White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack - Peggy McIntosh

"I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group"

Through work to bring materials from women's studies into the rest of the curriculum, I have often noticed men's unwillingness to grant that they are overprivileged, even though they may grant that women are disadvantaged. They may say they will work to women's statues, in the society, the university, or the curriculum, but they can't or won't support the idea of lessening men's. Denials that amount to taboos surround the subject of advantages that men gain from women's disadvantages. These denials protect male privilege from being fully acknowledged, lessened, or ended.

Thinking through unacknowledged male privilege as a phenomenon, I realized that, since hierarchies in our society are interlocking, there are most likely a phenomenon, I realized that, since hierarchies in our society are interlocking, there was most likely a phenomenon of while privilege that was similarly denied and protected. As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage.

I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege. So I have begun in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have white privilege. I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools , and blank checks.

Describing white privilege makes one newly accountable. As we in women's studies work to reveal male privilege and ask men to give up some of their power, so one who writes about having white privilege must ask, "having described it, what will I do to lessen or end it?"

After I realized the extent to which men work from a base of unacknowledged privilege, I understood that much of their oppressiveness was unconscious. Then I remembered the frequent charges from women of color that white women whom they encounter are oppressive. I began to understand why we are just seen as oppressive, even when we don't see ourselves that way. I began to count the ways in which I enjoy unearned skin privilege and have been conditioned into oblivion about its existence.

My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. My schooling followed the pattern my colleague Elizabeth Minnich has pointed out: whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow "them" to be more like "us."

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Daily effects of white privilege

I decided to try to work on myself at least by identifying some of the daily effects of white privilege in my life. I have chosen those conditions that I think in my case attach somewhat more to skin-color privilege than to class, religion, ethnic status, or geographic location, though of course all these other factors are intricately intertwined. As far as I can tell, my African American coworkers, friends, and acquaintances with whom I come into daily or frequent contact in this particular time, place and time of work cannot count on most of these conditions.

1. I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.

2. I can avoid spending time with people whom I was trained to mistrust and who have learned to mistrust my kind or me.

3. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.

4. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.

5. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.

6. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.

7. When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.

8. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.

9. If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on white privilege.

10. I can be pretty sure of having my voice heard in a group in which I am the only member of my race.

11. I can be casual about whether or not to listen to another person's voice in a group in which s/he is the only member of his/her race.

12. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods which fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can cut my hair.

13. Whether I use checks, credit cards or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.

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14. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.

15. I do not have to educate my children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection.

16. I can be pretty sure that my children's teachers and employers will tolerate them if they fit school and workplace norms; my chief worries about them do not concern others' attitudes toward their race.

17. I can talk with my mouth full and not have people put this down to my color.

18. I can swear, or dress in second hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty or the illiteracy of my race.

19. I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.

20. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.

21. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.

22. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.

23. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.

24. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to the "person in charge", I will be facing a person of my race.

25. If a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.

26. I can easily buy posters, post-cards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys and children's magazines featuring people of my race.

27. I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance or feared.

28. I can be pretty sure that an argument with a colleague of another race is more likely to jeopardize her/his chances for advancement than to jeopardize mine.

29. I can be pretty sure that if I argue for the promotion of a person of another race, or a program centering on race, this is not likely to cost me heavily within my present setting, even if my colleagues disagree with me.

30. If I declare there is a racial issue at hand, or there isn't a racial issue at hand, my race will lend me more credibility for either position than a person of color will have.

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31. I can choose to ignore developments in minority writing and minority activist programs, or disparage them, or learn from them, but in any case, I can find ways to be more or less protected from negative consequences of any of these choices.

32. My culture gives me little fear about ignoring the perspectives and powers of people of other races.

33. I am not made acutely aware that my shape, bearing or body odor will be taken as a reflection on my race.

34. I can worry about racism without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking.

35. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having my co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of my race.

36. If my day, week or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it had racial overtones.

37. I can be pretty sure of finding people who would be willing to talk with me and advise me about my next steps, professionally.

38. I can think over many options, social, political, imaginative or professional, without asking whether a person of my race would be accepted or allowed to do what I want to do.

39. I can be late to a meeting without having the lateness reflect on my race.

40. I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.

41. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.

42. I can arrange my activities so that I will never have to experience feelings of rejection owing to my race.

43. If I have low credibility as a leader I can be sure that my race is not the problem.

44. I can easily find academic courses and institutions which give attention only to people of my race.

45. I can expect figurative language and imagery in all of the arts to testify to experiences of my race.

46. I can chose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color and have them more or less match my skin.

47. I can travel alone or with my spouse without expecting embarrassment or hostility in those who deal with us.

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48. I have no difficulty finding neighborhoods where people approve of our household.

49. My children are given texts and classes which implicitly support our kind of family unit and do not turn them against my choice of domestic partnership.

50. I will feel welcomed and "normal" in the usual walks of public life, institutional and social.

Elusive and fugitive

I repeatedly forgot each of the realizations on this list until I wrote it down. For me white privilege has turned out to be an elusive and fugitive subject. The pressure to avoid it is great, for in facing it I must give up the myth of meritocracy. If these things are true, this is not such a free country; one's life is not what one makes it; many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own.

In unpacking this invisible knapsack of white privilege, I have listed conditions of daily experience that I once took for granted. Nor did I think of any of these perquisites as bad for the holder. I now think that we need a more finely differentiated taxonomy of privilege, for some of these varieties are only what one would want for everyone in a just society, and others give license to be ignorant, oblivious, arrogant, and destructive.

I see a pattern running through the matrix of white privilege, a patter of assumptions that were passed on to me as a white person. There was one main piece of cultural turf; it was my own turn, and I was among those who could control the turf. My skin color was an asset for any move I was educated to want to make. I could think of myself as belonging in major ways and of making social systems work for me. I could freely disparage, fear, neglect, or be oblivious to anything outside of the dominant cultural forms. Being of the main culture, I could also criticize it fairly freely.

In proportion as my racial group was being made confident, comfortable, and oblivious, other groups were likely being made unconfident, uncomfortable, and alienated. Whiteness protected me from many kinds of hostility, distress, and violence, which I was being subtly trained to visit, in turn, upon people of color.

For this reason, the word "privilege" now seems to me misleading. We usually think of privilege as being a favored state, whether earned or conferred by birth or luck. Yet some of the conditions I have described here work systematically to over empower certain groups. Such privilege simply confers dominance because of one's race or sex.

Earned strength, unearned power

I want, then, to distinguish between earned strength and unearned power conferred privilege can look like strength when it is in fact permission to escape or to dominate. But not all of the privileges on my list are inevitably damaging. Some, like the expectation that neighbors will be decent to you, or that your race will not count against you in court, should be the norm in a just society. Others, like the privilege to ignore less powerful people, distort the humanity of the holders as well as the ignored groups.

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We might at least start by distinguishing between positive advantages, which we can work to spread, and negative types of advantage, which unless rejected will always reinforce our present hierarchies. For example, the feeling that one belongs within the human circle, as Native Americans say, should not be seen as privilege for a few. Ideally it is an unearned entitlement. At present, since only a few have it, it is an unearned advantage for them. This paper results from a process of coming to see that some of the power that I originally say as attendant on being a human being in the United States consisted in unearned advantage and conferred dominance.

I have met very few men who truly distressed about systemic, unearned male advantage and conferred dominance. And so one question for me and others like me is whether we will be like them, or whether we will get truly distressed, even outraged, about unearned race advantage and conferred dominance, and, if so, what we will do to lessen them. In any case, we need to do more work in identifying how they actually affect our daily lives. Many, perhaps most, of our white students in the United States think that racism doesn't affect them because they are not people of color; they do not see "whiteness" as a racial identity. In addition, since race and sex are not the only advantaging systems at work, we need similarly to examine the daily experience of having age advantage, or ethnic advantage, or physical ability, or advantage related to nationality, religion, or sexual orientation.

Difficulties and angers surrounding the task of finding parallels are many. Since racism, sexism, and heterosexism are not the same, the advantages associated with them should not be seen as the same. In addition, it is hard to disentangle aspects of unearned advantage that rest more on social class, economic class, race, religion, sex, and ethnic identity that on other factors. Still, all of the oppressions are interlocking, as the members of the Combahee River Collective pointed out in their "Black Feminist Statement" of 1977.

One factor seems clear about all of the interlocking oppressions. They take both active forms, which we can see, and embedded forms, which as a member of the dominant groups one is taught not to see. In my class and place, I did not see myself as a racist because I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth.

Disapproving of the system won't be enough to change them. I was taught to think that racism could end if white individuals changed their attitude. But a "white" skin in the United States opens many doors for whites whether or not we approve of the way dominance has been conferred on us. Individual acts can palliate but cannot end, these problems.

To redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions. The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political surrounding privilege are the key political tool here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these subject taboo. Most talk by whites about equal opportunity seems to me now to be about equal opportunity to try to get into a position of dominance while denying that systems of dominance exist.

It seems to me that obliviousness about white advantage, like obliviousness about male advantage, is kept strongly inculturated in the United States so as to maintain the myth of meritocracy, the myth that

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democratic choice is equally available to all. Keeping most people unaware that freedom of confident action is there for just a small number of people props up those in power and serves to keep power in the hands of the same groups that have most of it already.

Although systemic change takes many decades, there are pressing questions for me and, I imagine, for some others like me if we raise our daily consciousness on the perquisites of being light-skinned. What will we do with such knowledge? As we know from watching men, it is an open question whether we will choose to use unearned advantage, and whether we will use any of our arbitrarily awarded power to try to reconstruct power systems on a broader base.

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From Mammy to Welfare Queen: Images of Black Women in Public-Policy Formation - Emilie M. Townes

White supremacist ideology in the United States depends on creating and maintaining a nonhuman status for Black and other darker-skinned peoples. We may think of White supremacists as long gone, merely a dark part of the American past, but the fundamental belief of this ideology, that non-Whites are lesser breeds, still exerts a strong influence on how we think of ourselves and each other and the decisions we make as a society. One way to trace the continuing impact of the slaveholding White supremacist ideology is to see how its racial and sexual stereotypes affect our public-policy decisions. This ideology includes stereotypical images of Black womanhood: we are all familiar with the Mammy who loves her White master's children as though they were her own, the Black Matriarch who rules her home and her neighborhood yet cannot keep a husband and thus cannot raise her children right, and the Welfare Queen who lives in luxury thanks to the hard work of the taxpayer. The negativity of these images, particularly those of the Black Matriarch and the Welfare Queen, allows us to assume the worst about Black women (and all Black folk). We then go on to develop welfare policies based on these imaginary characters' personal failings—policies that affect not only poor people of all colors, but all of us. In forming these policies, we rarely question the justice of the structures in which we all exist and the economic, moral, political, and social impact these structures have on our lives.

