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‘Universally Sacrificed’? Sexual Violence Experienced by Light-Skinned Women in the Slaveholding Societies of Barbados and Louisiana

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‘Universally Sacrificed’? Sexual Violence Experienced by Light-Skinned Women in the Slaveholding Societies of Barbados and Louisiana.

Contents

Introduction

In 1784 James Ramsay, a traveller to the British Caribbean, wrote 'it should be observed that Mulattoe girls, during the flower of their age, are universally sacrificed to the lust of white men'.[1] Ramsay's statement encapsulates the sexual violence that was endemic across transatlantic slaveholding societies from the outset of slavery, within which 'Mulattoe' or light-skinned females became specific targets.[2] This violence was pervasive, impacting both free and enslaved light-skinned women. Although sexual violence has been acknowledged as an ingrained feature of slaveholding societies, the sexual violence specifically perpetrated against light-skinned women should likewise be understood as an established feature of slavery. Therefore, this thesis will argue that sexual violence towards light-skinned females was an institutionalised feature of slaveholding societies across the Atlantic, as will be demonstrated by drawing focused parallels from Barbados and Louisiana.

The experiences of light-skinned women must not be placed in a competitive framework with dark-skinned females. There can be no gradation of the suffering all people of colour suffered in slaveholding societies, whether victims of sexual violence or other forms of exploitation. The unique experiences of light-skinned females in this context highlights their intersectionality, consequently studying them independently allows a more comprehensive understanding to be reached. Hence, by focusing on light-skinned women this study seeks to shed light on an underdeveloped aspect of historiography. The aim of this thesis is therefore two-fold: to establish that sexual violence against light-skinned women was an inherent and institutionalised aspect of slaveholding societies and to do so in the contexts of Barbados and Louisiana, illustrating the self-replicating nature of this violence across the transatlantic.

The terminology employed in this study should be noted. Slavery scholarship has developed to favour the term 'enslaved people' over 'slaves', separating victims' identities from their societal status. This highlights the significance of the language

[1] J. Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (London: Phillips, 1784), 239.
[2] Ramsay, *Essay,* 239.

used in this field. Subsequently, the sexual abuse against light-skinned females will be referred to as 'sexual violence'. Sexual violence against women has been interpreted as the result of entrenched sexism and patriarchy.[3] In the context of slavery scholarship, sexual violence is widely understood as a deliberate tool of slaveholding and a form of exerting domination over women of colour.[4] By employing this term this study is immediately asserting that this violence against light-skinned women was an embedded feature of slaveholding societies.

Light-skinned women will be understood as females of mixed ancestry. Although there would have been exceptions to this, the majority of these women would have had white fathers. Contemporaries referred to such women in numerous ways, often based on their racial makeup, the most prevalent archaic terms being 'mulatto', 'quadroon' and 'octoroon'. The term 'light-skinned' will encompass all of these titles, allowing consistency throughout this thesis.

Scholarship exploring the sexual violence of light-skinned women is largely underdeveloped, especially in the context of Barbados. This can partially be credited to the relatively recent shift in slavery historiography, focusing on the impact of gender and intersectionality, with Deborah White's work epitomizing this.[5] Ulrich Phillips, one of the earliest major historians of slavery, failed to acknowledge sexual violence, its existence discrediting his argument presenting slavery as a paternalistic institution.[6] Eugene Genovese produced a landmark study on Southern slavery, examining sexual violence as part of this.[7] However, the language he employed in discussing this, such as that these interactions were 'strong and affectionate interracial relationships' proves problematic, minimizing the reality of this exploitation.[8]

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[3] See L. Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988).
[4] See S. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1997). Hartman discusses the forms of domination and terror over people of colour during slavery, sexual violence studied as part of this.
[5] D.G. White, *Ar'n't I a Women?* (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1985).
[6] U.B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery* (New York: D. Appleton, 1918).
[7] E. Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Random House, 1976).
[8] Genovese, *Roll Jordan,* 418.

Genovese's work marked a change in slavery scholarship, exerting a 'bottom-up' approach that focused on the lived experiences of people of colour in slaveholding societies, rather than on the slaveholder as Phillips did. This thesis will continue in this narrative, striving to recover the experiences of light-skinned women as accurately as possible.

Despite existing within a limited framework, studies that enhance understandings of light-skinned women's experiences in slaveholding societies have been conducted. Edward Baptist's work on the commodification of light-skinned females provides valuable insight regarding how they were targeted with sexual violence in a domestic context, exploring the market that developed around them in Louisiana.[9] Emily Clark has studied the population of free light-skinned women in Louisiana, her contribution proving useful in understanding the historical context in which they existed.[10] Although important, both Baptist's and Clark's work do not specifically examine the sexual violence against free and enslaved light-skinned women on a transatlantic scope. Their focus on Louisiana is typical of existing works on light-skinned women, tending to explore them primarily in this context. By studying Barbados alongside Louisiana, this thesis will expand scholarship on light-skinned women to a broader scale.

