8am opening to closing at 5pm, except for Thursday, when I stayed until 8pm to take advantage of the longer hours. It was now Friday and for five days I was in the archives without finding one fragment about Isaac, Berenthia, or any other ancestors. During that same week, I watched white people enter and exit with similar results as the woman. Some of the visitors stayed longer to find relatives, but all of them left with at least one document or notes on their ancestors. There were not more than twelve people in the microfilm room with me during the entire week. I was the only Black person. Leaving the archive that day, I felt exhausted, and a momentary sense of powerlessness came over me. But I would return the next day, Saturday.

Just trying to verify whether an African American person was the particular person named on a document, was a challenge. It could take hours, but usually days to verify. Therefore, the requirement to triangulate in order to verify information about African Americans is fraught. Even though my ancestor, Isaac Renfro, was a well-known and "prominent" man in St. Clair, Missouri, it has taken me 17 years to gather fragments of his life. Just determining whether the

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[378] "Archivists, Curators, & Museum Technicians," Data USA, accessed July 1, 2021. https://datausa.io/profile/soc/archivists-curators-museum-technicians. "Among archivists, we discovered that 53.0% of them are women, while 41.5% are men. The most common race/ethnicity among archivists is White, which makes up 77.4% of all archivists. Comparatively, there are 9.2% of the Hispanic or Latino ethnicity and 5.1% of the Asian ethnicity." As of 2019, "82.4% of Archivists, curators, & museum technicians are White (Non-Hispanic), making that the most common race or ethnicity in the occupation." "55.3% of Archivists, curators, & museum technicians are Female, making them the more common gender in the occupation.

[379] Trexler, *Slavery in Missouri*, 83-84, Session Laws, 1846, p. 103, secs. I, 5.

Isaac Renfro that I found in the archive was my ancestor was time-consuming and frustrating. Oftentimes, when a person was not white, "colored" was noted in parentheses next to the name. But that was not always the case. And, there were many Isaac Renfros in and outside of Missouri.

I began my search for Isaac's story in 2007, and by 2015, I had located several land deeds where he bought and sold land, but I am yet to find a document for his manumission. The excavation for data on Agnes Evans is even grimmer. I cannot locate a death certificate for her, although I have a land deed that names her as "formerly the slave of Fernando A Evans," with a note that she was deceased.[380] Although she owned land from 1870 through 1888, I have not found the original transfer of ownership showing when she acquired her 40 acres of Section 27 Township 42 Range One East.

As a researcher, I consider all the ways my subjects were possibly connected to diagonality's geographic and cultural borders. By this I mean that I expected to locate people in the regions in which they lived. For example, in searching for my ancestors Isaac and Berenthia, my plan was to search their names from a data bank for the city of St. Clair, and also Franklin County, and newspapers for those areas. Gender creates different border crossings, which means women like Berenthia would likely be working in the domestic sphere,[381] as a laundress and/or cook, and Isaac in the public sphere,[382] as a crew member on a steamship, a mining worker, or an agricultural field worker. However, gender did not always determine the type of work done by enslaved persons. In an interview for the WPA, James Monroe Abbot states his mother, Allie Ann Lane, "nevuh worked in de house none but dey warn't nothin on de place dat she couldn' do. She cud cut down a big tree en chop off a rail length an' use a wedge an' maul an' make rails as good as anybody."[383] W. C. Parson Allen told an interviewer, " used to nurse de white foldks children when I was a little boy. I made a better nurse dan most girls, so jest kept on ut it till I was old enough to be a field hand."[384]

For a person who has no understanding of what it means to feel displaced, dispossessed, or stateless, my reaction to the comparison of me versus the white woman's archival experience, might appear exaggerated and unnecessary. Maybe the white woman staff member or the woman she assisted would think I was being melodramatic. As an African American woman and Black feminist researcher, who has felt a sense of nonbelonging most of my life, learning about my ancestors is more than writing down some interesting facts in a scrap book. Gaining insight to my family's characteristics, thoughts, and feelings adds to my self-definition and empowerment.

After spending eleven years trying to locate my ancestors in several Missouri archives, it was frustrating to see someone so easily access their family members. I had come to the Archives in Jefferson City twice previously, and had not located any ancestors after a week. Seated at a table seventeen hundred fifty miles from home, I suddenly became aware of the time, energy, and finances I sacrificed to locate my ancestors. Not that I did not consider it before, but this moment felt like the lash of an overseer's whip. I felt the punishment for my race and loss of my ancestors. Because of my ancestor's status, I am denied a more complete access to their lives. Most of them could not read or write due to no fault of their own. It reminded me that even though African Americans were emancipated one hundred fifty years prior, white supremacy and

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380 Franklin County Recorder 1 of 1 document# 6WD033-00211, September 28, 1888.

381 *Missouri Slave Narratives: a Folk History of Slavery in Missouri from Interviews with Former Slaves* (Bedford: Applewood Books, 2006), 6, 9, 14, 26, 44, 52, 100, 114, 122.

382 Ibid., 32, 38, 59, 65, 77, 87, 91.

383 Ibid., 3.

384 Ibid., 21.

slavery's legacy continue to impact African Americans financially, physically, and emotionally, and spiritually.

This research experience reflects the chapter's intent and thesis about the problems and possibilities inherent in the archives when researching African American women. I use the moment when my eyes welled in the Jefferson City State Archives to illuminate the trauma that remains for African American families when they are not able to easily locate their ancestors, if at all, but also experience and witness the ease in which most white people are able to access their ancestors with a few clicks on the computer. My witnessing and experiencing the manifestation of slavery's legacy is part and parcel of my attempt to redress the legacy of slavery through the excavation of my genealogy and that of an obscure African American woman, Agnes Evans.

What I offer to my readers is the insight and knowledge I accumulated over the past 60 years of my life, which includes eight years as a Ph.D. student researching African American women. The wisdom associated with African American women's history only recently coalesced, allowing me to better understand myself, my family, my community, and those outside of those nested containers. It has taken a combination of my pre-PhD life experiences along with the reading, thinking, writing, and conversations with fellow graduate students and faculty within and outside of the African American/African Diaspora Studies Department, to better understand what it means to be an African American woman and scholar. There is no one person, place, or particular event or text that contributed to guiding this chapter. Like the concept of diagonality, where every space and time presents new experiences and challenges, this chapter is a dynamic document unfolding with each of my archival journeys. What I remember about my past life, or think is significant or insignificant, constantly changes. As I read and reread primary and secondary sources about African American women, and think about myself observing my genealogical and academic journey, my thoughts about African American women like Agnes Evans, Ester Clamorgan, Harriet (Robinson) Scott, and Celia, shift, become more complex and I gain more clarity.

My goal here is to elucidate how the process of researching African American women taught me about the myriad ways they navigated life and did more than just survive in the context of their oppression. They sought out redress even when they knew the consequences of their fates, which was sometimes death. I consider the continuity of African American women's struggle for redress, including my own, and present a merging of the two, using primary and secondary sources to highlight the iterative ways my actions and experiences harken back to nineteenth century women. Most importantly, I assert that African American women's demands for redress illuminates the preservation of their human dignity and worth. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's statement says best what I am attempting to do in this chapter when she explains the need to allow every individual the opportunity of the representation of their humanity:

> I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult**.** It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar.[385]

[385] Adichie, "The Danger."