Recognizing these brutalizing images of Black womanhood for what they are provides an opportunity to think through how to address the legacies of slavery that remain in our minds, in our environment, and in our public policies, where they play out with perhaps the greatest cost in the lives of Black women and girls. I will explore the sources of these stereotypes, how they serve the dominant culture that created them, and their impact on public policy, especially welfare policy. This exploration of the religious, historical, and intellectual roots of our demonization of poor people will also show how we have come to live in a selfish, me-first society where many people believe that those down on their luck have only themselves to blame; the rich are in their position because they are blessed; government is only a hindrance, never a help; and none of us bears any responsibility to those around us. I conclude by offering a religious ethical critique with constructive proposals for forming a society that provides justice for all.

Whereas many people think of sexual ethics as a purely individual matter, in reality, people's experience of sexuality and their decisions about it never occur in a vacuum. The racial-sexual stereotypes that I discuss here, along with the unjust social structures that they justify, limit Black women's opportunities to live prosperous lives and harm their physical and mental health. In the area of sexuality, the toll is heavy, including greater vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, decreased access to reproductive health services and neonatal care, and the greater hurdles faced by Black rape complainants than by White ones in the criminal justice system.[1]

Images of the Perfect Black Woman: Perfectly Good, Perfectly Bad

The American imagination is peopled with a handful of images of Black women. This family of stereotypes, all useful to the dominant White culture that spawned them, includes fat, old Mammy with the rag around her head; Jezebel in her provocatively torn dress; the determined, emasculating Black Matriarch; and the weak-willed, sly Welfare Queen, out for all she can chisel from the well-meaning, naïve taxpayer. All play a role in the way we view one another. I will begin with the older images of the Mammy and the Jezebel for the sake of historical depth, then focus on how the contemporary images of the Black Matriarch and the Welfare Queen allow Americans to demonize the poor as we shape public policies.

We must start with the Mammy, because she came first in the White popular imagination. The most positive image of Black womanhood from this imagination is the asexual, overly nurturing Mammy. This mythological creation does not want freedom. In fact, she neglects her own kids to care for White children and their families. Mammy does not display any need for sex: this perfect Black woman focuses totally and completely on White people and their needs. Mammy is fat, an excellent cook and housekeeper, and above all loyal to her (White) family.

Unlike the Mammy, the more recently invented Black Matriarch does not forsake her family to care for Whites. She runs her household (with or without a man) and is responsible for the moral upbringing of her own children. She is the failed Mammy because she violates the image of the submissive, hardworking servant of White masters, even when she is in fact an employee serving the needs of White families. The Black Matriarch is a bane to the American cultural order because she works instead of tending to her children. But she has brought this upon herself. The Black Matriarch is single because she is overly aggressive and unfeminine. She emasculates her lovers and husbands, who then refuse to marry her or desert her.2 Because she is a single working mother, she cannot supervise her children and contributes to their lack of success in school and in society. This makes the Black Matriarch a failure to her own Black community as well.

The Welfare Queen is the Matriarch's companion—the bad Black mother. She drives a white Cadillac, the story goes, and pays for her steaks with food stamps. The Welfare Queen is, like the Black Matriarch, a failure twice over. She is a failed Mammy because she does not care for her own children (or anyone else's), and she is a failed Matriarch because she relies on the welfare system (the rest of us) to support her family.

Where Did They Come From?

If we rely on the popular "historical" accounts, we must believe that Mammies existed in legion. In fact, most of the White antebellum evidence for Mammies comes from fictional sources and romanticized memoirs. Catherine Clinton's exhaustive study *The Plantation*

Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South shows that only a handful of women actually fit the Mammy image.[3] Herbert Gutman's research also reveals that the prevalence of Mammies has been completely distorted.[4] He found that there were few older Black women who served the role of Mammy as late as the 1880s, when Southern memoirs began to tout her presence and importance. Gutman shows that most domestic workers in White households were young single girls rather than mature Black women. The conditions of slavery rarely allowed for such a large old woman to be in a position to care for the master's and mistress's children.[5]

The stereotype that we know as the Black Matriarch first received wide attention with the work of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 government report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, better known as the Moynihan Report.[6] The two highly respected Black academics on whose work Moynihan relied had seen the rise of the strong female figure in Black society as the result of racial oppression and poverty.[7] Moynihan himself, however, labeled female-led families as the cause of Black poverty and moral depravity.

One of Moynihan's sources was W. E. B. Du Bois, a founding figure in American sociology, who published The Negro American Family in 1908. Du Bois painted Black enslaved women as victims of slavery: depraved mothers, brutalized sex objects, and promiscuous. Discussing the Black women of his own era, he focused on their sexual behavior, pointing to high rates of illegitimacy and a lack of chastity.[8] Even more potent ammunition for Moynihan's viciously drawn image of the Black Matriarch came from E. Franklin Frazier, one of the premier Black sociologists of his time. Frazier began positively in *The Negro Family in the United States*, published in 1939, stating, "The Negro woman as wife or mother was the mistress of her cabin, and, save for the interference of master and overseer, her wishes in regard to mating and family matters were paramount." Further, "neither economic necessity nor tradition had instilled in her the spirit of subordination to masculine authority."[9] Later, in *The Negro in the United States*, appearing in 1949, Frazier described Black female-male relationships with such phrases as "considerable equality," "generally equalitarian," "tradition of independence," "spirit of democracy," and "considerable cooperation."[10] By 1957, however, in examining the rise of the Black middle class, Frazier presented wives as the masters of their husbands and essentially accused Black men of not being manly enough.[11]

Seizing on these negative portrayals, Moynihan labeled Black women as doubly deviant: they were masculine, and they were unnaturally superior. He portrayed Black men as deviant, effeminate, and passive.[12] Moynihan argued that female-headed households, which were more common in Black communities, were the cause of Black poverty and moral depravity. Moynihan did not believe that Black women played any positive role. The Welfare Queen of all colors took her place on the American stage at least as far back as the 1976 presidential campaign, when Ronald Reagan conjured her up to personify the need for welfare reform. "She has 80 names, 30 addresses, 12 Social Security cards, and is collecting veteran's benefits on four non-existing deceased husbands," Reagan would say. "She's got Medicare, getting food stamps and she is collecting welfare under each of her names. Her tax-free cash income alone is over $150,000."[13]

The stereotype of the Welfare Queen spread further after a 1986 CBS special report, “The Vanishing Family: Crisis in Black America,” portrayed the Welfare Queen as a failed Black Matriarch who is depicted as the domineering female head of the American Black family. Both figures represent, Bill Moyers told us, the moral corruption of Black childbearing.

Why White Society Needs the Mammy, the Matriarch, and the Welfare Queen

White society created these stereotypes, and they persist in our collective imagination because they serve a purpose. Mostly, these images let Whites off the hook for the injustices of the dominant group—themselves. The image of the Mammy allows Whites to praise Blacks who follow her contentedly subservient path and to criticize those who do not. Mammy is a super-mother, but she conveys an ambiguous message about motherhood: to be the perfect Mammy, the Black woman must neglect her own family.14 The de-eroticized Mammy also provides a fantastic facade meant to disguise White men's sexual exploitation of Black women during the post–Civil War era. Who would abuse a fat, old Black woman? She is “confirmation” that White men did not find Black women desirable. This convenient fiction allows Whites to overlook the living proof that Blacks and Whites were reproducing together. More recently, the imagined Mammy has served the needs of nostalgic White southerners seeking to make sense of and defend slavery and segregation by creating plantation legends featuring a bucolic, idyllic society filled with nurturing Mammies who embraced their servitude along with the White children they raised. The stereotypes place the perceived moral failures of Black children and Black men in the laps of Black women.

The images of the Black Matriarch and the Welfare Queen allow us to feel better about cutting back the help that we, as a society, give to poor people. These false images open the floodgates for theorizing about Black poverty as an affliction passed down through the generations. Black poverty persists, this theory has it (see Moynihan, Frazier, and Moyers), because the female heads of Black households pass down the alleged values or lack of values that “support” poverty from one generation to the next. From the viewpoint of an elite White male, Black children lack the attention and care allegedly showered on middle- and upper-class White children, and this deficiency retards Black children's achievement. These children grow up to fail. The Black Matriarch and the Welfare Queen become the cause of all social problems because of their singleness, their blackness, and their children. The authors of the 1996 welfare reform legislation, those whose debate shaped the legislation, and the rhetoric of welfare reform today, all vilify these mythical, bad Black women.

The images of the Black Matriarch and Welfare Queen throttle Black life into narrow, haunting spaces. They take bits of Black reality and transform them into a norm of immorality. These two stereotypes divert our attention from structural inequalities—economic, political, and social—that affect not only Black mothers and their children but all of us. The structural causes of poverty are many. A partial list includes a tax system designed to keep and grow wealth in the

hands of those who already have it (Whites); less funding for education, health care, transportation, housing, infrastructure, and other public services in poor areas; and a justice system tilted for the haves and against the have-nots.

But belief in the stereotypes of the Welfare Queen and the Black Matriarch make all those problems go away. If you agree with these stereotypes, the public-policy solution becomes simple: teach good values in the home and anyone can rise from poverty. Although it is important to teach good values and reinforce those values throughout our lives, this is not the sole or even best response to the structural inequalities that spawn poverty. Blaming Blacks who are poor for their plight and using Black women's imagined failure as mothers and wives to explain economic apartheid yokes classism, racism, and sexism into a tight, neat package that labels Black family structures deviant because they fall short of patriarchal assumptions about the family ideal.

Religious Roots of the Demonization of the Poor

The Mammy, the Black Matriarch, and her sister the Welfare Queen are the female faces of the poor in America. These images, combined with a work ethic that considers wealth a sign of God's grace and condemns poverty as a personal failing, added to the American cult of the individual, create a noxious stew of White supremacist ideology that infects every discussion of public policy involving the poor and the Black in the United States. The result is an attitude that considers the poor and the Black different from other Americans: less responsible, lazier, more undisciplined, less able to make the right decisions for themselves, and less deserving of society's consideration.

The foundation of the belief in the virtue of wealth is the work of the sixteenth-century theologian and Protestant reformer John Calvin, who believed that we achieve the Christian life by being obedient to God. For Calvin, obedience includes recognizing that God has given us our station in life.15 A secular version of Calvin lives on today, one in which God is stripped out: each person is solely responsible for her or his place in the social order. Although there are myriad explanations for why people are poor, assumptions about the lazy poor run through public-policy discussions today, even though Calvin himself may not have been that harsh.16

The eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers who were interested in understanding the individual separate from society made a significant contribution to the religious identity of many Protestants in the United States. This inheritance is a sense of self that is rooted in the Enlightenment understanding that all people have inherent rights and that each person is an independent unit. But the Enlightenment notion of the self has evolved into a rampant sense of individualism that stresses personal responsibility and despises any hint of dependency (while refusing to recognize the benefits that the government lavishes on those with advantages). This mean-spirited duo of skewed Calvinistic and Enlightenment thinking encourages the view that government is a necessary evil that we must keep from cutting into our personal freedom.

