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Gender, Legitimacy, and Expansion in Antebellum America

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## Sex, Race, and the Patriarchy

### The Changing Narrative of Interracial Relations in the Antebellum South and the Reconstruction Period on the Example of Tennessee

In 1607 the first legal stricture prohibiting miscegenation passed,<sup>1</sup> many more followed in an attempt to undermine interracial relations. It took over 300 years until the Supreme Court decreed all state legislature unconstitutional in the case of *Loving v. Virginia*. While many states chose to legalise interracial relations prior to the Supreme Court decision there were sixteen states which only had their anti-miscegenation laws repealed in 1967. Most of these states are former confederate states and former slave-holding states with a large population of African Americans. One of these states is Tennessee, not only a state which clung to its racist legislature, but it is also the birthplace of the *Ku Klux Klan*.<sup>2</sup> Ensuing the Civil War, the *Ku Klux Klan* violently persecuted black men as well as white women who engaged in interracial sexual relations.<sup>3</sup> This form of white backlash during the Reconstruction period represented the white anxiety of Southerners, especially less affluent men who wished to maintain a racial hierarchy.<sup>4</sup> The South perpetuated this racial hierarchy because, prior to the passing of the 13th Amendment, it was a society and an economy that relied upon the existence of slavery. The South is often perceived to have been a pre-capitalist society, however, enslaved people were highly valued property and performed the majority of the immense agricultural labour of crops, such as tobacco, cotton and sug-

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Perry and Mike Sutton, "Policing the Colour Line Violence Against Those in Intimate Interracial Relationships," *Race, Gender & Class Journal* 15 (2008): pp. 240-261, 245.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas B Alexander, "Kukluxism in Tennessee, 1865-1869," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 8 (September 1949): pp. 195-219, 198.

<sup>3</sup> Martha Hodes, "The Sexualization of Reconstruction Politics: White Women and Black Men in the South after the Civil War," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3 (January 1993): pp. 402-417, 403.

<sup>4</sup> Hodes, "The Sexualization of Reconstruction Politics," 403.

ar cane. The social status of someone was derived by the colour of their skin and whiteness became the indicator for political power. In addition to the racial hierarchy in the South, it was also a patriarchal society in which women were subordinated to men and derived their legal status from their husbands.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, white men were the most powerful entity and enjoyed the largest amount of freedom at the price of stolen labour, performed by African Americans.<sup>6</sup> Although whiteness and gender were the signifiers for power, interracial relations of a sexual nature were frequent in the antebellum South and the Reconstruction period. Despite all interracial relations producing mixed-raced offspring the gender make up of these relations was treated disparately. In the antebellum South the most common form of interracial relations took place between enslaved black women and white slave-owning men. Generally, society blamed black women for instigating these relations, in contrast, white women having relations with black men were deprived of any form of agency and the relations were often considered as rape.<sup>7</sup> According to the racial hierarchy of the South white women had more political power than black women and enjoyed a certain level of influence, yet black women seemingly had a choice concerning interracial sexual conducts. During the Reconstruction era interracial relations were common but treated unequally as well. Sexual relations between black women and white men were somewhat tolerated, while relations between black men and white women were targeted by white supremacists of the *Ku Klux Klan*. This context poses many questions, such as; why white women were denied any form of agency before the Civil War? Why they gained agency post-war, despite still being denied the right to vote and thereupon full citizenship? Why were black women, the most marginalised group, granted agency in the antebellum South? Why was there differential treatment towards the different make-up of interracial relations? Why were black men the target of violence along with white women participating in sexual relations? I argue that during the antebellum South and Reconstruction period different gender make-ups of interracial relations and its participants were treated differently because it benefitted white men, eased their concerns and upheld a racial and patriarchal hierarchy.

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<sup>5</sup> Marie S. Molloy, *Single, White, Slaveholding Women in the Nineteenth-Century American South* (Columbia, South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2018), 16.

<sup>6</sup> Edmund S. Morgan, "Slavery and Freedom: The American Paradox," *The Journal of American History* 59, no. 1 (June 1972): pp. 5-29, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1888384>, 29.

<sup>7</sup> Hodes, "The Sexualization of Reconstruction Politics", 402.