Adichie's assertion also connects African American women's humanity and dignity to the idea of diagonality. When she says that we must "engage properly with a place," this point speaks to the necessity of understanding these women in the context of their physical space, as well as the ideologies that influence the space. From this standpoint, we are able to move further into learning about each other and ourselves. This insight guided me in my journey to better understand how African American women pursued redress because I retained the idea that they refused to relinquish their beliefs about their humanity and dignity.

What I discovered about my journey is that when I began my genealogical research in 2007, and transitioned to Agnes Evans' story for the dissertation, what I was actually doing was learning how to redress my own past in hopes of reclaiming my future. Unlike Sadiyia Hartman, who attempts to "reclaim the dead"[386] in her journey to Ghana, I gained new insights as a historian researching African American women in archives built to house the records of wealthy white men. What I wanted was to figure out who I was by excavating my ancestor, Berenthia, as well as women like Agnes Evans, who contributed to African American women's culture in Missouri. I hoped to understand how to make meaning and find freedom in a society that does not love African American women.

My dissertation is a form of redress for me as an African American woman and an African American women's history scholar. Utilizing Patricia Hill Collins' Black feminist epistemology as a "connected knower," I engage with my subjects through and alongside my personal experiences in my archival journey. In this way, I show the value and significance of being a connected knower, because as a researcher observing African American women, my own personal and professional experiences are vital to how I understand and interpret the experiences, decisions, and actions of Agnes Evans and women like her. I'm taking the intellectual strand of Black feminism and connecting it to my interest in nineteenth century African American women. My narrative frames the rest of the stories that I discuss in this chapter. My experiences contribute to discussions about how African American women and girls are silenced through their intersectional identities.[387]

I am not saying that one needs to be an African American woman[388] to interpret and write about the actions and experiences of African American women. What I am saying is that the trauma, oppression, and marginalization experienced by my ancestors, and African American women in general, is in my DNA.[389] And, it resides in my DNA, not only as generational affects passed on through the body, but also through my own experiences due to racism and patriarchy. I am writing from a place of deep-rooted connectedness that, as Anna Julia Cooper asserts that "Only the BLACK WOMAN can say 'when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me.'"[390] There is something that only Black women can

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386 Hartman, *Lose Your Mother.*

387 Kimberle Crenshaw, "DeMarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, Article 8 1989, no 1.

388 I refer to woman here as any individual who identifies as a cis gender woman, femme, nonbinary, or other identity.

389 Learning about a person's DNA, which can inform people of their biological structure, where they can locate family members, and health data, are popular conversations today. African Americans who historically lack the ability to fully trace their familial roots, have utilized the service, especially with Harvard University scholar Henry Louis Gates promoting its use. The commodification of African American loss is another aspect of the afterlife of slavery, however, it is not discussed here.

390 Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990)*, xxix.*

understand about being a Black woman, and even the Black man[391] has no right to speak for me, because race is only one aspect of the intersectionality of Black women's lives and experiences. And, because of the Black woman's supposed subordinate position to men and other races in society, when Black women are uplifted and considered as valuable, only then do Black men and women become equal as a unit to reckon with society's racist and patriarchal violences.

Cooper's writings are another example of redress through Black feminist knowledge production and activist writing that critiques Black men's alignment with patriarchy as undermining of Black unity against white supremacy. Here too, a Black feminist epistemological framework allows the capturing of thoughts, feelings, and ideas from a connected knower, freeing them up to write beautifully, as Jennifer Nash contends.[392]

Here, I expand on my dissertation introduction and write more in-depth about autoethnography, and how, as a method, it helps illuminate the connections my research and personal experiences have with the experiences of women I study. By connecting the experiences of my subjects with my personal and professional experiences as an African American woman historian, I show the continuity and relevance of nineteenth through 21st century experiences (Jim Crow and New Jim Crow), and the various ways racism, sexism, and patriarchy impact our lives.

Why Autoethnography?

In the article, "Looking for Zora," Alice Walker tells the story of her journey to "find" Zora Neale Hurston in Eatonville, Florida, which was Zora's final home. Like Walker, who said, "Eatonville has lived for such a long time in my imagination,"[393] my first trip to St. Clair, Missouri felt as if I was going home. It was the imagined home or "imagined community"[394] that I thought I knew about from moments that remained with me since childhood. In my childhood mind, I saw a town of African Americans walking around greeting one another with warmth and pride. Everyone treated each other like kin, so the entire community was like a family. It never occurred to me that white people were also part of the town that was supposedly founded and named after my great great great grandfather Isaac Renfro. From the description given by my father and his siblings,[395] Isaac was like a mayor or the prominent citizen of the small town where everyone felt at home. Arriving in St. Clair, Missouri, in 2007, I will never forget how it

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391 I refer to a man as any individual who identifies as a cis gender man, nonbinary, or other identity.

392 Nash, "Writing Black Beauty."

393 Alice Walker, "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston," *Ms. Magazine*, 1976, pp. 74-89. https://findingaids.uflib.ufl.edu/repositories/2/archival_objects/132091

394 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006). Anderson defines the nation as, "an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." He asserts that the nation is a cultural construct that is created in the minds of people who imagine themselves connected to other people as part of a political community who sees themselves sharing the same beliefs, values, and a "deep horizontal comradeship." Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother.;* and Langston Hugues, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993) similarly saw themselves as part of an imagined community prior to their journeys to the African continent where they were surprised to discover that they were still stateless because Africans did not accept them as family. To her surprise, Hartman was an *obruni* or stranger to the Ghanains who encountered her arrival. Hughes, on his travels to Africa, was told that he was a "white man," not because of the color of his skin, although he was fair-skinned, but because Africans saw him as an American, which equated to whiteness.

395 I refer to the sisters, brothers and cousins as siblings because they were raised together in the same homes with their single mothers, so they felt more like siblings than cousins. The three sisters (Julia, Carolyn, and Elizabeth) were Isaac Renfro's granddaughters who for many years, lived in rented houses that housed the three sisters and a total of eight children between them.

felt to plant my feet in the same spaces where my ancestors once stood. Standing in the family cemetery where Isaac and Berenthia are buried along with other family members, I reflected on my life and how it brought me to that place at that time. And, I thought about the lineage that I came from - a long line of entrepreneurs, courageous men and women who stepped outside of the boundaries set for them as Black people.

Several times each year since my mid-twenties, I make the statement that, "Before I die, I'm writing an autobiography" to give readers a window into how I survived, thrived, and made sense of my life. I want to add another lens from which to understand African American women's actions, thoughts, and experiences. The refrain to write my story most often comes before, during, or after dealing with a traumatic or challenging situation, which adds to my list of multilayered experiences. All my life, especially my childhood and teenage years, I saw my experiences as very different from the people around me. In my youth, I believed my "othering"[396] came from my biracial heritage, due to my Japanese mother, more than from my African American father. Since I grew up in an African American community, my Asianness, meaning my long straight very black hair, lighter skin complexion, and almond-shaped eyes, gave me an appearance of otherness, and therefore, I felt a sense of nonbelonging. Not until my young adult years did I understand that, although my mixed-race(ness) impacted my experiences, my gender and the race of my father were actually the central factors shaping my experiences of marginalization in society.