Much of the literature exploring light-skinned women, and sexual violence more generally, exists in the context of American slavery with historiography focusing on the Caribbean sparse in comparison. Hilary Beckles' social history of enslaved women in Barbados studies this neglected area, acknowledging sexual exploitation.[11] Although Beckles recognizes light-skinned women in this context, he focuses on the experiences of darker-skinned enslaved women in Barbados.[12] Marisa Fuentes' work on women of colour in Barbados highlights the methodological challenges presented

[9] E. Baptist, '"Cuffy," "Fancy Maids," and "One-Eyed Men": Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States', *The American Historical Review*, 106 (2001) 1647.
[10] E. Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon: Free Women of Color in the Revolutionary Atlantic World* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).
[11] H. Beckles, *Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1989).
[12] Beckles, Natural Rebels.

when studying this area.[13] It proves instrumental in demonstrating how to effectively grapple with archival silences, however, similarly to Beckles' work, is a broader work that does not focus on the sexual violence against light-skinned women.

This thesis offers an original contribution to this existing historiography through its focus on the institutionalisation of sexual violence against free and enslaved light-skinned females alongside the comparative nature in which this is observed, drawing analogies from Barbados and Louisiana rather than a singular context.

If historical testimonies by enslaved people in the American South are scarce, those for the British Caribbean are practically non-existent. This presents itself as one of the main methodological challenges of this study, with archival silences meaning that the voices of light-skinned victims of sexual violence are largely inaccessible. Fuentes articulates this well, stating that 'the very nature of slavery in the Caribbean made enslaved life fleeting and rendered access to literacy nearly impossible'.[14] The majority source type available for investigating sexual violence in Barbados, and to an extent Louisiana, are travellers accounts, as illustrated by the opening source. This proves challenging, as such sources inevitably would have been shaped by the context in which they were written, such as if they were authored by abolitionists. To mitigate this issue, multiple sources will be used to establish the arguments made throughout to ensure the accounts used are not atypical and accurate conclusions can be reached.

The comparative nature of this thesis also presents potential pitfalls. As already acknowledged, Louisiana has more primary and scholarly material available than Barbados. This inevitably means that more extensive aspects of the violence against light-skinned women can be identified in Louisiana. However, this study will focus on parallel areas in both contexts in order to prove the transatlantic and systematic nature of sexual violence against light-skinned women. This allows for niche areas to be examined in depth, such as incestuous sexual violence.

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[13] M. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).
[14] Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives,* 2.

The colonial context of Louisiana must be acknowledged due to its impact on the sources utilized in this study. Louisiana has a complex colonial history, held under both French and Spanish control during different periods. The impact of French colonisation of Louisiana emerges primarily through the class of free people of colour that existed in New Orleans. Kimberly Hanger has stated that these people represented '33.5 percent [of the population] by 1805'.[15] This significant demographic meant that in New Orleans free people of colour were afforded more autonomy and perceived more benevolently than their counterparts in Barbados, a British colony. This inevitably impacted the ways light-skinned women who were part of this demographic experienced sexual violence in Louisiana, as will be evidenced predominantly in the third chapter.

The sources used throughout this thesis will span from 1784 to 1861. Due to the comparative nature of this study, the specific time frames covered in each context will differ. Alongside this, slavery was abolished at different times; 1834 in Barbados and 1865 in Louisiana. This is apparent in the dates of the sources used. However, examining slavery as an institution is imperative to the aims of this work, therefore the conclusions which will be drawn are applicable to slaveholding societies more broadly and can be divorced from specific national contexts and time periods. This is in keeping with the argument that sexual violence against light-skinned women was institutionalised across the transatlantic, as the different slaveholding societies of Barbados and Louisiana will demonstrate.

In any study of this nature, generalisations must be avoided, there being multiple aspects where this must be emphasised from the outset. Not all light-skinned women would have experienced the forms of sexual violence which will be identified in the latter chapters. Alongside this, not all light-skinned females would have become victims of sexual violence. This would have been dependant on the specific environments in which they existed, alongside how aesthetically pleasing they were deemed. Similarly, not all slaveholders or white men would have perpetuated or agreed with this sexual violence. Therefore, although this study will focus on what

[15] K. Hanger, 'Origins of New Orleans's Free Creoles of Color' in J.H. Dormon (ed.), *Creoles of Color of the Gulf South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 6.

was characteristic of the majority of light-skinned women's experiences of sexual violence, there would have been exceptions to this.

This study will first identify why light-skinned females were targeted, before proceeding to examine two unique ways in which this occurred. Chapter One will establish why they became widespread victims of sexual violence in Louisiana and Barbados. Chapter Two will study incestuous sexual violence and the circumstances in which it occurred. Chapter Three will then focus on ballroom dances that were held to facilitate sexual violence against free light-skinned women.

By studying unique manifestations of sexual violence against light-skinned women the intersectionality of their experiences is proven. These chapters encompass the experiences of free and enslaved light-skinned women in Barbados and Louisiana, demonstrating that they were not a heterogeneous group within slaveholding societies. By doing so, the argument that sexual violence towards light-skinned women was institutionalised is immediately furthered, impacting them irrespective of their status.