## Interracial Relations in the Antebellum South

In order to understand the politicisation of interracial relations during the Reconstruction period it is vital to understand the prerequisites which preceded it. As previously mentioned, the South was an economy constructed around agricultural slave labour. In 1807 however, the transatlantic slave trade was outlawed. Hence, slaveholding states such as Tennessee needed to find a novel way to maintain a steady supply of free labour and property as they could no longer purchase enslaved people from overseas. Fortuitously, any child born to an enslaved woman carried the same legal status of their mother,<sup>8</sup> resulting in the continuation of slavery through enslaved women bearing children.<sup>9</sup> Thus the class stratification of chattel slavery acted as the gateway for the universal and unique experience of enslaved women, in which they had to endure both sexual and reproductive slavery.<sup>10</sup> This method of accumulating wealth and property by means of reproduction is defined as biocapitalism, since the human body and human life itself are commodified and exploited.<sup>11</sup> Or as Alys Eve Weinbaum aptly describes it: “African slave woman [were] forced to gestate human chattel.”<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, reproductive slavery was a distinctly gendered, racialised, and sexualised process that created a capitalist economy in which the method of propagating wealth relied upon enslaved black women bearing children. Not only was reproductive slavery the foundation of the South’s biocapitalism, but it also included social formations such as American citizenship, white racial nationalism, and a racialised division of labour.<sup>13</sup> In order for enslaved women to perform reproductive labour they first had to endure the horrors of sexual slavery. African American women were at the focal point of the racial hierarchy as well

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<sup>8</sup> Hodes, “The Sexualization of Reconstruction Politics”, 402.

<sup>9</sup> Alys Eve Weinbaum, *The Afterlife of Reproductive Slavery: Biocapitalism and Black Feminism's Philosophy of History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 30.

<sup>10</sup> Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>11</sup> Weinbaum, *The Afterlife of Reproductive Slavery*, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Weinbaum, *The Afterlife of Reproductive Slavery*, 31.

<sup>13</sup> Weinbaum, *The Afterlife of Reproductive Slavery*, 31.

as the patriarchy and thus incapable of escaping society's oppression.<sup>14</sup> Unlike their male counterparts they could never escape the oppression of their gender.

African American women represented the most marginalised group of people because of the intersection of their gender and race. Nevertheless, black women were prescribed agency concerning sexual relations with white men, the mainstream narration of the antebellum South concocted the notion that black women seduced white men.<sup>15</sup> This notion was supported by the idea of African American femininity, which characterised enslaved women as "lewd and lascivious."<sup>16</sup> This type of black femininity was coined as the *Jezebel*. The creation of this characterisation is based upon a myriad of different factors, such as the conduct of slave markets where female bodies presented a venal commodity and were thus treated without respect nor were they given any privacy.<sup>17</sup> In fact women's bodies at slave auctions were subject to speculation of their fertility, as a former enslaved woman Rose Williams recounted:

"Den dere am three or four other niggers sold befo' my time comes. Den massa Black calls me to de block and de auction man say, 'What am I offer for dis portly, strong young wench. She's never been 'bused [abused] and will make de good breeder.'"<sup>18</sup>

This testimony hints at the promise the slave trader makes the potential buyer, suggesting that Rose Williams would be a 'good breeder' reveals the prospect of more slaves in the future, which would inevitably increase a person's personal wealth whether or not he would keep the offspring or sell them for a profit. Moreover, female slaves frequently had to endure close inspection in which they had to strip naked and let potential buyers touch them.<sup>19</sup> As William J. Anderson mentioned in his memoirs:

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<sup>14</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n'T I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (W.W. Norton, 1999), 28.

<sup>15</sup> Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Yale University Press, 1999), 5.

<sup>16</sup> White, *Ar'n'T I a Woman?*, 30.

<sup>17</sup> White, *Ar'n'T I a Woman?*, 32.

<sup>18</sup> "On Being Sold Library of Congress - National Humanities Center," On being Sold (National Humanities Center, 2007), <http://www.nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/enslavement/text2/onbeing-soldwpa.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> White, *Ar'n'T I a Woman?*, 32.