The same factors that shaped my experiences of non-belonging, became aspects of privilege, allowing me access to opportunities and resources, such as the ability to return to college full time.[397] While growing up, I was ignorant of the internment camps where the U.S. forced Japanese Americans to live against their will, having committed no crime. I did not understand that the reason my father vehemently told my Japanese mother to stop speaking Japanese to her children was based on the requirement for the Japanese to show loyalty to the U.S. because of the bombing of Pearl Harbor three decades earlier.[398]

As a mature adult, above the typical age of a nontraditional student, I experienced a complex duality of uneven power relations. As a student, many of my professors were younger than I, and in many cases, I sensed a greater level of respect by the professor because of my age. But, I might be incorrectly projecting my own thoughts here. Maybe it was because in community college, although I felt "othered," I still felt confident. But, there were awkward moments, like the time I walked up to the classroom where several students were waiting for the professor. As I approached, they all began to move. They thought I was the professor, and I felt a

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396 Othering refers to the idea that a person does not belong to the more civilized, superior population or society, which is the dominant group in society. Therefore, the "other" does not belong, and is seen as inferior to the dominant group.

397 I refer to my privilege based on my physical appearance. According to Carolyn M. West, "Throughout U.S. history, Blacks with lighter skin and straighter hair were afforded greater access to education, financial opportunities, and social resources." (Okazawa-Rey et al., 1987, qtd. In Carolyn M. West, "Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel: Historical Images of Black Women and Their Implications for Psychotherapy." *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training* 32, no. 3 (1995): 458-66. doi:10.1037/0033-3204.32.3.458.

398 History.com Editors, "Japanese Internment Camps," History. *https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/japanese-american-relocation.* The December 7, 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor was a surprise attack on the U.S. and the beginning of World War II. Japanese Americans became the targets of oppression by the U.S. government. President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942 ordering all Japanese, including Japanese American citizens into internment camps. Because of mistrust of the Japanese population, after the bombing, it took many years for Asians generally, to gain the trust of the U.S. government and its citizens.

slight sense of shame, almost like a teenager yelling "Trick or Treat" at a stranger's door, dressed in a costume along with elementary-aged children. It was a different type of imposter syndrome. On the other hand, as a student at UCLA, I was able to freely enter rooms designated for faculty or staff. Neither of these situations altered the balance of power between my professors and me. My age is a key factor in my academic and archival journey, and like diagonality, my age intersects with other factors on a spectrum to shape how I tell my story within and alongside the African American women's stories that I study. Therefore, telling my story has long been a deeply personal mission of empowerment, self-definition, and self-determination.

An autoethnographic approach aligns with that of Black feminist epistemology and works well as a method for scholars drawn to storytelling and reflexivity. Autoethnography includes my voice and experiences, and I feel comfort in that type of scholarship. I eventually learned that autoethnographers "integrate emotional, spiritual, and moral parts of themselves with the intellectual and analytical in order to hold on to the personal connection to their experience that inspired them to do autoethnography in the first place."[399] I saw how Black feminism's core framework of theory production aligned well with this alternative form of research and I looked forward to writing an autoethnographic chapter.

I also chose to use an autoethnographic approach because it is well-suited to my intersectional identities. A late bloomer in the area of academia, I did not earn a bachelor's degree until I was fifty-three years old. Growing up working-class without college-educated parents, I had no motivation to consider college until my eldest sister attended UCLA, the first in our entire family to achieve a higher education degree. Although my junior high school class voted me "most likely to succeed," I never once considered going to college during high school. However, visiting my sister on the campus of UCLA in my early twenties, I realized I missed an opportunity to learn about the world, my community, and things I could not know were there to learn. Almost three decades later, I became a registered student at UCLA majoring in History with a minor in African American Studies.

Why is this context important? All of these experiences shape my understanding of how I make sense of my place and purpose in life and academia. My knowledge and experiences as an African American woman and researcher qualify and position me to produce knowledge and use autoethnography to illuminate and interpret African American women's actions and experiences. I acknowledge that "no homogeneous Black *woman's* standpoint exists,"[400] yet "a Black *women's* collective standpoint does exist, one characterized by the tensions that accrue to different responses to common challenges."[401]

Knowledge Production

The power to control the production of knowledge has always come from white elite men, which is the basis of Eurocentric western standards. This "traditional" form of social science inquiry depends on four factors.[402] First, researchers must distance themselves from whatever or whomever they study.[403] The requirement of objectivity is to maintain an unbiased viewpoint. The second is that the researcher must not allow their emotions to impact the study.[404]

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399 Tony E. Adams, Holman Jones Stacy Linn, and Carolyn Ellis, *Autoethnography: Understanding Qualitative Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), vii-viii.

400 Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 28.

401 Ibid.

402 Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 270-274.

403 Ibid., 274.

404 Ibid.

A third point is to not use personal values or ethics, meaning to avoid placing judgment or value on the objects or persons studied.[405] The fourth factor is to use adversarial debate to tear down information that does not withstand the test of scrutiny, and use accumulation to build knowledge that is validated, ultimately leaving only truth - knowledge.[406] Consequently, the assumption is that there is only one way to produce knowledge.

Sociologist, Patricia Hill Collins, disagrees with Eurocentric social science inquiry methods, and instead, asserts the value of Black feminist epistemology.[407] Collins established four tenets that form alternative epistemologies: the lived experiences of what she calls "connected knowers," using dialogue instead of adversarial debate, the combination of using lived experiences and dialogue creates an "ethics of caring," and lastly, the researcher must take personal responsibility.

Autoethnography is a qualitative methodology that uses the researcher's lived experiences, which includes their identities, to inform the ways they gather data, analyze and write about a culture or group of people.[408] The goal of autoethnography is to allow personal experiences to help guide the researcher by including their thoughts about what they observe, why they observe it in a particular way, and naming aspects of power and privilege that is not otherwise mentioned in standard social science research. By thinking through their observations, researchers "check" themselves so as to not only think it in their minds, but let the reader know what they think and how it influences the ways they decide to make meaning in the broader context of a culture or group of people.

Autoethnography is a method that draws on storytelling and reflexivity in a way that disrupts notions of objectivity required by the scientific method of social science. This method, according to Kimberly Lau, "seeks to make sense of the often contradictory relationships between self and culture that so acutely mark the postmodern predicament while also exerting a very real influence on the politics of representation and scholarship."[409] The researcher's ability to critically engage with and problematize their observations, interpretations, and identities, provides a model for other researchers to learn from, and helps readers gain a better understanding of their own lived experiences within specific cultures. This is not to say that Black women, femmes, and nonbinary individuals think, feel, and practice in a nonheterogeneous fashion. Each researcher must see their work as a contribution based on their identities, insights, and research data. Autoethnographic research must account for how the researcher's identities can allow for their own oppression, give them access to privilege, or do both. Autoethnographers "integrate emotional, spiritual, and moral parts of themselves with the intellectual and analytical in order to hold on to the personal connection to their experience that inspired them to do autoethnography in the first place."[410] Black feminism's core framework of theory production aligns with this alternative form of research, which opens space for insights

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405 Ibid.