Chapter One: The Intersection of Gender and Skin Tone

> I will acknowledge that I prefer the complexion that is tinged, if not too darkly, with all the richness of the olive, to the face which, however fair in its paleness, can never look as lovely as when it wore the rose blush of beauty which has faded away. I know no prettier scene than a group of young and handsome colored girls.[16]

These were the sentiments of F.W. Bayley in 1830. His words epitomize the preference that emerged across slaveholding societies for light-skinned females. Although Bayley was writing in the context of Barbados, comparable attitudes were prevalent in Louisiana. Bayley's fixation on the 'complexion' of light-skinned women aids understandings as to why they were purposely singled out with sexual violence.[17] This chapter will identify the skin tone of light-skinned women alongside their gender as factors which made them targets of sexual violence. The ideologies associated with these in Barbados and Louisiana shaped how light-skinned women were perceived by contemporaries, enforcing the commerce of rape in these contexts. Albeit, this is an extremely multifaceted area, there existing countless motivations behind the sexual violence towards light-skinned women dependent on individual circumstances in which it occurred. However, parallel factors in Barbados and Louisiana will be focused on. Through doing so it can be argued that not only was sexual violence against light-skinned women institutionalised, but as were the motivations and ideologies that led to it.

The intersection of the gender and skin tone of light-skinned females made them inherently vulnerable to sexual violence, as this chapter will evidence. It will establish the implications associated with the gender and skin tone of light-skinned women, before examining ways in which their intersection manifested with sexual violence.

Historiography acknowledging the sexual violence of light-skinned women has often failed to establish why they were targeted or focused on factors unique to specific

[16] F.W.N. Bayley, *Four Years Residence in the West Indies* (London: W. Kidd, 1830), 493-494.
[17] Bayley, *Four Years Residence* (London: W. Kidd, 1830), 493.

contexts rather than slaveholding societies more broadly. Gunnar Myrdal noted that enslaved light-skinned people were chosen over darker-skinned people for sexual unions, yet did not establish what initially led to this preference.[18] More recently, Beckles identified that light-skinned women were favoured by white males for 'exciting socio-sexual companionship'.[19] Although a valid point, it is typical of existing studies and can be compared to Myrdal's in the sense that it fails to evidence why they were targeted. Baptist has provided a detailed analysis of the fetishisation that developed around light-skinned women, however, he explores this in a framework only relevant to Louisiana.[20] This chapter will therefore expand on this historiography.

The impact of Barbados and Louisiana's differing contexts must be reiterated, as these inevitably impacted the institutionalization of sexual violence against light-skinned women. In Louisiana, the fetishisation of light-skinned females essentially became a part of the infrastructure, specifically in New Orleans with the development of the 'fancy girl' trade. This was 'the sale of light-skinned black women for the exclusive purpose of prostitution and concubinage' as White defines.[21] This allowed for light-skinned women to primarily be viewed as commodities, and they would have been targeted as such, with Baptist's work reinforcing this.[22] This shaped why they were vulnerable to sexual violence in Louisiana and marks a significant discrepancy with Barbados. Indeed, New Orleans and the treatment of light-skinned women there is often deemed 'exceptional', as Clark has stated.[23] However, the skin tone and gender of light-skinned women can be credited with allowing this commodification initially, the 'fancy girl' market developing from this. Hence, although the intersection of light-skinned women's gender and skin tone inevitably manifested in differing ways, as the 'fancy girl' trade indicates, the factors that led to this can be identified in both contexts. Alongside this, not all of the victims of sexual violence in Louisiana would have experienced it through the 'fancy girl' market, as the succeeding chapters will illustrate. Therefore, this methodological challenge does not impair the aims of this chapter.

[18] G. Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1944).
[19] Beckles, *Natural Rebels*, 146.
[20] Baptist, 'Rape, Commodification'.
[21] White, *Ar'n't I a Women?*, 37.
[22] Baptist, 'Rape, Commodification'.
[23] Clark, *Strange History,* 9.

Light-skinned females were automatically vulnerable to sexual violence due to their gender and the implications associated with it. White's monograph on enslaved women highlights that 'conventional wisdom was that black women were naturally promiscuous'.[24] Although the existence of sexual abuse against males in slaveholding societies must not be downplayed, it did not occur in the established manner with which women were targeted with sexual violence. Thomas Foster, the leading proponent of studies exploring the sexual abuse of males during slavery, has stated 'we have no evidence for a sexual fetish market in black male flesh'.[25] Indeed, a male equivalent of the 'fancy girl' trade or the widespread sexual violence women experienced did not exist and could not have due to the gendered nature of this exploitation. The very existence of the 'fancy girl' market in Louisiana encapsulates the impact of gender on the sexualisation of light-skinned women, with the stereotype of women of colour as deliberately tempting 'men of the superior caste' serving as a justification for the widespread sexual violence of light-skinned women.[26]

This widespread assumption that women of colour were licentious was adapted specifically to light-skinned women, exacerbating the already prominent impact of this gender stereotype. In Louisiana, they were fictionalised as the 'tragic mulatta' in numerous contemporary literary works.[27] The 'tragic mulatta' was portrayed as representative of light-skinned females and depicted them as deliberate seductresses of white men. Joseph Ingraham's version of the 'tragic mulatta', one of the earliest works introducing this literary character, was specific to New Orleans.[28] Similarly, Diana Bouicicault's depiction was based in Louisiana.[29] This demonstrates how prevalent this stereotype would have been in this context, inevitably influencing contemporary views. The 'tragic mulatta' stereotype aggravated the pervasive

[24] White, *Ar'n't I a Women?*, 38.
[25] T. Foster, 'The Sexual Abuse of Black Men under American Slavery', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 20 (2011), 449.
[26] White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 38
[27] J.H Ingraham, *The American Lounger; or, Tales, Sketches, and Legends, Gathered in Sundry Journeyings* (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1839); L.M. Child, *Collected Works of Lydia Maria Francis Child* (New York: Pinnacle Press, 2017); D. Boucicault, *The Octoroon; or, Life in Louisiana* (London: Forgotten Books, 2017).
[28] Ingraham, *American Lounger*.
[29] Boucicault, *Octoroon*.

sexualisation of women of colour and was used to validate sexual violence against light-skinned women.