Calvin's emphasis on the godly nature of work, combined with the legacy of the Enlightenment, formed a worldview that served the needs of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Industrial Revolution. It provided the industrializing world with hardworking, thrifty entrepreneurs who took pride in and derived their sense of self from being driven and prudent businesspeople. They had to work hard, limit their consumption, and reinvest their profits to produce greater wealth. The ability to do this required a strong sense of duty to one's work, based on the following convictions: work gives meaning to life; hard work is necessary and one should give work the best of one's time; work contributes to the moral worth of the individual and to the health of the social order; wealth is a major goal in life; leisure is both earned by work and prepares one for it; success in work results primarily from personal effort; and finally, the wealth that one amasses from work is a sign of God's favor. We are inheritors of a work ethic that has abandoned its roots in the individual's sense of community to trumpet the value of the independence of the individual from the community.

Values and Policies Today

The so-called Protestant work ethic, formed from the views of Calvin, Enlightenment thinkers, and the demands of the Industrial Revolution, remains with us, and recognizing it helps us understand many contemporary U.S. public policies.17 These policies grow from religious values of which we are often unaware and which the makers of these policies are ill equipped to recognize because they cannot remember what they never knew.18 At the same time, in a more positive vein, the Enlightenment view of the independent self and the Protestant work ethic have helped to build large segments of our culture and society. They have aided in carving out enormous national wealth based on a capitalist economy. And these beliefs have often fueled movements for social change, including the Civil Rights Movement; attempts by residents of public housing complexes, often led by women, to take back and define their living spaces; and movements for economic empowerment in which churches set up independent corporations to address community problems. These movements rest, to varying degrees, on the values of hard work and thrift and the dignity and worth of the individual.

The difference between these movements and the view that government is a necessary evil lies in their conception of the proper relationship between the individual and society. These movements yearn for a robust, inclusive, interdependent society. In many dispossessed communities, the notion of personal freedom remains a utopian folly: constraints are everywhere. In sharp contrast, those who see government as a necessary evil attempt to limit and direct its scope in ways that have stunted the daily lives of poor people, to the point where many Black folk see current public policies as attempts at genocide. Efforts to limit the size of government fall punitively on poor people because they deprive those most in need of teachers, doctors, food, child care, public transport, and other necessities. The Welfare Queen and her children are at the

mercy of public policies that stress equality and personal liberty, as if our societal playing field were equitable and fair, with equal access to goods and services for all.

But we have become an intensely stratified nation economically. The top 10 percent of U.S. households owns over 71 percent of this nation's wealth.19 The top 1 percent of families owns slightly more than 34 percent of this nation's wealth. At the other end of the spectrum, under the 1996 welfare reforms, a family of three (a mother with two children under age 18) qualifies for federal cash assistance if its gross income is below $784 a month and its assets are worth less than $1,000. There is a four-year lifetime limit on receiving assistance from this program, and work is a major component, with the hope that it will help recipients gain the experience needed to find a job and become self-sufficient.20

Public-Policy Making

The inequities of our system are no accident. Public policies reflect our national value judgments. Our decision as a society to hold the poor morally responsible for their plight is a gruesome and death-dealing one. The poor in U.S. culture are alternately ignored, rendered faceless, and labeled undeserving; or considered an eyesore, their own worst enemy, or simply down on their luck. When we do see the face of the poor, it is often the face of the Black Matriarch or the Welfare Queen. Both stereotypes played a tremendous (sub)conscious role in the minds of those crafting the 1996 welfare reforms. We know this from the language that they used. The degrading stereotypes of Black women reassure us that poverty is a glitch, a bump in the road that does not contradict the grand narrative of progress and success that fuels our culture. The message is that we must simply work harder to reap the benefits that are there for the taking. This attitude prevents us from considering the possibility that we live in a socioeconomic system that is structured to ensure inequality but touts an alleged openness to all. If we question the status quo, we might choose to contest it, and a challenge would not serve the needs of those who benefit from our system's structural inequities.

Our culture suffers from the enormous impact of market forces on everyday life. Neoliberal economics, with its emphasis on limiting government intervention in the domestic economy and its focus on lessening restrictions on business operations and property rights, is now the order of the day. This philosophy places the interests of those who own or manage corporations and wealth at the center of all major public-policy considerations. Although this approach has a new name today, it has prevailed in the United States for most of our history. We see its constraints when we look at who can get and afford adequate health care, when we see employment patterns that show discrimination by race and gender, when we recognize how limited the access to affordable housing is, and when we note the lack of public transportation systems that address the needs of citizens. This tumble-down (versus trickle-down) economic reality exists amid a mix of racist, sexist, and classist ideologies that mask the morally bankrupt economic system of the United States. These deadly ideologies disguise the fact that the majority

of the poor and those on welfare are White.21 Policy makers view and present inner-city neighborhoods, largely inhabited by darker-skinned racial and ethnic groups, as sites of pathology and hopelessness. They ignore rural areas, which are largely inhabited by Whites, or paint them with the pastoral gloss of rugged individualism and as the last vestige of true Americana.

Our views of welfare and welfare reform grow from downright incorrect views of life in America. The previous welfare law needed reform because it did not adequately require or provide opportunities for work and parental caretaking to help families to get off the rolls. Indeed, it often locked families into dependency that could, but did not necessarily, become generational. But the myth that led to the welfare reforms of 1996 was that of the Black Matriarch and the Welfare Queen, with their irresponsible sexual activity, childbearing, and childrearing and their female-headed households. Thus the reforms were intended to reduce the number of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and promote the formation and maintenance of two-parent families in poor communities, rather than to address the structural problems that hobble the ability of poor people to get and keep jobs and take care of their children at the same time—problems like bad schools and no affordable day care centers.

Our views of what we think the poor are like make it easy to stereotype poor Black women as Welfare Queens. We have created a society that simply refuses to care beyond our narrow self-interests. We are not even concerned enough to recognize that welfare-reform efforts are doomed if we craft them to fit the familiar stereotypes and abstractions. To speak of “the poor” in U.S. society is to lump together highly diverse groups of people who need different kinds of help. The single White woman with a baby and no high school diploma; the elderly Black man living on his Social Security checks; the strong young man who cannot hold a job because he is developmentally disabled; the middle-aged factory worker whose skills have been swamped by the onrushing twenty-first-century economy—these are some of America’s poor. Some will need public assistance only briefly; others will always need our help. Some need cash aid or food stamps; others need job training or doctor visits, or a way to get to the doctor’s office. Welfare is a set of complex and interlocking dynamics that combine, at bare minimum, education, jobs, housing and homelessness, crime, addictions, race, gender, class, health care, and geography. As long as policy makers try to formulate a single policy to deal with the poor, they will fail, because they will not be addressing the structural problems that create poverty. The fallout for our society and many of its members will continue to be disastrous.

The bottom line is: can these reforms, built on mean-spiritedness, self-interest, stereotypes, and political expediency, enhance the lives of those who are living in whirlpools of catastrophe? The religious values of justice and love contradict public policies that require low-income and poor people to bear the weight of balancing the budget. Policy makers slash social spending on welfare and education while promoting tax cuts for the wealthy that have sent the federal debt spiraling beyond $11 trillion. Our religious values ask, What do politicians mean when they argue for tax cuts, Charitable Choice, the Defense of Marriage Act, the Contract with

the American Family and its predecessor the Contract with America, charter schools, and empowerment zones? The latest assault on welfare recipients is a strategy that political leaders—Democrat and Republican—are using to shift attention away from the government's redistribution of wealth to the rich through tax cuts, attempts to dismantle Social Security, and pandering to big business (e.g., the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005).22 Left behind as political fodder in this race to help the wealthy are the Welfare Queen, her children, and many of her friends.

Building a Just Society

I have examined the sources of the religious values at the core of American policies that harm people in need, including the identification of the individual as an independent unit, the emphasis on personal responsibility, and the disgust at dependency. We have seen how these values protect us from facing the structural evil created over generations that has resulted in inequities in our society. These values encourage us to label the victims irresponsible (at best) and to shrug off any responsibility of our own. In the face of these injustices, we must form public policies that move beyond the notion that government must work through individuals who care about themselves first and foremost. We need public policies that offer strategies more complex than the incremental conversion of individual souls. As a society, we concentrate far too much on individual morality. We discuss pieces of the social structure that we want to change rather than examining the structure in its entirety. Religious values led us into this situation, and they also offer us a way to consider that structure ethically, in its entirety, and to work our way toward the creation of a more just society for all.

Perhaps one reason we remain skeptical of the government's ability to do much about poverty is that our theological worldviews do not offer us much of an alternative, either. And yet, viewing the self as the center of the universe actually turns the Christian Gospel on its head. Moreover, the Bible hardly supports the notion embedded in welfare reform that a person must first earn merit (meet an obligation) before being accepted (receiving an entitlement). The Christian faith is built on God's grace. For Protestants, this grace is not rare and does not have to be earned; it is constant and free. One is accepted first (the entitlement), and then one follows with a life of joyous (but sometimes cranky) response (obligation).

If, however, we see ourselves as the independent Enlightenment self, refusing to yoke our identities and concerns into the community, we will never be able to engage in democratic politics with a spirit of justice or peace. If we remain absorbed in the consumer market, we will be unable to offer any genuine alternative to the way public policy has been formed; instead, we will continue to make and accept political deals. We will continue to lose our essence, that is, a genuine power arising from our desire for salvation. We will be even more complicit with the dominant political powers, for religious folk and religious discourse and religion itself will no

longer be the sigh of the oppressed or the heart of the world without a heart, as Karl Marx said so well.

As we engage in public-policy debates, we often lose track of the fact that although Calvin viewed the world as sinful, his ethic is also one of grateful obedience that leads to self-denial. He held together love of God and love of neighbor, calling for us to extend charity to our neighbor and to share with that person our blessings. For Calvin, neighbors include those we do not know and those we consider to be enemies.

When it comes to work, the work ethic, and public-policy making, we would do well to incorporate other elements of Calvin's work ethic: work as a calling or vocation rather than simply a career or job, and work in service to others and not only for our own self-fulfillment. We should acknowledge that work does not give us our basic identity or meaning; this comes from our relationships with God, from the world around us, and from the people in it.