“The slaves are made to shave and wash in greasy pot liquor to make them look sleek and nice; their heads must be combed and their best clothes put on; and when called out to be examined they are to stand in a row — the women and men apart — then they are picked out and taken into a room, and examined. See a large, rough slaveholder take a poor female slave into a room, make her strip, then feel of and examine her as though she were a pig, or a hen, or merchandise.”<sup>20</sup>

White men looking to buy slaves treated enslaved women’s bodies with entitlement and thereby stripped them of their humanity. After all, enslaved women presented little more than property and a white man could deal with his property as he sees fit. This lack of respect and decency towards black women and their bodies continued after they were sold at the auction block. As Anderson recounts:

“My master often went to the house, got drunk, and then came out to the field to whip, cut, slash, curse, swear, beat and knock down several, for the smallest offense, or nothing at all. He divested a poor female slave of all wearing apparel, tied her down to stakes, and whipped her with a handsaw until he broke it over her naked body. In process of time he ravished her person and became the father of a child by her. Besides, he always kept a colored Miss in the house with him. This is another curse of Slavery — concubinage and illegitimate connections — which is carried on to an alarming extent in the far South.”<sup>21</sup>

Evidently, black women had to silently endure the perpetual raping and sexual abuse by white men in order to generate more slaves as well as satisfy the white man’s lust. Although the women were the victims in these connections they were blamed as willing participants who via their licentious nature even instigated sexual relations and seduced white men. The notion of the sexually promiscuous, and debaucherous black women who seduced white men with her body is

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<sup>20</sup> William J. Anderson, *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson*, (Chicago: Daily Tribune Book and Job Printing Office, 1857), 14.

<sup>21</sup> William J. Anderson, *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson*, (Chicago: Daily Tribune Book and Job Printing Office, 1857), 19.

at the nexus between the Southern patriarchy and racial hierarchy. Claiming that white men were innocent bystanders in the sexual and reproductive slavery only benefitted them as, white men could maintain their image of the Southern gentleman in contrast to the appalling reality of slavery. He could, if married to a white woman, justify his extramarital liaisons to his wife by claiming that the *Jezebel* seduced him whilst simultaneously increasing his wealth by creating more slaves. The image of the lascivious black woman absolved white men of their crimes and although miscegenation was forbidden — as it obscured the lines between whiteness and blackness — it was widely accepted. Biracial children would garner high prices at slave auctions since whiteness and caucasian facial characteristics were an indicator for beauty and monetary value.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the aforementioned agency of black women is a false narrative which enabled white men to continuously rape and sexually abuse black women with no consequences and reproduce the workforce without having to purchase slaves.

Unlike white men engaging in sex with black women, white women did not receive the same societal response as men did. Notably, relations between free white women and enslaved black men did occur but were nowhere near as frequent as white men associating with enslaved black women.<sup>23</sup> Ironically, when these liaisons occurred they would often be depicted as rape, even if the connection was consensual.<sup>24</sup> This is a stark contrast between the supposed agency of black women and the supposed passiveness and victimhood of white women. If in rare cases sexual liaisons were not constructed as rape they would be categorised as fornication or adultery.<sup>25</sup> White women in the antebellum South did not have the same freedoms as their male counterparts. They did not have the right to vote and therefore were not considered full citizens in the eyes of the law. The entire notion of white southern woman included passivity. Evidently, *The Young Lady's Book* conveyed this passive nature as follows:

“Piety, integrity, fortitude, charity, obedience, consideration, sincerity, prudence, activity, and cheerfulness, with the dispositions which spring from, and the amiable qualities which rise

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<sup>22</sup> White, *Ar'n'T I a Woman?*, 35-37.

<sup>23</sup> Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*, 2.

<sup>24</sup> Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*, 19.

out of them, may, we presume, nearly define those moral properties called for in the daily conduct and habitual deportment of young ladies.”<sup>26</sup>

This book, which was published in 1830, highlights the qualities a white woman should have. Subsequently, all these standards that a woman had to prescribe to, created the image of white women being beacons of morality. In addition, the book outlines where a woman stands in relation to her husband:

“It is, however, certain, that in whatever situation of life a woman is placed, from her cradle to her grave, a spirit of obedience and submission, pliability of temper, and humility of mind, are required from her.”<sup>27</sup>

The keywords here are obedience and submission. A woman had to be obedient and submissive to her husband, even though according to the same book “the home [is] ‘her empire.’”<sup>28</sup> The ideal female virtues reveal why society often characterised consensual relations between a white woman and a black man as rape. Because a woman’s role, if she was married, was bound to her husband. Identities are constructed through oppositional pairs,<sup>29</sup> such as a white person having an identity of power and hegemonic acceptance based on the enslavement of African Americans. In turn, African Americans have their identities shaped by the identities of ‘racially superior’ white. Not only did white men shape their identities of African American men but also based on white women.<sup>30</sup> While women were passive and politically powerless, men were the opposite and derived political power by keeping women in an isolated domestic sphere.<sup>31</sup> Thus, if a woman

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<sup>26</sup> *The Young Lady's Book: A Manual of Elegant Recreations, Exercises, and Pursuits*. (Boston: A. Bowen, and Carter & Hendee, Carey & Lea, 1830), 24.