The sexualisation of light-skinned women specifically is further evidenced in an advertisement for 'a very handsome mulatto girl, just 15, tall and wellshaped, in short a very desirable purchase' featured in a Barbadian newspaper, detailed by Richard Wyvill in 1807.[30] The language used in this advertisement is notable, placing emphasis on the 'mulatto girl' being 'wellshaped' and 'handsome', deliberately sexualising her with the aim of appealing to prospective buyers.[31] This suggests that the purpose of the 'mulatto girl' to the purchaser, and potentially originally to the seller, was primarily in a sexual violence context.[32]

Wyvill recalled an advertisement in the same newspaper for a light-skinned man, which he detailed as stating: 'To be sold a mulatto man, a compleat taylor and sadler, understands a butler's place very well, is a capital groom and can drive a carriage'.[33] The contrast in the two advertisements is noteworthy. The 'mulatto man' is advertised for his skills and practical uses as a 'taylor and sadler'.[34] This diverts from the way in which the 'mulatto girl' is depicted, focusing on her 'wellshaped' body as her selling point.[35] This source needs to be viewed cautiously, as the newspaper in which the advertisements appeared is not mentioned by name and cannot be referenced directly, with Wyvill's description likely not a verbatim representation. However, it remains vital in exploring the impact of gender due to the sexualised depiction of the 'mulatto girl' alongside the contrast with the advertisement for the 'mulatto man', highlighting the impact of gender on perceptions of light-skinned women. The advertisements in Barbados, alongside the 'tragic mulatta' stereotype in Louisiana, evidence the influence of gender on perceptions of light-skinned women, often manifesting in sexual violence.

[30] Washington, Library of Congress, Peter Force Collection, (hereafter PFC): Series 8-D, Richard A. Wyvill, 'Memoirs of an Old Army Officer', 1814.
[31] PFC: Series 8-D, Wyvill, 'Memoirs', 1814.
[32] PFC: Series 8-D, Wyvill, 'Memoirs', 1814.
[33] PFC: Series 8-D, Wyvill, 'Memoirs', 1814.
[34] PFC: Series 8-D, Wyvill, 'Memoirs', 1814.
[35] PFC: Series 8-D, Wyvill, 'Memoirs', 1814.

Alongside their gender, light-skinned females' skin tone and the connotations associated with it made them vulnerable to sexual violence. The fixation on their hue has already been demonstrated by Bayley's description of his preference for 'the complexion that is tinged'.[36] Lighter skin was perceived as superior and aesthetically pleasing in contemporary society, largely due to the Caucasian heritage of light-skinned people and their phenotype having European characteristics.[37] This led to a preference for those with lighter skin and often meant that they were more likely to be enslaved domestically. This subsequently made them more vulnerable to sexual violence, as James Johnston has proven.[38] Therefore, their complexion coupled with their gender allowed for light-skinned women be specifically sought after with sexual violence.

A light-skinned 'fancy girl' in Louisiana was described as having 'white eyelids, and the appearance of a German girl' and priced at two hundred dollars, which was marked as a significant amount in the *New Orleans Bee*.[39] This focus on European traits in the light-skinned woman's features, such as her 'white eyelids' and 'German' likeness, epitomizes the fixation on light-skinned females' complexions.[40] The fact that this woman was priced exceptionally highly within the 'fancy girl' market is undoubtedly related to her prominent European features, with her therefore being marketed as such. This further illustrates that although the intersection of light-skinned women's complexion and gender manifested in alternating ways in Barbados and Louisiana, the fundamental causes of the sexual violence were adjacent in both contexts.

John Waller observed in 1820 in Barbados that one of his associates had been advised:

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[36] Bayley, *Four Years Residence*, 493.
[37] See R. Hildreth, *The White Slave: Another Picture of Slave Life in America* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1852); J. Nott, *Types of Mankind* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1854); E. Reuter, *The Mulatto in the United States; Including a Study of the Role of Mixed Blood Races Throughout the World* (Boston: Richard G. Badger, 1918).
[38] J. Johnston, *Race Relations in Virginia & Miscegenation in the South, 1776-1860* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970).
[39] 'Auction Sales', *New Orleans Bee*, May 31, 1850.
[40] 'Auction Sales'.

> in the most serious manner to look out for a young mulatto or Mustee girl for his housekeeper, urging that it would greatly increase his domestic comforts…in addition to this, she hinted very delicately, that, by being confined to one object, his health and reputation would be better secured, than by the promiscuous libertinism to which she seemed to consider every young man as habitually addicted.[41]

The fact that Waller's associate was advised to select a 'mulatto' or 'Mustee girl' demonstrates the fixation with light-skinned females.[42] It is clear the purpose of this female would have been of a sexual nature, as emphasised by the statement that he would be 'confined to one object'.[43] The 'promiscuous libertinism' which is referred encapsulates the prevalence of sexual violence in Barbados, it being so rife that white men who interacted with women of colour were believed as unable to refrain from it, viewed as 'habitually addicted'.[44] This recommendation suggests that sexual violence against light-skinned women was both expected and accepted, being specifically catered for. Waller's account demonstrates how the intersection of the skin tone and gender of light-skinned women would have manifested with sexual violence, them being preferred for such interactions.