Building on Calvin, three basic public-policy questions emerge. The first two, What kind of society do we want? and What sort of people do we need to be to achieve this society? dominate current public-policy debates and decisions. They are, unsurprisingly, based on the conception of the individual as an independent being who should take responsibility for his or her situation despite the structural inequalities in our society. These two questions are vital for our lives together, but they do not go far enough. It is the third question that helps to balance and enrich public-policy formation: What kinds of social structures do we need to help form people to make the society we want to live in? This last question pushes beyond a concentration on the self and individual character to include an examination of social institutions and structural change. It also recognizes our individual responsibility to one another and to our society as well as to ourselves.

It is apt, then, to add another set of religious values that shape public policies as we answer the third question, about shaping ourselves and our society. One of the earliest words we learn in church is "love." We take great delight in telling the story that love can lift us, that Jesus loves us, that Jesus loves all the little children of the world. Yet love without justice is asking for trouble. Justice is that notion that each of us has worth, and that each of us has the right to have that worth recognized and respected. In short, justice lets us know that we owe one another respect and the right to personal dignity.

Justice leads to public policies that claim rights as a part of the assertion of our dignity. Justice has to do with our relationships with one another. It leads to a sense of caring that takes concrete form in the provision of accessible and affordable health care and child care, and in the development of urban and rural infrastructures that promote the health, safety, and well-being of residents. This includes public transportation, green spaces for recreation and exercise, and zoning policies that support neighborhoods and communities. It recognizes the interdependence in which we all actually live.

Justice, then, is more than giving to each what is due or treating all cases equally. It requires attention to our diversities and particularly to those people most marginalized. Simply

put, justice involves uncovering, understanding, and rejecting oppression—that is, structural evil. This means recognizing the privileges and benefits that come a-waltzing to some in concert with the oppression of others. The point is fundamental structural transformation. Reform is not enough.

As we consider notions of democracy and public policy within conscious religious frameworks, we need to make explicit our conception of the common good in terms of how we understand it from our various religious and nonreligious worldviews, and to realize that we will not always agree. More importantly, for those of us who are middle-class Christians, we need to bring the poor to the center of our decision making. We need to set aside our images of Mammy, the Black Matriarch, and the Welfare Queen and engage with poor people to develop the questions we need to ask about the common good, and then develop strategies to achieve it.

I envision the common good as including social structures that benefit all people in an inclusive and democratic social and moral order. This society would include accessible and affordable health care, a just political system that holds all people to the same law, a fair educational system, effective and non-discriminatory public safety, a clean environment, and an effective and humane social welfare system. The common good calls us to think more deeply and strategically about our conceptions of community. Rather than community shaped by competition and domination, community can be a site of strength and meaning that helps citizens take an active role in society. This understanding of community embraces individualism by encouraging self-definition and self-determination but always in the context of the larger community's defining and shaping of the common good.

Such a conceptual shift requires that we recognize the ways in which each of us takes on powerful roles and powerless ones at different times and in varying circumstances. In recognizing the myriad views that we adopt with our different roles, we may begin to see that where we stand offers only a partial perspective on the world. We are unable to perceive absolute truth, but as individuals working together, we can share our perspectives as we participate in constructing the common good, one that does not grow from the demonizing stereotypes of the White supremacist worldview.

Establishing and maintaining the common good requires all of our cooperation, and this demanding task is part of what genuine democracy is about. To settle for a weak democratic system that runs roughshod over people is to reconcile ourselves to structural evil. Our diversity helps us in our quest for a rich and vital common good, because within it we understand the need for each of us to hear other perspectives if we are to "see" more fully the world around us and how we are shaping it. This is a very different stance from one that rests on the independent self as the center of the universe or the Welfare Queen as an accurate depiction of Black women and Black culture. It is very different from a society that demonizes Black women who leave the home to earn money to support their children, shames Black women who stay home and accept public assistance to feed their families, condemns as emasculating those Black women who take

on the burden of heading up their families and their communities, and defines Black women by their sexuality and their breeding ability.

Rather than settling for half-truths and inaccurate information, we commit to understanding the sometimes harsh realities of life in the United States. Instead of negative competition that seeks to dominate and win at all costs, in achieving the common good we practice a competition that pushes all of us toward excellence and growth. This competition builds a vital and healthy social order rather than one that can fall like a house of cards under the unrelenting pressure of capitalism's market forces. In this contest, we shift our perspective just enough to realize that we are members of the same community, the same society, and that we can respect and value individual freedom and pursue those goals we hold in common.

Traditionally, society gives us a choice: to submit either to religious values focused on private character or to those that stress public morality. There is at least one other option: find a healthier ground where we can craft a creative, progressive, and inclusive space for everyone. This space would demand the best from us as individuals; this space would expect nothing less than attempts by all of us, as a group, to create a just society.

Notes

1. See Dorie J. Gilbert and Ednita M. Wright, eds., African American Women Living with AIDS: Critical Responses for the New Millennium (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003); Quinn M. Gentry, Black Women's Risk for HIV: Rough Living (New York: Haworth, 2007); Dorothy Roberts, Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty (New York: Vintage, 1998); Elizabeth A. Howell, Paul Hebert, Samprit Chatterjee, Lawrence C. Kleinman, and Mark R. Chassin, "Black/White Differences in Very Low Birth Weight Neonatal Mortality Rates Among New York City Hospitals," Pediatrics (2008) 121(3) 407–415; Jennifer C. Nash, Black Women and Rape: A Review of the Literature (Waltham, MA: Feminist Sexual Ethics Project, Brandeis University, 2009),
http://www.brandeis.edu/projects/fse/slavery/slav-us/slav-us-articles/Nash2009-6-12.pdf (accessed August 3, 2009); and Elizabeth Kennedy, Victim Race and Rape (Waltham, MA: Feminist Sexual Ethics Project, Brandeis University, 2003),
http://www.brandeis.edu/projects/fse/slavery/slav-us/slav-us-articles/slav-us-art-kennedy-full.pdf (accessed June 20, 2009).

2. Robin Good, "The Blues: Breaking the Psychological Chains of Controlling Images," in Dismantling White Privilege: Pedagogy, Politics, and Whiteness, ed. Nelson M. Rodriquez and Leila E. Villaverde (New York: Peter Lang, 2000) 112. Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990) 73f.

3. Catherine Clinton, The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South (New York: Pantheon, 1982) 201f, notes: The Mammy was created by white Southerners to redeem the relationship between black women and white men within slave society in response to the antislavery attack from the North during the ante-bellum era, and to embellish it with nostalgia in the post-bellum period. In the primary records from before the Civil War, hard evidence for her existence simply does not appear.
4. Herbert G. Gutman, The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750–1925 (New York: Vintage, 1976) 443.
5. Patricia A. Turner, Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture (New York: Anchor, 1994) 44. Turner writes, "At no time during the pre–Civil War era did more than 25 percent of the white Southern population own slaves . . . most slave owners possessed ten or fewer slaves, the majority of whom—men and women—were consigned to field labor. Like the field hands, those black bondswomen who worked indoors were unlikely to be overweight because their foodstuffs were severely rationed. They were more likely to be light than dark because household jobs were frequently assigned to mixed-race women. They were unlikely to be old because nineteenth-century black women just did not live very long; fewer than 10 percent of black women lived beyond their fiftieth birthday."
6. Daniel P. Moynihan, The Negro Family: The Case for National Action (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1965). Moynihan misappropriated E. Franklin Frazier's The Negro Family in the United States. The 1948 abridged edition of Frazier's work, which is the most widely available, paints a much more complex and rich description of the Black family and the roles of Black men and women in it. Moynihan did not include this material. It is important to note that the 1939 unabridged edition of Frazier's work contains more material than the 1948 edition. In short, Moynihan did a highly selective and suspect reading of Black life. See E. Franklin Frazier, The Negro Family in the United States (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939). See also W. E. B. Du Bois, The Negro American Family (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1908).
7. Collins, Black Feminist Thought, 75.
8. See Patricia Morton, Disfigured Images: The Historical Assault on Afro-American Women (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1991) 58.
9. Frazier, Negro Family, 125.
10. Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, "They Have Careers! Women, Class, and Families in the Sociology of E. Franklin Frazier [or "Re-Reading" Frazier's Sociology of Women Through the Black Bourgeoisie]" (unpublished manuscript) 7. See also Frazier, The Negro in the United States (New York: Macmillan, 1949).
11. Frazier, Black Bourgeoisie: The Rise of a New Middle Class (New York: Free, 1957) 221; Gilkes, "They Have Careers!" 7.

12. Moynihan, Negro Family; Patricia Bell Scott, “Debunking Sapphire: Toward a NonRacist and Non-Sexist Social Science,” in All the Women Are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us are Brave: Black Women’s Studies, eds. Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith (Old Westbury, NY: Feminist, 1982) 87.
13. Walter Mears, “ ‘Welfare Queen’ Becomes Issue in Reagan Campaign,” New York Times, February 15, 1976.
14. Cheryl Thurber, “The Development of the Mammy Image and Mythology,” in Southern Women: Histories and Identities, ed. Virginia Bernhard, Betty Brandon, Elizabeth FoxGenovese, and Theda Purdue (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1992) 88.
15. See John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, vol. 1, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960) 724. Ethicist Joan Martin notes that Calvin’s rigid social class structure became problematic for the later development of a notion of the work ethic because the contemporary social order is more complex and fluid than Calvin could have imagined. Joan M. Martin, More Than Chains and Toil: A Christian Work Ethic of Enslaved Women (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000) 124.
16. In an interesting twist, in a speech he made at Columbia University in September 2000, billionaire Warren Buffett pointed out the inequities of wealth: “I hear friends talk about the debilitating effects of food stamps and the self-perpetuating nature of welfare and how terrible that is. These same people are leaving tons of money to their kids, whose main achievement in life had been to emerge from the right womb. And when they emerge from the womb, instead of a welfare officer, they have a trust fund officer. Instead of food stamps, they get dividends and interest.” Beth J. Harpaz, “Billionaire Buffett Takes a Swipe at Rich Kids Living Off Trust Funds,” Associated Press, September 27, 2000.
17. Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Scribner, 1958).
18. Katie Geneva Cannon, “Remembering What We Never Knew,” The Journal of Women and Religion 16 (1998) 167–177.
19. A further breakdown reveals that the bottom 40 percent of the U.S. population owns less than 1 percent of the nation’s wealth. These figures represent the most recent survey, conducted in 2004. For the most recent statistics on the distribution of wealth in the United States, see the Survey of Consumer Finances, sponsored by the Federal Reserve Board, which provides data from 1983 onward: http://www.federalreserve.gov/pubs/oss/oss2/scfindex.html (accessed June 20, 2009).
20. The 1996 welfare reform bill, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), includes the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grants to states, which replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program that had provided cash welfare to families with children since 1935.
21. Martin Gilens, Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 67–72.

22. The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 was signed in February 2006. It includes cuts to spending on Medicare, Medicaid, and education. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the Medicaid cuts alone will cause 65,000 people (mainly children) to lose health insurance, and cause many who are able to retain insurance to forgo medical care because they cannot afford the increased co-payments.