406 Ibid.

407 Ibid., 269-290.

408 Shashidhar Belbase, Bal Chandra Luitel, and Peter Charles Taylor, "Autoethnography: A Method of Research and Teaching for Transformative Education," *Journal of Education and Research* 1 (2013): pp. 86-95, https://doi.org/10.3126/jer.v1i0.7955.; Heewon V. Chang, *Autoethnography as Method* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast, 2008).; Robin M. Boylorn, *Sweetwater: Black Women and Narratives of Resilience* (New York: Peter Lang, 2017).

409 Kimberly J. Lau, "This Text Which is Not One: Dialectics of Self and Culture in Experimental Autoethnography," *Journal of Folklore Research*, Vol. 39, No. 2/3, Special Double Issue: Dialogues (May-Dec., 2002), 244.

410 Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner, *Autoethnography: Understanding Qualitative Research*, vii-viii.

and possibilities through an engagement with the self and data. Gaining insight into nineteenth century women in Missouri allowed me to learn more about myself because my ancestors left an imprint there for me to follow.

The Search is Underway

According to my father, he grew up poor. Raised in a family consisting of his mother, Carolyn, grandmother, Mamie, two brothers, David and Paul, one sister, Constance, two aunts, Julia and Elizabeth, and four cousins, Edward, Ernestine, Harlan, and Richard. My great-great-great-grandfather, Isaac, and great-great-great-grandmother Berenthia had one known daughter named, Mary Frances, also known as Fanny. Fanny's three daughters: Julia, Carolyn, and Elizabeth, eventually became divorced single mothers who raised their children in a strict and close-knit environment. I grew up listening to my father's memories of poverty, songs about not having enough to eat, and negative depictions of Black women on welfare. If I close my eyes and quiet my mind, I can hear and visualize him singing and performing the song that he said his mom sang at mealtime. He said that because they were so poor, they ate oatmeal often. His mother would sing, "Don't tell don't tell nobody, don't tell don't tell Lulottie, how much you got! Plop!" The plop was his mother plopping a big spoon of oatmeal into his bowl. Whenever my sisters and I searched for food at home, he would say, "Better get that oatmeal, oatmeal sticks to the ribs." He never explained how "oatmeal…sticks to the ribs," but we knew it meant that we would not be hungry for a while if we chose oatmeal. It was cheap and filling. My father's regular quips were survival strategies. He felt the need to remind us that poverty was just around the corner, and if we were not careful, we would be plopping oatmeal on plates. He returned from the Vietnam War when we were in high school. He did not trust that we could navigate boyfriends without getting pregnant, and becoming the stereotype of young Black women, a "Welfare Queen."[411] One of his most significant warnings came from a repeated refrain: "you'll just grow up to be on welfare with ten kids and have a man who knocks you in the head every month taking your welfare check."

Reflecting on the narrative put forth by my father, I see that poverty or the thought of his life as poor, significantly impacted his identity. I cannot recall him referencing any joyful memories during his childhood, but maybe that's because his father physically abused him. Maybe he was ashamed that his mother used government welfare benefits. As an adult, I now can better understand his preoccupation with African American women and girls and welfare. Born in 1935, in St. Louis, my father's father was married to another woman and my grandmother, Carolyn, was married to my father's stepfather, Mr. David Reems. Interestingly, Carolyn was a very religious woman who attended a Baptist Holiness church almost daily. She required all her children to attend church with her. My father stopped attending church once he became an adult, but in his late fifties, one Thanksgiving Day, he recited the book of Genesis. He spoke fluent Japanese and excelled at golf and boxing during his twenty-two year career in the army. He earned numerous medals of commendation, one of which is a Purple Heart for bravery during an enemy ambush. This section is a meditation about my father and a reminder of who I am. Knowing his story helps build my story and fills in small fragments of my identity.

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411 The "welfare queen" was a mythical one-dimensional character that portrayed notions of "laziness," promiscuity, and untrustworthy. Patricia Hill Collins, "Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images," in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

My father passed away in 2003, and I wish I had spent more time asking him about his life in St. Louis, Japan, and his travels in general.

Except for my father's cousins, Ernestine and Richard, my father and his siblings migrated from St. Louis to California in the mid-20th century, settling their families there. They followed the path of their Aunt Ella, the first to make the journey for a more lucrative life in California. Therefore, like millions of other African Americans, Ella and other family in St. Louis were part of the Great Migration.[412] By the year 2000, the elders in our family were beginning to go home to the "Promised Land," and we had not acquired much information about our family history. The tumultuous relationship I had with my father did not allow space for conversations about family history, even though my father was a dynamic storyteller, with a tendency toward exaggeration. The burgeoning historian within me desired to know my roots. I felt the need to learn where I came from and who influenced my identity. But, most of all, I wanted to find out more about Isaac Renfro. Who was this ancestor all the adults talked of with their heads held high and shoulders drawn back, straight as an arrow.

In 2007, my sisters and I decided to host a family reunion in the city where we settled - Los Angeles. My thoughts about the ancestors swirled in my mind, and I could not imagine having a reunion without providing the family with new information, especially information about Isaac Renfro. Therefore, I rallied three of my sisters and the four of us planned a week in Missouri in order to gather as much knowledge as possible on the Renfro family. We sought to answer four main questions: 1) Did an ancestor of ours named Isaac Renfro exist? 2) Was he wealthy? 3) How did he acquire his wealth? 4) Did he buy himself and family out of slavery? We eventually discovered what we thought were the answers to three of the four questions. Yes, he did exist. Yes, he was wealthy, and it appears that he acquired his wealth by finding an area of land rich in lead minerals, although, whether the lead deposits were his original source of wealth, was yet unknown to us. However, we felt confident that the Silver Lead Mine, documented as owned by Isaac Renfro, was archived at the St. Clair Historical Museum at the time of our visit. We were unable to find any primary sources verifying the purchase of his and his ownership of the Silver Lead Mine. Yet, most locals in St. Clair, Missouri, where Isaac and his family lived, knew about his Silver Lead Mine.

That first trip to St Clair, Missouri, in the spring of 2007 became the start of a new family engagement that includes a large portion of Franklin County, Missouri and Southern California. From our first meeting in 2007, my sisters and I have maintained communication with our Franklin County relatives and attended several of their family reunions. Their reunions are called the Clay/Generally family reunion because there are a number of relatives from one or both of the families due to the proximity of the small town, which created cross-marriages of the families.