The terminology employed in Waller's account links back to the importance of language in the context of slavery studies, evident even when examining contemporary sources. Referring to the light-skinned women as a 'housekeeper' is used as a euphemism instead of explicitly stating the sexual purpose she would have served.[45] This demonstrates how endemic sexual violence against light-skinned women was, with its pervasive nature seeping into the lexicon of contemporaries. The nature of this culturally specific language is ironic, the tact employed indicating an awareness of the crudeness of sexual violence, yet this awareness not stopping engagement in it.

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[41] J. Waller, *A Voyage in the West Indies* (London: Richard Phillips, 1820), 20.
[42] Waller, *Voyage*, 20.
[43] Waller, *Voyage*, 20.
[44] Waller, *Voyage*, 20.
[45] Waller, *Voyage*, 20.

It is clear that the intersection of the skin tone and gender of light-skinned women made them inherently vulnerable to sexual violence. As the evidence has shown, in Barbados and Louisiana these factors were present in examples of sexual violence, with their implications manifesting across the transatlantic. This suggests that these factors were institutionalised across slaveholding societies. Therefore, although the manifestations of this violence inevitably would have varied in different contexts, the factors that led to them are broadly applicable. Through establishing this, the unique ways in which sexual violence manifested towards light-skinned women explored in the following chapters can be contextualized.

Chapter Two: Incestuous Sexual Violence

Jacob Aldrich described his former master as having 'chillen by his own chillen'.[46] Aldrich's account of incestuous sexual violence in Louisiana is not an isolated example, with evidence for its occurrence in Barbados existing alongside this. It serves as tangible evidence of the sexual prerogative the institution of slavery afforded white men over women of colour. Despite its significance, no literature examining the incestuous abuse towards light-skinned women exists. It was an experience unique to this group due to their gender and the nature of their conception. This immediately demonstrates the intersectionality of light-skinned females' experiences, incestuous sexual violence an exceptional manifestation of their vulnerability. The fact that this can be shown in both Barbados and Louisiana furthers the argument that sexual violence was institutionalised on a transatlantic level, with the ways in which it materialised also occurring on this scope. Inevitably, enslaved light-skinned women were more likely to become victims of incestuous sexual violence due to their enhanced lack of agency. This chapter will argue that incestuous abuse was a product of the pervasive sexual violence against light-skinned women, exploring the environments in which it occurred. It will also examine its impact on light-skinned women, allowing the consequences of this violence to be understood.

Although the direct testimony of a light-skinned victim of incestuous sexual violence cannot be recovered, throughout this chapter the testimony of enslaved people will be utilized in order to gain a deeper understanding of light-skinned women's experiences of sexual violence. This raises methodological challenges, as the only sources available in this context are ones which would have been shaped by an outsider, such as an amanuensis or interviewer, as is the case with Aldrich's account. The individual motivations of the outsider involved inevitably would have shaped the testimony recorded. This raises questions regarding the authenticity of such sources, with Nell Painter writing that 'authorship is a more complex matter than when

[46] G. Rawick, *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography, Supplement Series Two, Volume 2* (Westport: Greenwood, 1972), 138.

thinker and scribe are one'.[47] Care will therefore be taken when drawing conclusions from such testimonies by acknowledging the context of the sources used in this chapter.

The institution of slavery was infused with ideologies of the racial inferiority of people of colour and perpetuated patriarchal power from the outset, creating an environment which fostered the institutionalisation of sexual violence.[48] Judith Herman has argued that 'patriarchal power and ideology create a social and legal climate hospitable to incest'.[49] This is directly applicable to incestuous sexual violence during slavery. Sexual violence and miscegenation went largely unchallenged in slaveholding societies, with white men often assuming free sexual access to women of colour. This was accommodated by the 'patriarchal power' the institution of slavery allowed.[50] Incestuous abuse was an extension of this unfettered prerogative. Although it must not be assumed that all white men within slaveholding societies assumed this sexual prerogative, or that it was acceptable in all environments, these ideologies were undoubtedly infused within slaveholding societies. By identifying this, the environment in which incestuous violence occurred can immediately be better understood, whilst simultaneously presented as a cause of this abuse.

Ramsay, a surgeon and minister who worked in the Caribbean for over twenty years, wrote in 1784: 'It should be observed that Mulattoe girls, during the flower of their age, are universally sacrificed to the lust of white men; in some instances, to that of their own fathers.'[51] Ramsay's account serves as an immediate indication of incestuous sexual violence occurring in the West Indies and allows information to be gleaned regarding the setting in which it occurred. Ramsay noting that light-skinned females were 'universally sacrificed' corroborates the previous chapter's establishment that light-skinned females were specifically targeted with sexual

[47] N.I. Painter, 'Representing Truth: Sojourner Truth's Knowing and Becoming Known', *The Journal of American History,* 81 (1994), 468.
[48] See D. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
[49] J McConnell, 'Incest as Conundrum: Judicial Discourse on Private Wrong and Public Harm', *Texas Journal of Women and the Law*, 1, (1992), 148.
[50] McConnell, 'Incest', 148.
[51] Ramsay, *Essay,* 239.

violence.[52] Stating this immediately prior to acknowledging incestuous abuse infers that when this transpired it was motivated by factors analogous to those that caused the widespread sexual violence against light-skinned women.