Early Christianity, Slavery, and Women's Bodies - Jennifer A. Glancy

Early Christian practices of slaveholding disturb me. I began to write about slavery in early Christianity because I wanted to know how it could happen that, twenty centuries ago, my fellow Christians saw nothing wrong with owning slaves. In the course of my research, I encountered the writings of many Christian scholars who asserted that slavery in the Roman Empire wasn't that bad. I knew that wasn't true. Roman slavery was different in significant respects from the images of plantation slavery familiar to most Americans. Roman slavery was not based on race, for example, and Romans ultimately freed a higher percentage of their slaves than Americans. Nonetheless, Roman slavery was brutal, vicious, and dehumanizing—a system of corporal or bodily control sustained by violence and the threat thereof. One dehumanizing practice common in the Roman Empire as well as the Americas was the treatment of slaves as the sexual property of their owners.

For generations of Christians, identification with the enslaved Israelites traveling toward a Promised Land of freedom has been a liberating strategy. As important as this strategy continues to be, I think it is also important to deal with the effect of slaveholding on early Christian communities. By confronting slaveholding's impact on these communities, we can begin to expose the diffuse but pervasive legacy of slaveholding on Christians today—a legacy that also insinuates itself more broadly into American civic life. Contemporary Christians find it less painful to recognize slaves among the first followers of Jesus than to acknowledge the role that slaveholders played in those circles. The presence of slaves in the first Christian communities does not pose a moral challenge to Christians today; the presence of slaveholders in those communities does. Why expose this shameful past? Because unrecognized, trauma does not simply disappear. Understanding the dynamics of ancient slavery, especially the dynamic of sexual exploitation, helps us recognize the lingering impact of slavery on contemporary Christian thought and practice.

I therefore raise a series of difficult questions. What did Jesus of Nazareth teach about slavery? Did conversion to Christianity have any impact on attitudes about slavery? How did the treatment of slaves as sexual property affect the development of Christian sexual ethics? And what does any of this have to do with women's bodies today?

We begin with the teachings of Jesus and Paul, teachings that carry the weight of biblical authority. As we will see, Jesus challenged his listeners to defy the status hierarchies of his day. Nevertheless, his teaching did not directly challenge slaveholders who might want to follow him. Paul proclaimed a gospel of freedom, yet his writings are inflected with the logic of slave relations. Ancient relationships of slavery were acted out at a bodily level: with a bold gait or a hesitant stride, with eyes staring boldly ahead or head lowered. Children learned to comport themselves in accordance with their statuses, slave and free. Baptism did not cancel a person's lifelong training as slave or free any more than it canceled lifelong training in what it meant to be male or female. Christian slaveholders continued to beat their slaves, even when those slaves

were themselves Christian. These slaveholders also persisted in exploiting their slaves sexually. Ancient Christian theologians, who were far more likely to be slaveholders than slaves, demonstrated little if any awareness of the sexual vulnerabilities of slaves.

Christian indifference to the sexual exploitation of slaves continues to play itself out in various ways in contemporary churches and, more broadly, in modern American society. The impact of this legacy is complex. Effects vary for persons of differing social status, race, and age. For example, when a bishop treats a priest who has sexually abused a child as a wayward sinner who requires forgiveness and restoration to the clerical community while ignoring or minimizing the harm done to the child, the bishop's moral choices conform to the priorities of an ancient Christian tradition that exhibited scant concern for those who were unable to withhold consent to sexual activity. In a different vein, American society often denies persons of low social status the basic right to protect their own bodies. Many Americans view sexual violence in prisons, for example, as an ordinary component of state-mandated punishment rather than a violation of human rights. I hope that recognition of the pernicious impact of slaveholding on some of our typically unquestioned values and practices helps move us toward a sexual ethics that promotes the dignity of every person. In particular, I hope that Christian communities muster the resources to acknowledge the insidious impact of slavery on Christian sexual ethics and to work to eradicate the rotten fruits of that legacy. I will return to the implications of early Christian slaveholding for feminist sexual ethics at the close of this chapter.

Jesus, Paul, and Slavery

The Galilee, where Jesus grew up, was dominated by Rome in the first century. Slavery existed in Galilee, just as it existed throughout the Roman Empire. Although we do not have enough information to reconstruct the exact extent of slavery in the Galilee, Jesus' parables suggest that he was familiar with practices of slavery common throughout the empire. Jesus, who relied on imagery of fishing and agriculture in his parables, also relied on imagery of slaves and slaveholders. Paul, the most important writer of the first Christian generation, likewise exhibits familiarity with the institution of slavery. Jesus was acquainted with rural patterns of slavery; Paul was acquainted with urban ones. Neither Jesus nor Paul issues verdicts on the sexual use of slaves. Given the centrality of Scripture to the lives and teachings of Christian communities, we will consider some key New Testament teachings related to slavery.

Although Jesus taught his followers to humble themselves, he did not condemn the institution of slavery. He did not grant slaves license to flee slavery. He urged his followers to act as slaves, not to liberate them. Jesus taught, "Whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all."[1] With this simple saying, he broke with the norms of the society in which he lived. Jesus related this teaching to the example of his own service and death: "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."[2] The Gospel of John, although it does not include this saying, narrates an episode that embodies its message.

According to John, Jesus, in the hours before his betrayal, washed his disciples' feet and instructed them that they must likewise serve one another. "So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."3 Foot washing was a chore assigned to one of the least regarded slaves in a household, a role often played by women. By washing his friends' feet at the meal where he predicted his betrayal by one of those friends, Jesus defied the hierarchical and gender norms of his day. He embodied the part of the slave of all, a slave who desired "not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

John sets the scene for the foot washing. Imagine: Jesus leaves the place where he reclines at the table. He strips himself. He wraps himself in a towel, a towel he then uses to dry feet. When he finishes serving his followers, he dresses himself in his familiar garments and resumes his comfortable place at the table. The Beloved Disciple settles against him. To an ancient audience familiar with the practice of slavery, the image of a man kneeling to wash other men's feet graphically pictured Jesus' exhortation to his followers to imitate him by abasing themselves.

When I presented a draft of this chapter to the feminist theology group that meets at my church, Jesus' insistence that his followers should act as slaves elicited the sharpest discussion. We are a group of professionals and business-women, mostly White women and a few African-American women; some are Episcopalian, some Presbyterian, some Roman Catholic, and some with no use for organized religion. Our group includes women who struggle with addiction and women haunted by childhood abuse, both physical and sexual. Embracing the promise of a community without masters, some women spoke of the importance of participating in a community where all took turns washing feet. They spoke of what it meant to them to wash feet and, even more, to have their own feet washed. "Through love become slaves to one another," Paul instructs in his letter to the Galatians.4 A number of women, however, expressed alienation from this teaching. After long struggles to define themselves apart from subordination and violence, it was too painful to embrace a self-image as a slave. Although I think that in Jesus' cultural context his instruction to become a slave of all subverted hierarchical relationships, I am sympathetic to those who are troubled by the teaching.

Despite the negative associations of the image for many feminists, I focus on the image of Jesus kneeling to wash feet in order to introduce the idea that ancient slavery was an embodied practice. As such, slavery was unquestioned in everyday life. Slavery conditioned bodies and perceptions of bodies. Individuals were trained at a basic level to stand, walk, and negotiate the world either as slaves or as free persons. A slaveholder who beat a slave did not consciously weigh the morality of her behavior. Slaveholders, like husbands and fathers, were expected to maintain order and decorum in their households. They used violence to do so. Jesus' commandment to his followers to be slaves to one another was countercultural because it urged them to adopt, consciously and voluntarily, the manner of a despised slave.

As I think about ways that bodies are trained to act out social roles, I rely on the concept of *habitus*, a concept I borrow from sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. He was concerned with what he called the logic of practice: ordinary and invisible operations by which a society perpetuates itself. Bourdieu adopted the Latin word *habitus*. In Latin, *habitus* refers to various dimensions of self-presentation: demeanor, bearing, expression, and posture, as well as manner of dress, especially mode of dress appropriate for a particular social status. For Bourdieu, *habitus* is "embodied history, internalized as a second nature and forgotten as history."5

What kind of knowledge is carried in the body? The knowledge of how loudly to laugh at a superior's joke, of how to braid hair (in one plait or many), of how to move through a crowd to avoid or attract attention—unquestioned things we seem to know instinctively. Through *habitus* a person is socialized, Bourdieu writes, "as an eldest son, an heir, a successor, a Christian, or simply as a man (as opposed to a woman)."6 In other words, we carry knowledge in our bodies. Feminist philosopher Linda Martín Alcoff applies parallel logic to the knowledge that gendered and raced bodies carry in American society. "Greetings, handshakes, choices made about spatial proximity," she writes, "all reveal the effects of racial awareness, the assumptions of solidarity or hostility, the presumptions of superiority, or the protective defenses one makes when one routinely encounters a misinterpretation or a misunderstanding of one's intentions."7 I find the concept of embodied knowledge helpful as I think about the ways that the practice of slaveholding affected the development of Christian sexual ethics.

"Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything," writes the author of the Epistle to the Colossians.8 What were the implications of this mandate for a believing slave whose owner expected sexual access? We have no way to answer this troubling question directly. There is no reason to think that slave-holders who were not church members had any motivation to modify their sexual behavior with Christian slaves. Perhaps some first-and second-century Christian slaveholders understood the gospel to require them to refrain from sexual activity with slaves, although no early Christian sources prescribe such a change in behavior.9 Passages enjoining slaves to obey their owners also appear in the Epistle to the Ephesians, 1 Timothy, and Titus, all letters attributed to the apostle Paul.10 I agree with the majority of New Testament scholars who dispute the attribution of these letters to Paul. They are part of the New Testament canon, but they are inconsistent with Paul's teachings in letters universally accepted as authentic. In his Letter to the Galatians, Paul proclaimed a new creation, no longer defined by the categories of the old creation. Paul writes, "For those who are in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, not male and female."11

But as Paul continues his argument in Galatians, he relies on the imagery of slavery. He develops an elaborate allegory based on distinctions between the free body of the matriarch Sarah, Abraham's wife, and the enslaved body of her slave Hagar. The story is from the Book of Genesis. Barren, Sarah gives Hagar to Abraham as a sexual surrogate. Hagar bears Abraham a son, Ishmael. After Sarah bears her own son, Isaac, Hagar and Ishmael are abandoned to the desert. In Paul's allegorical interpretation, Hagar symbolizes "the present Jerusalem," that is, the

Jerusalem church, while Sarah symbolizes “the Jerusalem above.” Although the details of Paul’s allegory need not concern us, Sarah and Hagar are central to the story I tell in this essay, and we will return to them, to the imperious slaveholder and the frightened slave. For now, though, I simply want to point out the tension between Paul’s proclamation of an end to the distinction between slave and free and his subsequent reliance on imagery that depends on a distinction between the bodies of free women and the bodies of slave women. Paul’s development of the Sarah-Hagar allegory does not explicitly sanction slavery. He does not, in the letters authentically attributed to him, dictate a one-sided obedience of slaves to slaveholders. Nonetheless, his choice of imagery suggests that the *habitus* of slavery imbues his thinking. The figures of Hagar and Sarah were familiar to Paul from Scripture. An essential reality of slavery evoked by the story, the sexual availability of enslaved women, was also familiar to Paul, a citizen of the Roman Empire, from his own culture.

Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* helps us appreciate why it was difficult for the first Christian generations to recognize slavery as a moral wrong. John’s narration of Jesus washing feet subverts status hierarchy, but it relies on the *habitus* of slavery to do so. Paul preaches a gospel of freedom, but he expresses this message in images that repeat embodied patterns of slave relations. These men simply take slavery for granted. In the next section, we consider more thoroughly the sexual exploitation intrinsic to ancient slavery. We also consider how such exploitation would have conditioned the bodies of women, both slave and free. What might the instruction to “become a slave to all” have meant to a woman, free or slave? Surely, Jesus did not mean that women should make themselves sexually available to all; yet for many women, sexual exploitation was central to their experiences of slavery.

Slavery, Freedom, and Women’s Bodies

Roman culture was the matrix of early Christianity. Thinking about the effects of slavery on Christian bodies, on the bodies of women and men, of slaves and freepersons, requires awareness of the sexual dynamics of Roman slavery. In order to help us visualize the corporal impact of slave relations, we will focus on a character well known to ancient audiences, the Trojan Queen Hecuba. Hecuba’s reduction to slavery brings into sharp relief the contrast between the sexual conditioning of free bodies and of slave bodies.

In the mid-first century, around the time that Paul wrote his letters to Christian communities from Asia Minor to Rome, the Roman philosopher and playwright Seneca composed a play entitled The Trojan Women. The plot of The Trojan Women focuses on the fate of the royal women of Troy who become captives of the Greeks after the final defeat of the city at the end of the long and bitter Trojan War. The women, like other war captives throughout antiquity, are destined to be sold as slaves. They await news of the identities of their new masters, the very men who have slaughtered their husbands, sons, and brothers. Hecuba, Trojan queen, addresses the women of the vanquished city to prepare them for inevitable enslavement.

She speaks to her companions in defeat: “Let the crowd expose its arms in readiness; ungird your breasts, letting fall your garments, and let the body be stripped even to the womb. For what marriage do you cover your breasts, O captive modesty [*pudor*]?”12 Hecuba declaims, at once appropriately and ironically, with royal authority. Shaping her elocution is a lifetime of privilege, but that privilege, with Troy itself, is burnt to ash. The women to be distributed as booty include Hecuba, her daughters, and her widowed daughters-in-law.

Seneca visually dramatizes reduction of status by contrasting the modest dress of a free woman and the shameful exposure of an enslaved woman. Because the royal Trojan women have lost the ability to shield themselves from the intrusive gaze and touch of men, Hecuba charges them to bare their breasts. Then, she sighs, “There, this manner of dress [*hic habitus*] satisfies me.” The training and habits of a lifetime shape Hecuba’s royal countenance as she commands her subjects, now her former subjects. A garment can be slipped off the shoulders and knotted about the hips, but a deeply cultivated habit of authority cannot be so easily dropped. Romans expected that they should be able to recognize, by dress and other details of a woman’s self-presentation, her status. According to Roman law, liability for an insult against a respectable young woman was lessened if the woman was dressed in a manner more appropriate to a slave.13 Hecuba’s words are thus bitter. The royal women will no longer dress to signify sexual exclusiveness but rather sexual availability.

In Elaine Fantham’s translation, Hecuba directs her remarks to the personification of “captive modesty.” “Modesty” is Fantham’s translation of the Latin word *pudor*, a word that cannot be captured in a single English word or phrase.14 *Pudor* connotes not only modesty but also a sense of shame, chastity, an awareness of what is proper, and attention to propriety—especially sexual propriety in conduct, dress, and speech.15 *Pudor* evokes not only chastity but also a reputation for chastity. *Pudor* belongs to the free woman. The personification of captive *pudor* to whom Hecuba speaks is thus a paradoxical creature, for the slave, in elite Roman eyes, lacks *pudor*.16

Inability to maintain corporal integrity, vividly evoked by Hecuba in her directions to the Trojan women to disrobe, characterizes the condition of a slave. An elite woman, previously assured that her status protects her against sexual violation, confronts the familiar realities of slavery with new eyes. She no longer views the slave’s sexual availability with contempt but with horror. As slaves, as sexual property, the Trojan women must retrain their bodies, exposing themselves to the gaze of men outside their own families. What would it mean to become the slave of all? Consignment to the category of slave undermined a woman’s claim to chastity (*pudor*). Even an enslaved woman who avoided sexual use by her owner lacked the reputation essential to *pudor*. The fact of enslavement cast doubt on her sexual history. The freeing of slaves was common in the Roman Empire, far more common, of course, than reduction of royalty to the status of chattel. Freed slaves, however, did not enjoy the same social status as freeborn persons. Their bodies, habituated by a lifetime of slavery, conveyed a sense of continuing subordination. In particular, freedwomen, who had been vulnerable in their youth to

the sexual appetites of their owners, could not enjoy the same reputation for *pudor* enjoyed by freeborn women.

Seneca the Elder, the father of the philosopher and playwright Seneca, composed a series of fictional legal disputes. In one of these invented debates, an elite freeborn woman's bid for a priesthood was challenged because she had been kidnapped, enslaved, and forced to display herself in a brothel, even though she claimed to have maintained her virginity, in the end by killing an armed man who tried to force her to have sex—a wildly implausible scenario. Although the woman is vindicated by the trial, the arguments of her detractors illustrate the widespread ancient perception that female slaves had no claim to chastity (*pudor*). The detractors argued that, even if she somehow managed to avoid defloration, her vulnerability as a slave undermined her claims to sexual purity: "Do you regard yourself as chaste just because you are an unwilling whore?—She stood naked on the shore to meet the buyer's sneers; every part of her body was inspected—and handled."17

Elite authors cared more about the indignities and sufferings of women raised as aristocrats than about the indignities and sufferings of women raised as slaves. More fundamentally, they were aware of the potential indignities an aristocratic woman might endure but oblivious to any humiliation a slave woman might suffer. How did it affect enslaved children to grow up with the knowledge that they were the sexual property of their owners? What does the body learn from being stripped and fondled in public? What knowledge did slaves bear in their bodies, and how did this knowledge inform their moral imaginations? A child raised as a slave acts out the scripts of slavery at a bodily level. At the same time, she rewrites and resists these scripts in order to create meaning in her life.

The speech composed by the playwright Seneca for Queen Hecuba contrasts the sexual habituation of a free woman and the sexual habituation of a slave woman. The sexual vulnerability of an elite woman reduced to slavery elicited sympathy from an ancient audience, sympathy denied to women raised as slaves. As we will see, that indifference to the sexual susceptibility of enslaved women colored ancient Christian interpretations of the biblical figures of Sarah and Hagar.

Sarah and Hagar

Women and men who joined the early church did not shed their deeply habituated postures and manners when they walked into congregational gatherings. The waters of baptism did not wash away the lifelong branding of slave relations. Christian congregations welcomed slaveholders. We look in vain for evidence to suggest that most Christian slaveholders treated their slaves substantially differently than did pagan slaveholders. Christian slaveholders relied on violent means to discipline their slaves, who were sometimes their brothers and sisters in Christ. Moreover, the sexual dynamics of Roman slavery infected Christian practice. Christian congregations tolerated slaveholding members who sexually exploited household slaves.

Indifference to the moral harm of sexual coercion persisted. We can trace the impact of ancient Christian toleration of sexual exploitation of slaves through interpretations of the biblical figures of Sarah and Hagar by two Christian theologians: the apostle Paul in the first century and the esteemed fourth-century bishop of Milan, Ambrose. Paul and Ambrose did not view the habituation of slave women to sexual exploitation as morally problematic. In fact, they blamed Hagar for her desperate plight. Paul and Ambrose do not, however, exhaust Christian interpretation of Hagar. American Christian interpretations of Hagar demonstrate that this same biblical text can be a resource for women, especially Black women, who resist oppression.

So deep was Paul's conditioning by the *habitus* of slavery that he could move from a conscious declaration that the categories "slave and free" were outmoded in the new creation (Galatians 3:28) to his development of the Sarah-Hagar allegory in Galatians chapter four, an allegory I have already introduced. In his critique of the Jerusalem church, which is assimilated in the allegory to Hagar, Paul writes, "But just as at that time the child who was born according to the flesh [Ishmael, son of the slave woman Hagar] persecuted the child who was born according to the Spirit [Isaac, son of the free woman Sarah], so it is now also. But what does scripture say? 'Drive out the slave and her child; for the child of the slave will not share the inheritance with the child of the free woman.' "[18] Genesis, however, does not narrate a persecution of Isaac by Ishmael. According to Genesis, when Sarah sees Isaac and Ishmael playing together, she demands, "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac."[19]

Paul closes the allegory without telling the whole story. He does not mention that God responds to Hagar's distress by assuring her that her son, like Sarah's son, will be the ancestor of a great nation. He does not mention that at Hagar's bleakest moment when she turns away from her own son because she cannot stand to see him die of thirst in the desert, God meets her in her distress. A spring moistens the arid desert. Paul does not temper his midrash, that is, his version of the Genesis story, with sympathy for the moral position of the slave. Quite the opposite. In Paul's version, the free woman's hostility is attributed to the slave child, and the slave woman's encounter with her God is left untold. Paul's interpretive choices are shaped by the slaveholding *habitus* of the early Roman Empire.

Ambrose, the fourth-century bishop of Milan, was a descendant of an established and well-placed Roman family. At the time he wrote, Christianity had been administered as the imperial religion. Old habits die hard. The slaveholding men in Ambrose's churches were still conditioned by ancient Roman *habitus* to assume as a matter of course that they had the legal, cultural, and moral right to use their slaves sexually. In an essay on Abraham, Ambrose commented on the story of Sarah and Hagar. The biblical account of Abraham conceiving a son by his wife's slave created a problem for Ambrose. If Abraham could carry on with a female slave, a Christian man might ask, why can't I? Ambrose offered several justifications for his counsel to men to avoid sexual relations with their slaves. He told men that they, like their wives, were obligated to sexual exclusivity. He also pointed out that some wife might take her

husband's sexual liaison with a slave as a pretext for divorce. He urged women, in turn, to refrain from jealousy.