<sup>27</sup> *The Young Lady's Book*, 28.

<sup>28</sup> *The Young Lady's Book*, 23.

<sup>29</sup> Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World: Regulating Desire, Reforming Practice* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 8.

<sup>30</sup> Raewyn W. Connell, *Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1995), 74.

<sup>31</sup> Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 7.

defied these passive virtues she defied society's role of a woman and by extension imperilled the white man's position in the patriarchal hierarchy.

Beyond that, interracial relations including free white women and black men jeopardised the racial hegemony of white Southerners. As discussed, society, and by extension, family structures were patriarchal and not forthcoming to women having extramarital liaisons or children out of wedlock. However, white women bearing biracial children explains why this gender makeup of interracial relation was vilified. Since a child's legal status would derive from the status of their mother, a free white woman will always give birth to free children, even mixed-raced ones. Naturally, these mixed-racial children would have the phenotype of an enslaved person. Consequently, the existence of free mixed-raced people endangered and questioned the racial stratification of the antebellum South.

#### Interracial Relations during the Reconstruction Period

The end of the Civil War changed many things in the United States. Most notably the 13th amendment forever abolished the institution of slavery within the United States. Hence, former slaves were now free citizens and theoretically equal to white people. Regardless of official legislation African Americans still experienced a tremendous amount of racial hatred and were systematically oppressed. But like many things, the treatment of interracial relations changed after the Civil War. Most notably, negative attention started fixating on black men and there was an unprecedented amount of violence against black men who engaged sexually with white women. This violence originated from white supremacists of the *Ku Klux Klan*.<sup>32</sup> As is reported by the *Memphis Daily Appeal* in 1868:

“The Governor's office was crowded with negroes from Maury county today, who left there from fear of the Ku-Klux. Wm. Gustine, a negro, was taken from the jail at Franklin yesterday, and shot by a mob. His offense was rape upon a white girl.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*, 176.

<sup>33</sup> “Nashville.” *Memphis Daily Appeal*. July 19, 1868. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045160/1868-07-19/ed-1/seq-2/> (accessed March 17, 2022.)



The *Daily Appeal* highlights that ‘a mob’ dispensed an already incarcerated black man from jail and took it upon themselves to become jury, judge and executioner. The way in which this lynching was reported informs about the indifference. In the same short abstract, sunstrokes and lightning are reported as causes of death. This was not the only case in which members of the Ku Klux Klan enacted violence and murder upon a black man for supposedly raping a woman:

“In the latter part of 1868, a negro was hang by men in mask, at Franklin, on a charge of rape, I believe.”<sup>34</sup>

However, earlier that same year *The Nashville Union and Dispatch* cited a case in which a white man committed a rape upon a black woman:

“The Police Court was in session nearly all yesterday, the most of its time being taken up with the case of Thomas Lewis , a Broad street merchant, charged with committing a rape upon the person of a negro girl twelve years of age, named Lizzie Turner, whom he is accused of enticing into his store and violating. The testimony in the case was extremely revolting, and resulted in the defendant being bound over in the sum of \$1000.”<sup>35</sup>

Firstly, the race of the perpetrator is not explicitly mentioned but due to the fact that it is always explicitly mentioned by the use of the n-word if a criminal was a black man, one can safely assume that the rapist was in fact a white man. Secondly, the white man who raped an innocent young girl did not even get incarcerated and simply received a fine while the black man was thrown into jail and later murdered by a mob. While both incidents are accredited as rape it is questionable if all cases of black men raping white women or girls are actually rape. Historian Martha Hodes, who wrote intensively about escalating violence relating to illicit sex between white women and black men, asserts that there are many cases in which the rape is alleged in order to save a white woman’s reputation as miscegenation had societal stigma attached to it.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> “Fletchers Statement.” *Nashville Union and American*. April 13, 1870. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85033699/1870-04-13/ed-1/seq-1/> (accessed March 17, 2022.)