Ramsay's account suggests that when a nominal father raped his offspring it may not have been understood as an act distinct from the already normalised sexual violence. Indeed, perpetrators of incestuous violence may not have perceived it as isolated from sexual violence towards light-skinned women they had no relation to. This demonstrates how divorced from parental responsibility and devoid of care they were, primarily viewing their children as property and as any other enslaved person.[53] Albeit, just as it must not be assumed that all light-skinned women experienced incestuous sexual violence, all of the men who fathered light-skinned women would not have abused them or lacked emotional attachment. However, when incestuous violence did occur, this explanation is arguably the most universally applicable.

Ramsay was an abolitionist, with his work used in the anti-slavery movement. He may have been writing to this agenda, potentially exaggerating or deliberately focusing on occurrences such as incestuous sexual violence. Although Ramsay did visit and write about Barbados, his account is about the 'British Sugar Colonies' as a whole.[54] Therefore, it would be misleading to assume that his description of incestuous abuse is based specifically on Barbados, as he does not make this distinction. However, Ramsay appears to have been inferring that it occurred 'universally' in the British Caribbean, allowing the account to remain relevant to this study.[55] The arguments that can be made based on Ramsey's account are therefore still valid, although it will not be relied on as the only source to evidence this.

[52] Ramsay, *Essay,* 239.
[53] This is also relevant to understanding the relationships the majority of enslaved light-skinned people had with their fathers. See J. Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1995).
[54] Ramsay, *Essay*.
[55] Ramsay, *Essay,* 239.

Susan, a light-skinned enslaved woman, stated 'I don't care anything for him and he don't for me' in reference to her father.[56] Although not specific to Louisiana or Barbados, Susan's attitude can be understood as largely representational of the majority of attitudes enslaved light-skinned women had towards their fathers. Although not a victim of incestuous abuse, Susan's detached attitude allows additional understanding of the environment in which incestuous rape occurred, with the mutual emotional detachment she demonstrates being broadly applicable. This adds further merit to the argument that incestuous sexual violence occurred in environments devoid of a traditional parent-child relationship, the victims viewed the same as other enslaved people and vice versa.

Susan's testimony is sourced from the diary of Ella Thomas, the wife of a planter in Georgia. Thomas exhibits racialized views throughout her diary, stating 'the institution of slavery degrades the white man more than the Negro'.[57] Thomas' recording of Susan's sentiments regarding her father inevitably cannot be verified due to the nature of this source. However, the fact that Thomas includes it in her diary despite its negative reflection on slaveholding society and the white men who fathered light-skinned children suggests that it is an authentic account. Additionally, Thomas' diary was not written for public consumption, indicating that it is a candid account of her interactions with Susan.

The 1787 satirical novel detailing Jonathan Corncob's travels in Barbados depicts a case of 'complicated incest' at the hands of a slaveholding master named 'Mr. Winter'.[58] The passage reads as follows:

> 'Mr. Winter himself is the father of them all,' replied he: 'when he was very young he had the mulatto woman by the negress: when the mulatto was twelve years old, he took her for his mistress, and had by her the mestee. At about the same age his intimacy with the mestee produced the quadroon, who had by him a few months ago

[56] V.I. Burr, *The Secret Eye: The Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas 1848-1889* (North Carolina: UNC, 2009), 168.
[57] Burr, *The Secret Eye*, 169.
[58] Anon, *The Adventures of Jonathan Corncob, Loyal American Refugee. Written by Himself* (Boston: David Godine, 1976), 126-127.

> the white child you see in her arms. This is what is called in this country washing a man's self white, and Mr. Winter has the credit of having washed himself white at a very early age, being at this time less than sixty years old.'[59]

Although this account is fictional and must be understood as such, it is instrumental due to its contemporary status. Throughout the novel the anonymous author demonstrates a substantial awareness of Barbados, such as through the description of vendors in Carlisle Bay, suggesting that they had visited or at least held considerable knowledge of the island.[60] Furthermore, Robert Vail stated that the author was 'thoroughly familiar with…Barbados'.[61] This indicates that the observations made are likely have been based, albeit loosely, on genuine occurrences. The novel can therefore be utilized to glean information about contemporary Barbados, the fact that incestuous sexual violence is included as part of the narrative notable.

The author highlights the casual nature with which incestuous sexual violence is discussed, Corncob stating 'This complicated incest, and the coolness with which my friend spoke of it'.[62] This 'coolness' indicates that incestuous violence was not meant to be understood as a remote or extraordinary act, suggesting that it was not an uncommon feature of slavery. [63] This could reflect contemporary Barbados and the perceptions held towards incestuous abuse, especially when considered adjacent to Ramsay's account. It therefore further aids understanding of the contexts in which incestuous sexual violence towards light-skinned women took place, it perceived as an unremarkable act indistinct from the already accepted sexual violence of slaveholding societies.