Most of all, Ambrose sympathizes with Sarah's perception of Hagar as "uppity." He apparently perceives the same phenomenon in his own world. A female slave who is her owner's concubine, he writes, becomes arrogant and insolent toward her mistress.20 He knew that, regardless of his exhortations, many Christian men would continue to have sex with their slaves. He therefore wrote that Christian men who regrettably pursued sexual relations with their slaves should insist that those slaves subordinate themselves to their mistresses. Ambrose, like Paul, develops the implications of Hagar's story in the context of a cultural script unconcerned with the moral and physical costs of bondage for a slave. Paul blamed the enslaved child for the maltreatment of mother and child. Ambrose blamed the uppity slave woman for defying her mistress. Neither Paul nor Ambrose hinted at the moral harm done to the slave. They treated her as a source, not a victim, of immorality.

Ambrose's moral imagination centers on Abraham's choices rather than those of Hagar. Not all readers of the story share Ambrose's point of view. Indeed, as we shall see, Islamic tradition celebrates the faithfulness of Abraham's God to the slave woman Hagar and her son Ishmael. In her treatment of African-American appropriations of Hagar's story, Kimberleigh Jordan argues, "The actual physical location of the reader can also reflect one's experience of freedom and liberty. Where one's body is and how it is oriented serves as a canvas of learning."21 Jordan argues that a reader's reactions to Abraham and Hagar depend "on his or her relationship to embodied power."22 Gender, race, and privilege (or lack of privilege) shape our readings.

For example, Eliza Poitevent Nicholson was a Southern White Christian woman. She was also a newspaper publisher who engineered the recovery of the New Orleans Picayune from debt in the late nineteenth century. Nicholson composed a narrative poem entitled "Hagar." Nicholson's Hagar was a resourceful woman whose devotion to Abraham was unreciprocated. To conclude her poem, Nicholson composed these words for Hagar to address to Abraham:

> The wrongs that you have done this day
> To Hagar and your first-born, Ishmael,
> Shall waken and uncoil themselves, and hiss
> Like adders at the name of Abraham.23

Unlike Paul and Ambrose, Nicholson, with her distinctive history as a woman wrangling with powerful men in the publishing trade, was able to imagine Hagar as a woman capable of speaking against the powerful man who wronged her.

The figure of Hagar has been especially important to African-American women. Ambrose of Milan was unable to feel the moral and physical harm done to Hagar. African-American women, however, have felt that harm in their bones. Jordan writes that African-American women "have known unfreedom through their bodies—the Middle Passage, enslavement, rape, poor labor conditions, parenthood, segregation, poverty, and so forth. For the

most part, their lives can be seen as an embodied interpretation of Hagar."24 From the period of slavery to the present, many African-American women have explicitly named themselves daughters of Hagar. In a classic work of womanist theology, Delores Williams lays out the significance of Hagar for Black women's religious experience. Black women have known sexual exploitation, betrayal by White women, hunger, abandonment, and single motherhood. But, like Hagar, they have carried on. In their survival, as in their struggles, they have known that God is with them.25

Habitus is conservative, even tenacious. When we come into contact with new information and new symbolic patterns, we are likely to react out of our primary conditioning, particularly our training in gender and social status.26 As Linda Martín Alcoff comments of American society, "race and gender consciousness produces habitual bodily mannerisms that feel natural and become unconscious after long use; they are thus very difficult to change."27 So Seneca's Hecuba, waiting to learn the name of the man who will be her master, still speaks as queen. Ancient Christians who heard the Pauline baptismal formula proclaiming that within the body of Christ there was no slave or free, no male and female, continued to act out of deeply conditioned *habitus*.28 So, ultimately, without making a conscious choice to replicate the gender and status divisions of Roman society within the churches, Christians translated their training in what it meant to be human, a humanity always incarnate in a body marked by gender and social location, into their prescriptions for what it meant to live as Christians. Seneca's powerful depiction of Queen Hecuba helps us apprehend the distinction Roman culture created between the sexually conditioned bodies of free women and of slave women. Interpretations of Hagar by Paul and Ambrose illustrate the degree to which ancient Christianity was shaped by and perpetuated a slaveholding *habitus*.

Paul and Ambrose are not the only Christian interpreters of Hagar, however. Women interpreters, especially African-American women, approach the story of Sarah and Hagar from their own cultural locations. I will return to the story of Hagar at the conclusion of this chapter as I consider resources for articulation of a feminist sexual ethics. Before that step, I examine the story of another Roman woman, a story that highlights the different ways in which Romans viewed the sexual violation of free woman and the sexual use of enslaved women. This distinction between women who deserve protection and women who do not persists in American thinking today in both public and private spheres.

Lucretia

The legend of Lucretia dates to the early Roman Republic, long before the rise of Christianity. Throughout antiquity, Christian theologians, steeped in Roman culture, continued to rely on the legendary Lucretia to illustrate their arguments on women's chastity. The story of Lucretia offers another example of the horror elicited by the sexual violation of freeborn women

among elite Romans, including, eventually, elite Christians. In this section, I contrast this horror with the casual Christian acceptance of the vulnerability of slave women to sexual violence.

According to legend, Lucretia was the wife of the soldier Collatinus, who boasted to his fellow soldiers in military camp about his wife's virtue. He convinced them to ride by night to his home. Although other wives were notorious for attending banquets in their husbands' absence, the beautiful and virtuous Lucretia spent her time spinning wool, even into the night. When the company of soldiers arrived, unannounced, they found Lucretia hard at work. The sight of the virtuous Lucretia inflamed Tarquinius, the son of the last king of Rome. He was at least as impassioned by her virtue as her beauty. Tarquinius later returned to seduce the chaste wife. When Lucretia refused his advances, he threatened to kill her and one of his own male slaves. He taunted that he would place the corpses together in bed and then announce that he killed them because he caught them having sex.

Pudor, specifically, the horror that others would believe her body had been sexually penetrated by a slave, induced Lucretia to capitulate to Tarquinius's sexual demands. Afterward, she sent for her father and husband from their military encampment. After narrating the events, she begged them to avenge the wrong. Both father and husband assured her that she was not guilty. The Roman historian Livy claims that she replied, "Though I acquit myself of the sin, I do not absolve myself from punishment; nor in time to come shall ever unchaste woman live through the example of Lucretia."29 With that, she plunged a sword into her own breast and died. The incident supposedly incited sufficient anger to catalyze the revolt that brought the Roman monarchy to a close.

Because Christians were shaped by Roman *habitus*, the legend of Lucretia exerted a powerful hold over their imaginations. For example, Jerome, a fourth-century Christian theologian, wrote, "The virtue of a woman is, in a special sense, purity. It was this that made Lucretia the equal of Brutus, if it did not make her his superior, since Brutus learnt from a woman the impossibility of being a slave."30 (Brutus led the revolt against the Roman monarchy.) What does Jerome mean by his statement that Lucretia taught "the impossibility of being a slave"? For Jerome, it seems, only a free woman could be truly virtuous. The absence of *pudor* was the daily lot of many female slaves. In her unwillingness to live with compromised *pudor*—to live, that is, like a female slave—Lucretia embodied the special virtue of a woman, a virtue associated with her legal and social status as a free woman.

The moral importance of a woman's physical integrity became an obsession among many early Christians—an obsession defined as a woman's quintessential virtue. Such virtue was not equally accessible to all women. Only in unusual circumstances did a free woman deal with the question of whether forcible sexual violation compromised her honor. Slave women faced this dilemma routinely. Lucretia's story points to the tensions in ancient Christian attitudes toward the virtue of slaves, who had no choice in their sexual use by their owners. The failure of Christian sources to consider the choices of slaves confronted by forcible sexual demands underscores the

degree to which a Roman *habitus* conditioned Christians to accept the sexual vulnerability of servile bodies.

A partial exception to this rule is Basil of Caesarea. Basil, who wrote in the fourth century, believed that the fact of slavery or of freedom informed a person's very potential for virtue. He cited as a mystery why a wicked person flourished while a righteous person suffered, "why one man is a slave, another free, one is rich, another is poor (and the difference in sins and virtuous actions is great: she who was sold to a brothelkeeper is in sin by force, and she who immediately obtained a good master grows up with virginity)."31 Sensitive to the constraints under which women were forced to act, Basil specified that women who were corrupted by force should not be held responsible for that corruption. He added, "Thus even a slave, if she has been violated by her own master, is guiltless."32 Nonetheless, as Bernadette Brooten notes in her introduction to this volume, Basil did not assign a church penalty to the Christian men who used their slaves as sexual outlets, although he was clearly aware of the prevalence of such behavior.

The situation of a free woman threatened by rape evoked consternation. The mundane situation of a slave whose owner made routine demands for sex did not. Basil's reasoning that a woman who was coerced to have sex against her will should be considered innocent was atypical among theologians of his era. Some Christian theologians praised women, at least elite women, who chose death over rape.33 Ambrose of Milan excited controversy when he used the resources of the Church to redeem Christians who had been captured by pagans, a danger in northern Italy in the fourth century. He commented that it was good when "a man is redeemed from death, or a woman from barbarian impurities, things that are worse than death."34

Ambrose praised the legendary Pelagia of Antioch. Pelagia, threatened with rape, dressed herself as a bride and killed herself. The would-be rapists turned their predatory attention to Pelagia's mother and sisters. The mother and sisters drowned themselves. They chose a baptism, Ambrose eulogized, after which they could not sin.35 Ambrose composed a speech for Pelagia that underscored the relationship of liberty to chastity (*pudor*): "I die willingly, no one will lay a hand on me, no one will harm my virginity with his shameless glance, I shall take with me my purity and my modesty unsullied . . . Pelagia will follow Christ, no one will take away her freedom, no one will see her freedom of faith taken away, nor her remarkable purity."36 Pelagia died willingly. She followed Christ, in Ambrose's view, by refusing to be a slave to all. She died with liberty and *pudor* intact.

Ambrose was aware of the sexual vulnerabilities of slaves. Commenting on the story of the patriarch Joseph—who was, as a slave in Egypt, the target of his mistress's sexual overtures—Ambrose wrote, "It was not within the power of a mere slave not to be looked upon."37 Yet, as we have seen, when Ambrose wrote about Abraham and Hagar, he did not express concern for Abraham's injury to Hagar's chastity. Nor did he suggest that Hagar, like Pelagia, should have killed herself to avoid sexual tainting. For Ambrose, Hagar's sin was not a violation of chastity, apparently because Ambrose considered her beneath chastity. Her sin, he alleged, was haughtiness toward her mistress.

Would choosing life over death have been praiseworthy for a slave threatened with rape by her owner? That such questions did not arise for Christian writers attests to their deep-seated habituation to the privileges of free bodies and the vulnerabilities of enslaved bodies. The possibility that a slave woman would be sexually violated against her will did not produce the horror elicited by the forcible sexual violation of a free woman.