<sup>35</sup> “The Broad Street Rape Case” *Nashville Union and Dispatch*. January 30, 1868. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85038521/1868-01-30/ed-1/seq-3/> (accessed March 18, 2022.)

<sup>36</sup> Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*, 193.

Given the sheer amount of newspaper reports of black men raping women this seems entirely plausible and feeds the antebellum narrative of enslaved black men raping white women. Despite rape allegations in the antebellum south, enslaved men would rarely be executed for these offences and would not have provoked white violence contrary to the Reconstruction period.<sup>37</sup> This seems counterintuitive given the fact that the antebellum racial stratification meant more oppression for black men before the passing of the 13th Amendment. One possible explanation for the ‘toleration’ of enslaved men having sexual relations with white women might be that they were considered property. Accordingly, if an enslaved man would be executed for supposedly raping a white woman, the owner of that man would suffer great financial loss and damages to his property.

Black men no longer being considered property does not fully explain the outrage against black men allegedly raping white women, while white men got away with raping women with a fine. Black men were subject to white anxiety about the recent changes to the racial hierarchy. Especially, the white population of Tennessee had reasons to be anxious about the political changes. In 1865 the civil government was restored and William G. Brownlow became Governor in a farcical election.<sup>38</sup> Promptly after, a law was passed which stipulated that all ex-Confederates and Confederate sympathisers were stripped of their right to vote. Moreover, a special law denied ex-Confederates the right to bear arms.<sup>39</sup> These laws had the effect that in 1867 some counties had more registered black voters than white, whereas previously the vote was only reserved for white men.<sup>40</sup> These set of circumstances left many in Tennessee unhappy and many white men organised themselves in secret organisations, one of them being the *Ku Klux Klan* in Pulaski. The formation of the *Klan* and the violence that ensued is thus a form of white backlash, as white backlash encapsulates the negative response of white towards racial progressivism<sup>41</sup> and black men had just gained their freedom and the right to vote. Hodes outlines that “[t]he Klan was most active in areas of the South where the economic disparity and social inequality between blacks

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<sup>37</sup> Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Stanley F. Horn, *Invisible Empire: The Story of the Ku Klux Klan, 1866-1871* (New York: H.M., 1939), 74.

<sup>39</sup> Horn, *Invisible Empire*, 74.

<sup>40</sup> Horn, *Invisible Empire*, 74.

<sup>41</sup> Dan Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 349.

and whites was least remarkable.”<sup>42</sup> Evidently, the Nashville *Daily Press and Times* characterised “the kind of people who join the Ku Klux Klan” as “young men brought up in idleness, with no reflective powers and no purpose in life except drinking whiskey; plantation overseers, with no property, education, intellectuality, or humanity; and townsmen without work.”<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, *Klan* members were men with little future prospects and had a similar level of wealth as former slaves. On top of not being economically superior to African Americans they were no longer politically superior, as black men could now theoretically vote (the African American vote was heavily suppressed by means of *Jim Crow* laws). Previously, a white man, even one with few future prospect and little money, could still be validated in themselves and their masculinity as he was on top of the antebellum racial hierarchy. Consequently, black men’s sexuality and interracial sexual relations were associated with racial equality as expressed in the *Memphis Daily Appeal*:

“Miscegenation and negro equality are one and the same. One springs out of the other, just as the blossom out of the bud. Negro equality is made the law of the land by our Legislature and the national Government, and the logical consequence will and must be miscegenation.”<sup>44</sup>

Subsequently, black men were accused of raping white women<sup>45</sup> in order to justify the brutal vigilante lynching of black men, since their existence now threatened the white men’s political claim for power.

In addition, the alleged act of rape victimises the white women and supports the narrative of white women being passive participants in society and virtuous and pious beings. As the act of rape takes away any consent and therefore the possibility of white women choosing black men instead of white men as their sexual partners. White women choosing black men instead of white men is emasculating and suggests that white men are inferior to black men. Not only did white men lose their racial superiority with the abolition of slavery, but they also had to acquiesce to black men’s humanity and by extension their masculinity. As white men were no longer racially

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<sup>42</sup>Hodes, “The Sexualization of Reconstruction Politics”, 404-405.