The description of Winter as washing 'himself white' and the complimentary manner in which this is framed, described as a 'credit', suggests that incestuous abuse was

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[59] Anon, *Adventures,* 126-127.
[60] Anon, *Adventures*.
[61] R.W.G. Vail, 'Adventures of Jonathan Corncob, Loyal American Refugee (1787) A Commentary,' *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America,* 50 (1956), 106.
[62] Anon, *Adventures,* 127.
[63] Anon, *Adventures,* 127.

deliberate.[64] The satirical style of the novel must be taken into account here, as this explanation may have been fabricated to demonstrate the ludicrousness of this situation. However, it may also reflect the attitudes of the perpetrators and slaveholding society. The concept of 'washing a man's self white' correlates with contemporary racial ideologies purporting the superiority of light skin.[65] As already recognised, the near European phenotype of light-skinned women's skin tone was a significant factor as to why they became targets of sexual violence. Winter being depicted as deliberately washing 'himself white' relates to this, with these acts of incestuous abuse potentially not only accepted, but encouraged, due to the skin tone of the children born of this.[66] This allows an understanding of the perverse nature and impact of racial ideologies. Alongside this, it establishes that sexual violence towards light-skinned women was not only normalised, but arguably advocated, with incestuous violence included in this.

Aldrich's account of incestuous sexual violence is the only one obtainable in the context of Louisiana. It exists as part of the Works Progress Administration interviews conducted with formerly enslaved people. These interviews have raised much debate amongst historians regarding their use, with Walter Johnson arguing that the conditions they were conducted in were 'inhibiting'.[67] Despite this, they remain an invaluable and rare source, allowing the experiences of enslaved people to be recovered. Therefore, although Aldrich's testimony must be contextualised as part of these interviews, with his account potentially shaped by this, his narrative is useful for gaining insight into incestuous abuse.

Aldrich's testimony highlights the pervasive sexual violence in Louisiana, with Thibedoux's son having 'as many mulatto chillens as his daddy had'.[68] This further highlights that incestuous violence occurred in environments of already persistent sexual violence and was therefore accepted by default, linking back to Ramsay's account. This is demonstrated when Aldrich states '[o]ld Missus ain't say nothing tall about it', suggesting that the plantation mistress did not take issue with Thibedoux

[64] Anon, *Adventures,* 126-127.
[65] Anon, *Adventures,* 127.
[66] Anon, *Adventures,* 126-127.
[67] W. Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 226.
[68] Rawick, *American Slave,* 138.

having 'chillen by his own chillen'.[69] This highlights that it was not perceived as an exceptional act.[70] Indisputably, Aldrich's testimony indicates that incestuous rape occurred in environments of prevalent sexual violence and was integrated as part of this.

It is important to seek to gain an understanding of the impact incestuous sexual violence would have had on light-skinned females, despite the difficulties presented by archival silences. Doing allows the impact of the institutionalised sexual violence which is central to this study to be understood in greater depth. Aldrich focuses on Thibedoux when describing incestuous violence, offering no judgement on the victims of Thibedoux's violence. [71] Andrea Livesey has highlighted the ways enslaved communities in the American South dealt with sexual violence, stating that 'formerly enslaved people made it clear that such relationships were non-consensual and abusive, and associated no stigma to victims of sexual violence'.[72] This can arguably be extended to include victims of incestuous violence, especially as it has been established that it was predominantly regarded as an act indistinct from other forms of sexual violence. Although no testimony comparable to Aldrich's exists for Barbados, his narrative alongside Livesey's work proves useful in understanding how the victims of incestuous sexual violence would have been treated by enslaved communities.

Although a first-hand account of incestuous sexual violence cannot be recovered, Louisa Picquet's Louisiana narrative details intergenerational sexual violence and can be utilized to gain insight into the responses of light-skinned women to such abuses. Although incestuous violence and intergenerational sexual violence occurred simultaneously, they were not mutually exclusive. Picquet describes her sexual harassment at the hands of David Cook, who impregnated her mother several times

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[69] Rawick, *American Slave,* 138.

[70] Aldrich's account also signifies the unchallenged nature of the patriarchal power of slaveholding masters, even in cases of egregious abuses. Even if the plantation mistress had taken issue with the sexual violence her husband was perpetrating, she likely would have been unable to act on this. Catherine Clinton's work on plantation mistresses supports this, arguing plantation mistresses were also affected by the patriarchal power of slavery. See C. Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*: *Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Random House Publishing, 1982).

[71] Rawick, *American Slave,* 138.

[72] A. Livesey, 'Conceived in Violence: Enslaved Mothers and Children Born of Rape in Nineteenth-Century Louisiana', *Slavery & Abolition*, 38 (2017), 374.

when she was 'not fourteen years old'.[73] When describing how she became the concubine of John Williams, she explained that because of these sexual interactions she would 'have to die and be lost' and wanted to 'get religion'. [74] The misplaced guilt and shame Picquet expresses would inevitably have been shared by many victims of sexual violence, despite its non-consensual nature. Victims of incestuous violence would not have been exempt from this, their responses potentially further exacerbated due to the identity of the perpetrator. Picquet's narrative therefore proves invaluable in understanding the responses of light-skinned women to incestuous violence, as well as the widespread sexual violence against them more broadly.