After returning to Los Angeles with more knowledge of our ancestor, Isaac, including a whole new lineage of relatives in Missouri, my sisters and I were excited to share what we learned. We had a good turnout at our July 2007 family reunion in Los Angeles, and I presented the information we discovered along with some photos we brought back. Thanks to our new cousins, Rosie Brison, Audrey Edwards, and Cristean Bowers, whom we met on our last day in Missouri, we had an image of Berenthia to add to our collection. Our elder cousin in St Louis, Ernestine Robinson, my father's first cousin, had given us a photo of Isaac Renfro, so we now

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412 The Great Migration was a period in the U.S. when Black people migrated from the South to the northern and western states seeking better opportunities. See Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: the Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (London: Penguin Books, 2020).

had photos of both great-great-great-grandparents that started the lineage from Missouri. Our presentation about our family history was the first time our relatives, including the elders, had received knowledge based on primary sources. While oral history has its value, primary sources help us to verify aspects such as land acquisition and sales, and the location of people at different times. For example, locating the mortgage deeds with Isaac Renfro's mark (x), because he was illiterate, helps us to see when and where he acquired land, how much it cost him, and how many acres he acquired. The knowledge of his land transactions gives us an indication about his financial status, which helps us to speculate about whether he had the means to purchase himself and his family out of slavery.

To leave a legacy is one way to redress the racial and sexual terror experienced by women like Berenthia, who gave birth to two mulatto boys, certainly against her will. Unlike some enslaved women, like Margaret Garner, who committed infanticide because she did not want her children to suffer the horrors of slavery, Berenthia chose not to cut off the life of her sons. Perhaps she did not experience the consistent brutalities of violence, sexual and otherwise, that many enslaved women experienced. Maybe she endured the suffering in hopes that her circumstances would soon change. Whatever the reason, Berenthia and her two sons lived through the Emancipation and Reconstruction periods of the nineteenth century. One of her sons, Lee Andrew Generally, and his wife, Eliza Generally, were responsible for bringing forth a lineage that continues today in Missouri and other parts of the U.S. We do not know of any children by her son, Theodore John Murphy, but he lived a considerably long life, well into his sixties. Can we call the continuation of Berenthia's lineage a type of redress?

Newly emancipated African American families could not wait to reunite with family members, even after many years of separation from their loved ones.[413] This act of attempted reunification was one way that African American women sought to redress the loss of physical connection to their kin. Many women never saw their children, intimate partners, siblings, parents, and other loved ones again. Some discovered that their kin passed on. For those denied physical reunions and/or any knowledge at all, part of their pursuit of redress was successful just because of the social mobility that allowed them to search. Diagonality still factored into their experiences because their mobility remained embedded within a white supremacist nation. Depending on the region they moved within, their search was easier or more difficult based on the level of anti-Blackness they encountered on their journeys.

My experiences of desperately trying to locate family members through an encounter with the archives, was and is, in many ways, a similar challenge. By this I mean, the past remains in the present because the sources inserted into the archive are all that is available. For this reason, my methods and methodology, discussed in chapter one, addressed the limitations of the archives. Newly freed women put ads in newspapers hoping to receive information that could help them find their lost kin.[414] The lost kin that I still seek to find are not physically locatable, other than in the family cemetery in St. Clair, Missouri. Our family's remaining elders were unable to provide the memories needed to help in my genealogical endeavors. However, most of the local community graciously provided me with the knowledge they had, which oftentimes, came from my Franklin County relatives, who had already given the information to me.

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413 Ira Berlin, Steven F. Miller, Leslie S. Rowland, "Afro-American Families in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom," *Radical History Review*, 1988 pp.89-121; Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*.

414 "Mrs. Clara Bashop seeking information about her daughter Patience (2nd of 4 ads)" Editorial article, St Louis Post Dispatch (St. Louis, MO), October 2, 1892, Last Seen: Finding Family After Slavery, accessed June 27, 2021, https://informationwanted.org/items/show/3140.

After our family's 2007 reunion, the excitement about our genealogy extended from my sisters and me to the rest of our family. Those most interested were the elders.[415] After I presented our research findings, the few surviving elders that were present wanted to talk further about our discoveries. Over the next few months, I spoke with each of them in depth hoping to learn something that could increase my chances of locating more relatives, names, and specific knowledge about them. While I learned some important and interesting insights and knowledge about the characteristics and experiences of family members, I realized they did not have useful information that could help me connect dots in the archives. Nevertheless, my memories of the conversations with those who passed away are meaningful and significant in terms of how I took part in redressing the scarcity and hostility of the archives for my family and myself.

Since our first 2007 genealogical research trip, I took more than fifteen flights to Missouri from California, and although I gathered enough information to answer three of our four original questions, one remains elusive. I still have not been able to verify through court records whether Isaac bought himself, his wife, or children, out of slavery. I did determine that Isaac earned his income from investing in land, and then selling and renting the land.[416] Immediately after emancipation, it is clear from Fernando's probate record, that Isaac was a 50/50 partner in the Evans Mine, and he managed the workers and other affairs related to the mining and hauling of minerals from the mine and to the smelting furnace.[417] Another way that I see myself redressing the terror, silencing and invisibility of the archives, is bringing out of obscurity, a woman who showed me how nineteenth century Missourian African American women sought redress on their own terms.

In August of 2015, I discovered Agnes Evans. With the assistance from one of the archivists at the Missouri State Archives, I located a probate file that mentioned the name Isaac Renfro, but the microfilm location was in another archival location. Unable to determine whether this Isaac Renfro was my ancestor, I anxiously requested that the archivist send for the file and inform me when it arrived so I could return to view it. The following day, I drove to the next scheduled archive location about two hours away in Franklin County. After receiving confirmation that the microfilm for Isaac Renfro arrived at the State Capital archive a few days later, I returned there in hopes of a significant discovery. I received a double victory: the man mentioned in Fernando A. Evans (F. A. Evans) probate record was my ancestor, Isaac Renfro, and I also discovered Agnes.[418] Fernando, a former enslaver, ironmaster, and owner of the Evans Mines, died in November 1869. A land deed[419] indicates that Fernando enslaved Agnes Evans, and according to an interview with Andrew Evans, he, his mother, and siblings were also enslaved by Fernando prior to the end of the Civil War.[420]

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415 There were only three elders present at the reunion: Ernestine Robinson, my father's first cousin, David Reems, my father's eldest brother, and Constance Hart, my father's sister. Ernestine's brother, Edward Robinson, did not attend the reunion, although he stated he would. These four were the last surviving siblings from St. Louis, Missouri. I spoke with each one of these elders on several occasions about their childhood experiences in St. Louis and the actions and characteristics of their siblings. Along with my father, these are the main four elders that discussed Isaac Renfro at family gatherings. Ernestine is the only current surviving sibling.

416 Isaac Renfro, "Last Will and Testament," (St. Clair, Missouri, 1902). The will reads, Berenthia is able to collect the rents from his land and only use the interest for the maintenance of her lifestyle. She has no rights to sell the lands, and must retain it for their grandchildren.

417 Franklin County, Missouri, Probate Records, Box 30, Folder 19, Fernando A. Evans, 1869.

418 Franklin County, Missouri, Estate Files, Book 30: Probate Case Files of the Estate of Fernando A. Evans, 1869; MSA 735-7.

419 Franklin County Recorder 1 of 1 document# 6WD033-00211, September 28, 1888.

420 Blassingame, *Slave Testimony,* 585.

Not only did I finally discover the first significant primary source related to Isaac's wealth and occupation, I also had the testimony of a woman who says she witnessed the verbal contract between Fernando and Isaac wherein the two men became 50/50 partners. Agnes Evans' testimony, alongside the testimony of a prominent White business owner and enslaver, James Nashville Inge, bolstered Isaac's claim for his share of the profits in the mining business where he worked with F. A. Evans. The partnership between Fernando and Isaac continued until Fernando's death in November 1869.