In *The City of God*, Augustine drew on the Lucretia legend to discuss chastity. Augustine relied on Lucretia to challenge Christians who, like Ambrose, held that forcible sexual violation entailed moral compromise.38 Augustine reasoned that, if purity could be sullied against a person's will, then purity would rank not among virtues but among bodily goods. He concluded that if a woman was sexually penetrated against her will, she remained as pure as she was prior to the violation.39 To make his point, Augustine returned to the example of Lucretia. He judged her guilty of murder. Augustine's logic was, if Lucretia did not share Tarquinius's lust, then taking her own life entailed killing an innocent woman. Her guilt as a murderer was mitigated only if she secretly shared Tarquinius's lust.40 Augustine contrasted conventional conceptions of *pudor* and the proper chastity of a Christian woman. His take on the story of Lucretia thus challenged the traditional values of the Roman elite, with their insistence that physical violation signaled moral deficiency.41

Augustine wrote *The City of God* as he confronted growing chaos in the Roman Empire at the close of the fourth century. Attacks endangered the personal security of many persons, creating terror and fear that exceeded actual physical harm to the population. Why did God permit chaste Christian women to be molested? Augustine asked women to consider the possibility that arrogance about their chastity led God to punish them through violation of their bodily integrity, a punishment that nonetheless did not compromise their claims to chastity.42 Augustine implied that elite women were often arrogant in their dealings with women of lower status who could not adhere to conventional standards of chastity. God thus permitted the elite women to be subjected to the sexual violations routinely endured by slaves.43 Augustine accepted the habituation of bodies to various social statuses as he called on all Christians to accept their social positions with humility. No matter how well-intentioned the slaveholders, such humility exacted a higher price from slaves, who were, one infers, expected to accept sexual exploitation with equanimity.

A belief that rape morally stains its victims survives even today. In antiquity, the belief was rarely challenged. A woman's *pudor*, including her reputation for sexual modesty, could not survive forcible sexual violation. A few Christians eventually challenged this formulation, yet even their arguments underscore the grip of Roman *habitus* on Christianity. Both Basil and Augustine taught that women who were sexually violated against their will were guiltless. Yet both Basil and Augustine assumed that women of lower social status, particularly slaves, would be routinely subjected to sexual violations from which elite women were routinely (but not always) protected. Basil and Augustine, like other Christians in antiquity, simply accepted that women of differing social statuses enjoyed differing degrees of corporal protection and sexual

integrity. This belief persists today in various guises. In working to enact a feminist feminist sexual ethics, the right of all women, men, and children to protection from sexual coercion is a high priority.

Water in the Desert

Early Christian complicity in the sexual exploitation of slaves disturbs me. Even more upsetting to me than the early Christian embodiment of slaveholding norms is the many ways in which American culture today reads moral distinctions in the bodies of persons of different social statuses: rich, poor, Black, White, Native American, Latino/a, male, female. Rapists of Black women are less likely to be charged and receive fewer convictions and lighter prison sentences than rapists of White women, for example.44 I'm not advocating longer prison sentences. What a body learns in prison is deleterious to the health, both to the incarcerated person and to his or her post-incarceration community. We should, however, think about why the rapes of Black women are treated less seriously than the rapes of White women.

I doubt that many people would endorse such blatantly disparate treatment. So why are prosecutors reluctant to press charges when an African-American woman has been raped? Why are juries more likely to acquit men accused of raping Black women? Despite an apparent consensus against racial discrimination, our actual behavior as a society continues to embody racial prejudice. In the case of rape, the insult to Black women is consistent with an ancient tradition that regards some women as lacking status and therefore lacking the right to protect the privacy and integrity of their own bodies. In the United States, this tradition can be traced directly to attitudes toward African-American women's sexuality during the era of legal slavery.

Early Christian sexual ethics were infected by the sexual dynamics of Roman slavery. That infection still courses through the Christian body. The Church requires healing. Christians today who are horrified to learn of the sexual exploitation of slavery are too often silent about the exploitation of other persons who are not in a position to say "no" to sexual advances: prisoners, for example, and children in homes, churches, and other settings. I've asked how growing up as the sexual property of a slaveholder affected female slaves in antiquity. We should urgently ask how growing up with sexual coercion and violence affects girls and boys. Why are so many churches that speak loudly about sexual ethics reluctant to speak of the damage that incest, sexual harassment, and rape wreak on the Christian body? The Feast of the Holy Innocents, December 28, is a day set aside in the church calendar to mourn Herod's slaughter of Jewish babies.45 On the Feast of the Holy Innocents, my church offers a service of healing for those affected by childhood sexual abuse, a service written and planned by survivors of such abuse. Healing begins.

A change in *habitus* is tough to legislate. Nevertheless, although *habitus* is conservative, it is not immutable. Those of us who are active in our churches, synagogues, and mosques look there for moral leadership. Can our traditions, Scriptures, and rituals offer resources for

fundamental change, for healing? I earlier highlighted the iconic image of Jesus as he kneels to wash his followers' feet, a gesture defiant of hierarchy that is still ritually reenacted by Christians. I close the essay with another image, one that has likewise generated enduring ritual action: the image of Hagar's joy when she finds water in the desert. This is an image that Paul and Ambrose omit in their versions of the story and that African-American women always remember. Hagar, a slave woman who bore her owner's child, a mother raising a son on her own, is cast out to a barren expanse. She and her son, famished and parched, face death. Yet they survive. In a moment of supreme despair, Hagar discovers that God is with her when a spring moistens the arid desert.

In Islam, this spring is called Zam Zam, and Hagar's epiphany is ritualized as part of the hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca all Muslims are enjoined to make, if they can, once in their lifetime. During the hajj, each pilgrim, female or male, puts their body in Hagar's place as she runs in terror between the hills of Safa and Marwa, seeking water for herself and her son. I don't know what the Muslim pilgrim feels or what the body learns running between Safa and Marwa. The ritual, however, invites identification with the slave woman's physical location. The pilgrim rejoices in God's faithfulness to the slave woman and her son. For the many women who live their lives thirsting between Safa and Marwa, the Scriptures and rituals of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam still promise springs of rejuvenation.

Notes

1. Mark 10:44; cf. Matthew 20:26–27, 23:11; Mark 9:35; and Luke 22:26.
2. Mark 10:45; cf. Matthew 20:27.
3. John 13:14f.
4. Galatians 5:13.
5. Pierre Bourdieu, The Logic of Practice, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1980) 56.
6. Bourdieu, Logic of Practice, 58.
7. Linda Martín Alcoff, Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 108.
8. Colossians 3:22–25, especially 3:22.
9. For a fuller treatment, see Margaret Y. MacDonald, "A Reassessment of Colossians 3:18–4:1 in Light of New Research on the Roman Family," New Testament Studies 53 (2007) 94–113.
10. Ephesians 6:5–8; 1 Timothy 6:1f; Titus 2:9f.
11. Galatians 3:28; 6:15.
12. Seneca, Trojan Women, lines 87–91. Translation adapted from Elaine Fantham, Seneca's Troades: A Literary Introduction with Text, Translation, and Commentary (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982) 132.
13. Digest of Justinian 47.10.15.15.

14. At the outset of her kaleidoscopic treatment, Carlin A. Barton identifies *pudor* as an "inhibiting emotion." Barton, Roman Honor: The Fire in the Bones (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) 202; discussion of *pudor*, 197–269.
15. Cf. Oxford Latin Dictionary, s.v. *pudor*.
16. Noted by Fantham, Seneca's Troades, 227; Atze J. Keulen, ed., L. Annaeus Seneca Troades: Introduction, Text and Commentary (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2001) 141.
17. Seneca, Controversies 1.2, esp. 1.2.3; Seneca, Declamations, trans. M. Winterbottom (2 vols.; Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).
18. Galatians 4:29f.
19. Genesis 21:10.
20. Ambrose, On Abraham 4.26; Ambrose, On Abraham, trans. Theodosia Tomkinson (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 2000) 14.
21. Italics original. Kimberleigh Jordan, "The Body as Reader: African-Americans, Freedom, and the American Myth," in The Bible and the American Myth: A Symposium on the Bible and Constructions of Meaning, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (Studies in American Biblical Hermeneutics 16; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999) 105–121, esp. 107.
22. Jordan, "The Body as Reader," 114.
23. Eliza Poitevent Nicholson, "Hagar," Cosmopolitan 16 (1893) 10–13. For more on Nicholson's poem, see Janet Gabler-Hover, Dreaming Black/Writing White: The Hagar Myth in American Cultural History (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2000) 131.
24. Jordan, "The Body as Reader," 117.
25. Delores Williams, Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993) 15–33; 245f, n. 2.
26. Bourdieu, Logic of Practice, 62.
27. Martín Alcoff, Visible Identities, 108.
28. Galatians 3:28.
29. Livy 1.58.10; The History of Rome, trans. B. O. Foster (14 vols.; Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919–1959).
30. Jerome, Against Jovinianus 1.49; see also 1.46.
31. Basil of Caesarea, On Psalm 32 5; Saint Basil, Exegetic Homilies, trans. Agnes Clare Way (Fathers of the Church 46; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1963).
32. Basil, Epistles 199.49.
33. For further discussion of Lucretia in early Christian writings, see Dennis Trout, "Re-Textualizing Lucretia: Cultural Subversion in the City of God," Journal of Early Christian Studies 2 (1994) 53–70.
34. Ambrose, On Offices of Ministers (De officiis) 2.28.
35. Ambrose, On Virgins (De virginibus) 3.7.32–37.
36. Ambrose, Epistle 37.
37. Ambrose, On Joseph 5.22.

38. Trout, “Re-Textualizing Lucretia.”
39. Augustine, City of God 1.17; Augustine, The City of God Against the Pagans, trans. George McCracken (7 vols.; Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957–1972).
40. Augustine, City of God 1.19.
41. Trout, “Re-Textualizing Lucretia,” 67.
42. Augustine, City of God 1.28.
43. Augustine, City of God 1.28.
44. Elizabeth Kennedy, Victim Race and Rape (Waltham, MA: Feminist Sexual Ethics Project, Brandeis University, 2003), http://www.brandeis.edu/projects/fse/slavery/slav-us/slav-us-articles/slav-us-art-kennedy-full.pdf (accessed June 19, 2009); and Jennifer C. Nash, Black Women and Rape: A Review of the Literature (Waltham, MA: Feminist Sexual Ethics Project, Brandeis University, 2009), http://www.brandeis.edu/projects/fse/slavery/slav-us/slav-us-articles/Nash2009-6-12.pdf (accessed August 3, 2009). For related analysis, see Toni Irving, “Borders of the Body: Black Women, Sexual Assault, and Citizenship,” Women’s Studies Quarterly 35 (2007) 67–92.
45. Matthew 2:16–18.

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