<sup>43</sup> Nashville *Daily Press and Times*, July 14, 1868.

<sup>44</sup> “Negro Equality and Miscegenation.” *Memphis Daily Appeal*. April 06, 1864. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045160/1864-04-06/ed-1/seq-2/> (accessed March 18, 2022.)

<sup>45</sup> Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*, 206.

superior it also meant that the hegemony of white masculinity was threatened by the existence of free black men's masculinity. Thus, the sexual agency of a free black men was much more threatening to white men than the sexual agency of an enslaved man as slavery no longer existed to maintain a racial stratification. The gruesome violence directed towards black men associating with white women was the result of white concerns over their economical and societal status within a society, in which slavery did no longer uphold racial stratifications.

Before and after the Civil War, biracial sexual relations between white women and black men were commonly portrayed as rape with white women being denied sexual agency. The Reconstruction period saw women receiving punishments and condemnation for treading across the colour line and coalescing with black men. If a miscegenation case was not classified as rape, white women would have their characters smeared and would be thrown into jail and have to appear in court.

“Jas. Robertson, col., and Nancy Robertson, white were bound over for violating the miscegenation law in Chattanooga Thursday. [...] Babe Allison, a negro brute and ex-convict, committed an outrage on Miss Polly Travis, an aged and help less maiden, near Shelbyville, last week. He was arrested and lodged in jail and the court will, no doubt, have his neck broken real soon.”<sup>46</sup>

“Five or six white women and three or four negro men were jailed last week for being a little grain careless as to how they mixed their genders and their colors.”<sup>47</sup>

The *Milan Exchange* reported on two white women having to appear in court for their misdemeanours involving miscegenation. Simultaneously, a black man is jailed and will likely be executed for being associated with a white woman. The *Bristol News* took note of a similar set of circumstance, in which white women were jailed for engaging in illicit sex with black men. In another case where the sexual relation between a white woman and a black man is not portrayed

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<sup>46</sup> “Over the State.” *The Milan Exchange*. February 28, 1875. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sb86053488/1875-02-28/ed-1/seq-5/> (accessed February 28, 2022.)

<sup>47</sup> *Bristol News*. April 18, 1876. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85026955/1876-04-18/ed-1/seq-3/> (accessed March 22, 2022.)

as rape the *Clarksville Chronicle* denounces the woman as ‘deluded’ thereby questioning her character even calling her ‘morally criminal’:

“The article going the rounds of the press in reference to the disgusting incident in the family of Gen. Mower at Ship Island [...] It may, or may not, be true that the negro soldier seduced his daughter, or that the daughter seduced the negro, or that neither is true. [...] Such unnatural love suggests moral and physical criminality, and the result is that the deluded woman consigns herself to a condition of incurable disgrace and life-long misery.”<sup>48</sup>

Acknowledgment of interracial consensual relations correlated with a poor women’s image in the South, they were portrayed as morally dubious and sexually depraved.<sup>49</sup> Questioning a woman’s character regarding her sexual agency is common throughout history and literature, as poor white women were capable of seducing black men during slavery as they did not have the same social capital as wives or daughters of rich landowning men.<sup>50</sup> Poor women were not seen as richer women, they were not accredited with the same amount of virtue and piety. However, white purity was the hegemonic ideal of a woman in the South and not fitting into that archetype of woman conveyed fault and lack of morality. Women of lower class were already ‘faulty’ women, therefore they were capable of having ‘unnatural’ liaisons with black men. Undermining a woman’s character distracted from the fact that interracial liaisons involving white women was harmful to white men’s masculinity. Furthermore, white women associating with black men symbolised an act of defiance towards white men, as aforementioned miscegenation was equated to racial equality for black men. Subsequently, women aiding this endeavour spurred the rage of white extremists.<sup>51</sup> Corporal punishment by extremists did not solely target the sexual ‘depravity’ of women but presented the outrage against white women advancing racial equality and ‘betraying their own race.’ In fact, white women had to remain pure for white men and not mix their blood. As long as white women only gave birth to purely white children they would guarantee the

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<sup>48</sup> *Clarksville chronicle*. May 08, 1868. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88061077/1868-05-08/ed-1/seq-2/> (accessed March 18,2022.)