Although relieved and excited about my discovery, my mind kept returning to the criminalized woman that, for whatever reason, refused to give up possession of personal property her accusers claimed that she had no right of ownership to. Her accusers were all men, and interestingly, one of them was my ancestor, Isaac, whom she had just months ago, testified in favor of. I had questions about this sequence of events and made a note to return to investigate the matter. The other accusers were James N Inge, wealthy businessman, Walker Evans, Fernando's cousin, and T. Rowe., the attorney for Isaac, James, and Walker. The allegation of embezzlement intrigued me and drove my desire to pursue additional information about Agnes Evans, whom I saw as bold, confident, and defiant.

Connecting Experiences

Invisibility and erasure helped to fuel what Adichie calls a single story that is exclusion, sometimes based on controlling images, sometimes patriarchal power, and sometimes based on diagonality. No matter the crosscurrents of the diagonal, the patriarchal pull can rob women of their dignity.[421] In the fall of 2015, after my archival visit to the Missouri State Archives, I read Lea Vandervelde's text, *Mrs. Dred Scott*, which helped me to better understand how Harriet (Robinson) Scott became invisible in her own court case.

My father and his siblings were complicit with patriarchy's impact on Black women. Because of patriarchy's hold on women, my great Aunt Ella, Isaac's granddaughter, saw California as her way to more freedom, considering it was not a state that legalized slavery. She must have heard that California was beautiful with great weather and lots of opportunities to cook for wealthy people. Although born in St. Clair, Missouri, Ella and her siblings moved to St. Louis by the early 20th century. St. Louis was a major city in the first part of the 20th century, and as grandchildren to a prominent businessman, Ella and her siblings could afford to move out of their small town, not only for a faster-paced life, but to find more employment opportunities. When Berenthia's son, Theodore Murphy, died September 23, 1925, her grandchildren inherited Theodore's land since he had no wife or children. The grandchildren, including Ella Carter, Marie Green, Mamie Inge, Rufus Ewing, and Ike Ewing, transferred the relatively small tract of land to their uncle, Lee Generally, Theodore's brother, for the sum of one dollar.[422] According to the deed, it was 50 feet x 300 feet in Section 36 Township 42 Range One East.[423] The grandchildren were probably doing well in St. Louis, and did not see the land as a substantial enough investment to hold onto between the five of them.

Ella, a single woman, found a way to migrate to California on her own, and once there, became a part of the Black middle-class of Los Angeles. As a chef, and owner of her own successful catering business, Ella defied categories like "poor" and "single mother." Ella had no

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421 Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story."

422 Franklin County Recorder 1 of 4 Document #WD100--00305, 30 October, 1925. Deed of Trust, Ella Carter, Mamie Ewing, Marie Green, and Robert Rufus Ewing. March 2, 1926.

423 Ibid.

children, and she was definitely not poor. Along with other professional chefs, Ella was featured in a cookbook that my cousin Karen Brooks now possesses. Karen showed it to me once when I visited her home and I was both impressed by Ella, and also disturbed that I could not know her.

Upon her death, to the chagrin of my father and his siblings, Ella left nothing for them of real and personal property. Instead, as an unmarried woman, she left everything to her caretaker.[424] Yet, she was unable to escape the myths. While I am not exactly sure the year Ella migrated to Los Angeles, I know from my conversations with her nieces, Ernestine and Constance, that Ella was the first of the family to go to California. My father's oldest brother David followed Ella a few years later in the early 1950s. Apparently, Ella was a trailblazer and entrepreneur. She is part of the long line of entrepreneurs whose DNA is within me. She had the intellect and courage to leave familiar surroundings because she did not fear defeat. Leaving the safety of her family, she took a chance on herself, and because of her, most of her nieces and nephews also migrated to California, settling in the northern and southern regions. Like Ella, I have always challenged norms and refused to accept that I cannot succeed in my endeavors. But, Ella only lived a few miles from my parent's home in Los Angeles, and I recall visiting her twice when she was elderly and not very mobile.

The vilification of Ella, especially by her nephews, denied me and the rest of my siblings valuable information and insights about an empowered African American woman that could have passed on the power of positive representation. During the same time that my father and his siblings proudly discussed Isaac Renfro as a successful businessman, their conversation eventually turned toward Aunt Ella, but with the opposing affective sentiment. My entire childhood through to adulthood, the criminalization of Ella framed my understanding of a woman ancestor who allegedly embezzled the family "jewels." The jewels refer to the land Isaac Renfro acquired, and there is an assumption by his descendants that upon Isaac's death, Aunt Ella managed to secretly sell the land to "white folks." Ultimately, the narrative around Ella and Isaac was that Isaac was a hero, and Aunt Ella was a villain.

One thing I learned is that archives, especially from the nineteenth century, refuse to tell whole truths. Ula Taylor asserts that, "documents, no matter how massive and detailed, never present the whole story; therefore, it is important to struggle just as much with archival voids as we do with material traces."[425] Because of the power embedded in archives, distortions and non-representations of African American women fill up spaces where a more humane narrative might reside.[426] To retroactively reconcile Aunt Ella's alleged transgressions against the family, I tried to locate evidence of her innocence, similar to how Hartman tried to "reclaim the dead."[427] Like Hartman, I was unable to change the past. Beliefs were cemented in the minds of family, especially those who are older. I located some, and possibly all, of Ella and her siblings' land deeds, and tried to retrace the steps that criminalized Aunt Ella. I saw that she and her siblings signed transfer deeds to property, which in my mind was evidence of her innocence. More than likely, Ella did not steal her siblings' land and sell it without the consent of her siblings. I realize that my need to find closure for my ancestors comes from a sense of unreconciled belonging. Maybe my attempt to redress the subjects' lives in this dissertation is about redressing my

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424 David L. Reems, Norman Reems, Constance Hart, Edward Robinson, and Ernestine Robinson, Ella's nieces and nephews, said they were told that Ella did not leave any of them in her will, and her caretaker received her assets.

425 Ula Y. Taylor, "Women in the Documents: Thoughts on Uncovering the Personal, Political, and Professional (2008) *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 20 No. 1, 187-196.

426 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past.*

427 Hartman, *Lose Your Mother,* 6.

identity. Hartman's words fill up so much space in my body. The use of critical fabulation in order "to make productive sense of the gaps and silences of the Archive," but at the same time, remembering "narrative restraint" and "the refusal to fill in the gaps and provide closure."[428]

I consider the finding of Agnes (in the probate case) and discovery of Harriet's more central role (in the Dred Scott case), to show how Agnes and Harriet's experiences of silencing and erasure relate to researching Ella. After decades of wondering about the legacy of Aunt Ella's criminality, I recently learned about something interesting and powerful about Ella. Ella was an amazing chef with a successful catering business, and she left her birthplace of St. Louis to open her business in Los Angeles. If the Black Club women's and Civil Rights movements were invested in changing the stereotypical characteristics of African American women and men, individual family members were dealing with their own families differently.[429] That I could live more than half a century, listening to endless rants about Aunt Ella's villainous deeds, and not know that she was a successful entrepreneur, is reprehensible. Patriarchy and sexism are not the only factors since other women in the family continue Ella's disparagement. Stereotypes of African American women as untrustworthy expose the power of white supremacy, even in the midst of contrary archival evidence.

"Literal Silencing: Violence, Rape, Patriarchy"

As I trace my connected knowingness with Agnes, Ella, and Harriet, I also find myself connected to Celia. Celia's story is a tragic one because of her brief life that ended in her execution, and it speaks to the literal silencing of a young woman who only sought to demand the rights to her body. Reflecting on the day I was sexually assaulted and how it felt for me to feel isolated and alone, even when there were family and friends only a few feet away from me in the same house, I feel so much pain for Celia. I was not enslaved, and my circumstances are not compared to hers at all in terms of the devastation, power, and outcome. Yet, my story juxtaposed to Celia's reflects patriarchal power and the ways in which it allows for the literal silencing of Black women. Celia's silencing was through her execution. She had no right to defend herself from her enslaver, and therefore, she became an example for other women like her that might consider challenging the rights to their bodies. Whether for sexual pleasure or the birthing of enslaved laborers, white men used African American women in whatever capacity they desired and demanded silence from their victims.

It started out as a typical day hanging out with my two older sisters, my cousins, and friends. We were a regular group of kids and teenagers ranging from about ten to eighteen that had hung out together on my aunt's block since my family moved to California in 1968. I lived with my mom and four sisters, while my father was away fighting in the Vietnam War. Our regular hangout spot was my aunt's front and side yards, but occasionally, we went to one of the friend's homes. I cannot remember much about the particular day - whether it was sunny or cloudy outside or whether it was a weekday or weekend, but I know that the experience etched a scar within me. Although the scar is invisible, and the trauma occurred four decades ago, I sometimes run into the rememory and an explosion of affect imprisons me for a moment that feels like forever.

I was one of the youngest in our group. Shy but silly in one-on-one or small group interactions, I did not command much respect, but rather followed along with group consensus.

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428 Hartman, "Venus," 12.

429 The Black club women, also called "race women," organized separately in different cities throughout the U.S. until they eventually created the National Association of Colored Women's (NACW) club in 1896.

Someone decided we should go to one of the older girls' homes, so we did. I recall sitting in a room with everyone, maybe about seven of us, and I decided to go to the kitchen and get some water. I do not know if someone asked me to get them water, or if I was thirsty and chose to go for myself.

The kitchen was just to the left of the bedroom where we gathered and across the living room. I was at the refrigerator and heard someone behind me. Suddenly, I see my friend's cousin, an older teenage boy about seventeen or older. He was apparently visiting, but I do not recall whether he was in the room with the rest of us. I did not know his name, age, or anything about him other than being the cousin of my two friends who lived there. He immediately put his hand over my mouth and told me to be quiet. He forced me up the small steps to the family's attic, which was right next to the kitchen and not far from the room where my family and friends were enjoying themselves. I hoped someone would hear us or look out of the room to see him forcing me up the steps, but no one noticed. The attic was an obvious space for someone to sleep and spend leisure time. There was a setup for sleeping with a large blanket, rug, or something soft enough to lie on. I was a virgin, and had no experience with intimacy and boys, so I was frightened of what his demands meant. He pushed me down to the bed area and began taking off my clothes while constantly saying I had better not make a sound. He positioned himself on top of me and attempted to penetrate me while pushing hard on my mouth with his hand and constantly telling me to be quiet. How could this be happening in a house full of people, who, for all intents and purposes, were having fun? My heart was beating so fast I thought it would explode, and the pain I experienced was excruciating as he continued forcing himself on me.

And then, I heard the homeowner's voice calling out from the base of the attic steps. It was my attacker's uncle. He yelled up saying, "Who's up there?" Is someone up there?" My attacker stopped and pushed his hand even tighter over my mouth and threatened to hurt me if I made a sound. Fearful of the boy, yet feeling a sense of ease, I wanted to scream to the man coming to rescue me, but I obeyed the much larger boy, thinking the ordeal was almost over anyway. As the father took each step up the stairs to the attic, the boy covered and squeezed my mouth even tighter with his fist directly in my face.

And then, the steps stopped. The father's head was just above the attic flooring where he could see enough to decide that his inquiries were answered. He saw it was his nephew in the attic. And, yes, there was "someone up there." And just like that, the man began backing down the steps as if it was fine for his teenage nephew to have sex with a young girl. Needless to say, once the man was gone, the attack continued until the teenage boy was either satisfied, tired of trying to penetrate a virgin, or some other reason that did not involve empathy or guilt for his actions.

Half a century later, the trauma of that attack remains for me, so much so that it became part of this study related to the oppression of African American women who were once girls. So much of what me, Agnes, Ester, Harriet, Celia, Ella, and Berenthia experienced continues to impact African American women today because patriarchy and sexism are not just legacies of the past, but firmly rooted in U.S. institutions, including significant ones like, governments, schools, and families. The homeowner who saw two bodies in the attic, only saw one of those bodies as legible and important, and it was not my body. It did not occur to the man to ask if I was okay, because the assumption is that African American women and girls are promiscuous. Maybe there is a "man code" that says do not interfere when another man is in the grip of seizing his prey.

The trauma I experienced that afternoon gives me a sense of connection to the women discussed in this dissertation, and I would argue, all African American women. The unaddressed trauma and legally unredressed grievances pass down through generations, leaving scars that manifest in different ways. My father's untreated physical and emotional abuse from his father, combined with growing up in what he saw as poverty,[430] and his experiences and traumas from the Vietnam War, influenced his style of parenting. Upon his permanent return home from war, he was distrustful of me and my two sisters, never believing us when we informed him of our whereabouts. The fact that we were teenagers significantly increased his fears about our relationships with boys, and it seemed to rule his ability to see us as anything other than Jezebels.[431] Rooted in slavery, the Jezebel derived from enslaver's desire to increase profit by either impregnating enslaved women and girls or forcing them to engage in sex to produce laborers. Since children of enslaved women followed the status of their mothers, the children were automatically "owned" by the mother's enslaver.

The stereotype of enslaved women as Jezebels also allowed white men and women to claim that African American women were inherently sexual beings who seduced white men into sexual liaisons. Even though the women usually had no control over the actions of their enslavers, enslaved women were the scapegoats for the violations against their own bodies. Jezebel remains a powerful myth in the public imagination that influences the beliefs of family members, even in the absence of evidence of promiscuity. In this sense, Ester's, Celia's, Agnes,' and Berenthia's, experiences of rape were common instances of violence that often went unacknowledged, unaddressed and unredressed. With the exception of Celia's sensationalized court case, we do not know the extent of trauma the women experienced.

While enslaved, they had no rights, and even when freed, they did not receive the same forms of legal redress as white women. Yet, they did pursue redress from a moral standpoint in ways they could navigate because of the tenets of Black feminisms: self-definition, self-determination, and connected knowing, in the context white supremacy and patriarchy. In the hostile spaces of the archives, African American women like myself are still misrepresented, still difficult and sometimes impossible to excavate, and I will continue to encounter manifestations of the afterlife of slavery.