<sup>49</sup> Hodes, “The Sexualization of Reconstruction Politics”, 417.

<sup>50</sup> Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*, 14.

<sup>51</sup>Hodes,“The Sexualization of Reconstruction Politics”, 404.

survival of the white race due to the one-drop rule, which asserted that anybody with even one black ancestor is considered black.<sup>52</sup>

Although miscegenation was equated with racial equality and a threat towards racial stratification black women associating with white men did not experience the same violence their male counterparts did. Nonetheless, they still experienced racially motivated violence:

“Deputy Marshak Sanders arrived from Murfreesboro’ Sunday morning with five prisoners, arrested on a charge of whipping Jane Roy, a colored woman [...] The woman was most brutally whipped by a band of Ku-Klux.”<sup>53</sup>

Moreover, their gender was again at the intersection of discrimination and black women continuously got sexually assaulted by white men, for which there were rarely any legal ramifications.<sup>54</sup> The white South continued to view black women as sexually depraved beings who sought out promiscuous sexual encounters.<sup>55</sup> Black women still carried the burden of the *Jezebel* and sexual violence and assault that followed this stereotype.<sup>56</sup> In fact, the *Klan* preached to refrain from miscegenation but their violent rampages included the rape and assault of black women.<sup>57</sup> This stance towards miscegenation is hypocritical but feasible as black women did not gain political power after the Civil War. They still lived in a sexist society and in turn the patriarchal system of the South guaranteed that black women did not pose a threat to the political power of white men. Additionally, since the burden of maintaining a purely white race rested upon white women it allowed white men to continue engaging in interracial liaisons. As any offspring of a black woman would always remain black regardless of who fathered the child.

Many historians have previously investigated interracial relations in the South. Especially historian Martha Hodes greatly contributed to research about interracial liaisons and the targeted

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<sup>52</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962), 113-117.

<sup>53</sup> “KuKlux Outrage Near Smyrna.” *Knoxville Weekly Chronicle*. July 05, 1871. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85033438/1871-07-05/ed-1/seq-3/> (accessed March 22, 2022.)

<sup>54</sup> Peter Winthrop Bardaglio, *Reconstructing the Household: Families, Sex, and the Law in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 195-197.

<sup>55</sup> White, *Ar'n'T I a Woman?*, 164.

<sup>56</sup> White, *Ar'n'T I a Woman?*, 165.

<sup>57</sup>Hodes, “The Sexualization of Reconstruction Politics”, 409.

violence, which ensued the Civil War. She asserts that the violence against black men is spurred by white anxiety about political emancipation.<sup>58</sup> Her work is comprehensive and layered and compares illicit sex between white women and black men prior and after the Civil War. However, I would classify the violence against black men as white backlash. In addition, I think types of femininity in connection with a system that subjugated women as a class of people contributed vastly on the narratives of interracial liaisons and its participants. The lack of women's political power and the construction of womanhood lends great explanative power towards the treatment of them concerning interracial liaisons. As identities are commonly constructed around counterparts, the change of power and actions of these counterparts, be it black men or be it women, compromise the hegemonic status of the group of people, which are on top of a racial and patriarchal hierarchy. Furthermore, the emphasis of most research regarding the politics of miscegenation after the Civil War, follows black men and white women. The opposite gender make-up needs to be further researched, addressed and analysed. However, such a project might prove difficult as sources on the topic are much more difficult to unearth.

To summarise all the aforementioned points, black women's constructed femininity served as the legitimisation for white men's sexual assault in order to reproduce an enslaved workforce. Free white women associating with black men imperilled the masculinity of white men as their masculinity was structured around women's passivity and obedience and the existence of free biracial children also questions the racial stratification of the South. Then, white supremacists targeted black men over concern of their right to vote, which they equated with miscegenation. White women were assigned the responsibility of keeping the white race 'pure' and thus any transgressions with black men would conjure societal disapproval and slandering of her character. Finally, the overreaching influence of patriarchy enabled white men to continue assaulting black women, as they have done previously, and society continued to ignore their plights. Overall, white men's hegemonic position of power within a racial patriarchal society resulted in people of colour and women being negatively affected in order for men to maintain their position and continue to abuse their status at the cost of others without any ramifications.

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<sup>58</sup>Hodes, "The Sexualization of Reconstruction Politics", 416.

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