I end this chapter with Maya Angelou's poem, "Still I Rise," because it sustains me in the archives when I'm exhausted and traumatized, and also in moments of doubt about my place in this world. Mostly, Angelou's notion of "rising" is a refutation and attempt to exorcise and carry away the haunting myths I internalized throughout my life.

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.
Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells

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[430] My father's belief that he grew up poor is based on his own assessment relayed to his children throughout our lives. His sister, Constance, and cousin, Ernestine did not see themselves growing up as poverty-stricken, which shows that my father understood himself and his childhood differently than his siblings who grew up with him in the same household.

[431] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*; Harris Perry, *Sister Citizen*; Carolyn M. West, "Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel.

Pumping in my living room.
Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.
Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?
Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own backyard.
You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.
Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?
Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.
Maya Angelou

CONCLUSION

The Work of Recovery

My personal history reflects a tension within African American history, whereby Black women are silenced and/or villainized,[432] while some Black men continue to be the heroes in Black families, just as Isaac remains as a hero in my family. African American history is largely mediated through the perspectives of Black men. However, my dissertation is part of a genealogy of Black feminist scholars who are interested in not only uncovering the stories of Black women, but the stories of "everyday" African American women - the unsung heroes - not because they are good or meet a normative standard, but they are heroic and embody complex personhood. They exemplify the complexity of living at the intersection of overlapping oppressions.

For Agnes, Ester, Harriet, Celia, Ella, and myself, redress was and is temporary and elusive. Whether African American women pursue redress formally or informally, achieving full redress has always been a fraught possibility. After Reconstruction ended in 1877, African American women no longer had the Radical Republican[433] administration offering elements of protection immediately after 1865 emancipation. The court awarded Agnes $244.62 in 1871 after the dismissal of the embezzlement case against her.[434] However, whether or not she actually received the funds is not known. What we do know is that she did not retain her 40 acres of land, because she eventually sold it to Amanda B. Evans for almost nothing in 1888.[435] Different scenarios were possible considering the access Agnes had to the Evans family and Fernando's associates, not to mention Isaac Renfro. Although her association with Fernando's family members may have aided her during Fernando's life, their allegiance or assistance to Agnes could have ended with his death. If Amanda sought to support Agnes during financial hard times, she might have helped to pay the taxes on the land, if Agnes was delinquent again. Amanda's ownership of Agnes' land allowed Amanda to make a profit because she sold it to John Meyers for one hundred dollars with eight percent annual interest, as stated on an August 5, 1892 deed of trust.[436]

For an African American woman like Agnes, it usually meant limitations even though she was emancipated. Reconstruction ended around 1877, and her socio-economic struggles probably began around that time. She maintained her land for about two decades, one decade after Reconstruction, before she became a pauper around 1887. By 1892, Agnes was dead. If Agnes did receive the court-awarded funds of $244.62, the conversion from 1871 into today's purchasing power would be approximately $5,447.73.[437] Five thousand dollars is a substantial payout, but for some reason, eleven years later, in 1882, her land was in foreclosure. Controlling

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[432] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought.*; Harris Perry, *Sister Citizen*.

[433] As part of the Republican Party of the United States, the Radical Republican faction was "radical" because of their belief in the immediate abolition of slavery, and African Americans' equal political rights. They were responsible for pushing for and passing the three major Reconstruction Amendments: 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments that abolished slavery, gave African Americans the right to citizenship, and gave African American men the right to vote.

[434] Franklin County Court, T.A. Lowe et. al versus Agnes Evans, dismissal of embezzlement "at cost of plaintiff," June 26, 1871.

[435] Franklin County Recorder 1 of 1 Document # 6WD033-00211, 28 September 1888.

[436] Franklin County Recorder 1 of 3 Document # D00O-00485, 5 August 1892.

[437] Ian Webster, Alioth LLC, Official Data Foundation, http://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1871?amount=244.62

images, the end of Reconstruction, and patriarchy's power over women's ability to earn a living wage, are probably factors that pushed Agnes into poverty.

Ester's pursuit of redress shows up in her family's litigious records, leaving her legacy of landownership and a fight for her and her descendant's rights to lands. Although she was able to acquire land through her own purchase and the lawsuits against Jacques Clamorgan, she could not get full redress because she had to fight a prominent white man who had the courts on his side. Harriet and her family eventually gained their freedom, but the court trial and the process requiring Harriet and her family to remain in jail, during the trial, was taxing on them. Harriet chose anonymity after she and her family were freed, but she had to work to help the family survive. Harriet's decision to pursue her freedom was about redressing her circumstances, and she did achieve partial redress. However, the eleven years that it took for her to receive redress lessened the magnitude of her redress because her husband died 17 months after his emancipation. Prior to Etheldred's death from tuberculosis, Harriet must have worked tirelessly to care for her husband's health, earn an income, and maintain the household. Celia's pursuit of redress through the informal means of self-defense with a hefty stick, and she knew that redress for her would be swift, both in the time it took to kill her enslaver, and the jury's expediency to convict, sentence, and execute her.

For Ella, redress was likely moving away from the racism and patriarchy of the south in her hometown of St. Louis. Considering the continuity of the allegations against her, maybe Ella became exhausted with living among family that distrusted her. Her move to California allowed her to start a new life with a new identity. The Great Migration created a huge shift in the placement of Black people around the country. By 1920, Ella's hometown of St. Clair, in the eastern section of the state, had a population of 442, while the City of St. Louis had 772,897 by the same year.[438] The City of Los Angeles was growing with a population of 576,673 by 1920. Ella remained in Los Angeles until her death. I did not attend her funeral, and I am not sure why. Even in Ella's death, there was silence in my family. Why? I wonder if my father chose patriarchy over family, similar to how it appears that Isaac chose patriarchy and capital over race, related to Agnes.

Analyzing probate and court documents in my examination of African American women in Missouri helped me understand the possibilities and the limits of redress. For African American women, the intersections of their identities are inseparable from each other, and the geo-cultural dimensions of diagonality shape how the women navigate pursuits of redress. Through my PhD journey, I learned that I am connected to all of the women in this study, not only because of our race and gender, but through our experiences related to redress. We all pursued some form of redress, but our redress is incomplete. This dissertation is an attempt to redress the violence of the archives and silences and erasures of African American women. It is

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[438] For the city of St. Louis and city of St. Clair, see the U.S. Census Bureau, Summary for the United States, by Divisions, Population, Agriculture, Manufactures, Mining, 2, Centers of Population 1790-1920, and Centers of Farms, Agricultural Products, and Manufactures, 1850-1920, 6. https://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/06229686v20-25ch4.pdf; For the city of Los Angeles, See the 1920 U.S. Census Bureau, Department of Commerce, Cureau of the Census, Sam L. Rogers and W. M. Steuart, Fourteenth Census of the United States, State Compendium, California, https://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/06229686v1-7ch04.pdf

both a formal and informal pathway to redress that leaves my imprint, my voice and my experiences in the archives for all those African American women unable to speak.

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