Picquet's testimony is an amanuensis-written narrative, recorded by Hiram Mattison. Mattison was a reverend, therefore Picquet's desire to 'get religion' may have been influenced by this.[75] However, throughout Picquet's testimony, Mattison makes distinctions between his commentary and Picquet's spoken word, suggesting that Picquet's narrative is an accurate representation of her experiences. Therefore, the conclusions that can be drawn from it remain relevant.

The fact that sources from both Barbados and Louisiana can be found to prove the occurrence of incestuous sexual violence is significant. It has further demonstrated that on transatlantic context this violence against light-skinned females had parallel manifestations, even in nuanced areas. Despite the limited sources available, much can be learnt from examining incestuous sexual violence as a unique manifestation of the institutionalisation of sexual violence against light-skinned women. The reoccurring theme that has emerged is that incestuous abuse occurred within environments of prevalent sexual violence and was largely perceived as indistinct from that. This provides insight into contemporary attitudes towards incestuous violence, and more broadly the sexual violence against light-skinned females, indicating the normalisation of this exploitation. Studying the way in which this

[73] H. Mattinson, *Louisa Picquet, The Octoroon: Or Inside Views of Southern Domestic Life* (New York, 1861), 10.
[74] Mattinson, *Louisa Picquet*, 22. Picquet's desire to 'get religion' corroborates the broader consensus amongst slavery scholars that religion and other forms of culture were a coping mechanism for enslaved people in the face of the abuses they suffered. See J. Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).
[75] Mattinson, *Louisa Picquet*, 22.

would have impacted the women affected allows this sexual violence to be contextualised and highlights the importance of 'bottom-up' approaches in historiography. This chapter has also revealed differentiations within the light-skinned women who experienced sexual violence, with incestuous abuse specifically affecting enslaved females in the sources available. This convergence in the experiences of free and enslaved light-skinned women will be further explored in the following chapter.

Chapter Three: Ballroom Dances

In Barbados and Louisiana ballroom dances were held which promoted sexual violence towards light-skinned women. In each context they were referred to under different names, the most common terms being 'dignity ball' or 'mulatto dance' in Barbados, whereas in Louisiana they were widely known as 'quadroon balls'.[76] Their focus on light-skinned women immediately demonstrates the intersectionality of their experiences alongside the institutionalisation of sexual violence towards them. It is unclear whether the balls in Barbados and Louisiana developed independently from one another, however, the fact that similar events occurred in tandem across the transatlantic must not be understated. They serve as outstanding evidence of the extent that sexual violence became an inherent feature of these societies. Their focus on free light-skinned women indicates that this pervasive violence impacted light-skinned females irrespective of their statuses. Although the institution of slavery allowed for the factors that made light-skinned women vulnerable to develop, the balls evidence that this also manifested in environments independent from slavery.

This chapter will examine how the balls were an established form of sexual violence, before exploring the conscious involvement of the free light-skinned women. Through doing so not only will the institutionalisation of sexual violence be further proven, but the ways in which light-skinned women understood and operated within this will be acknowledged.

Scholarship referencing these balls is extremely limited, with there being no work studying their existence in Barbados. Monique Guillory has stated that the balls occurred due to the socially determined value placed on light-skinned women because of their complexion, supporting the arguments made in the first chapter.[77] Guillory's work is one of the first and only extensive studies examining the balls in New Orleans, however, it fails to recognise them as a result of the institutionalised sexual violence against light-skinned women and does not acknowledge their

[76] PFC: Series 8-D, Wyvill, 'Memoirs', 1814; [untitled], *Barbadian,* 15 November 1843; H. Kmen, *Music in New Orleans: The Formative Years, 1791-1841* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1966), 154.

[77] M. Guillory, 'Under One Roof: The Sins and Sanctity of the New Orleans Quadroon Balls', in J. Fossett and J. Tucker (ed.), *Race Consciousness* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 82.

occurrence on a transatlantic scope. Alongside this, it does not reference much of the evidence it uses. This chapter therefore presents an original contribution to the historiography on these balls and light-skinned women's experiences more generally.

As noted in the introduction, there was a significant population of free people of colour in Louisiana, specifically in New Orleans. Many of the free light-skinned women involved in the balls would have been part of this demographic and been born free. Although this does not change the fact that they became victims of sexual violence, it contextualises this and marks an incongruity with Barbados. Due to this 'plaçage', the social practice of forming interracial relations, became formalised in Louisiana, as will be illustrated in this chapter.[78] Despite this difference, the fact that similar balls occurred in Barbados indicates that the sexual violence against light-skinned women superseded the individualised contextual structures targeting light-skinned women in Louisiana. This demonstrates the pervasive nature of sexual violence against light-skinned women across the Atlantic.

The sustained period of time over which the balls occurred indicates that they were an established form of sexual violence towards light-skinned women. In 1841 the *Barbadian* described a ball as an 'assembly of dissipated men white, black and coloured and coloured women of ill fame.'[79] This was not the first event of its kind, with Nathanial Hawthorne's account from the early nineteenth century referring to a 'quality ball' as a party where free light-skinned women entertained white men.[80] Additionally, in 1814, Wyvill wrote that he attended 'a grand mulatto ball, commonly called a Dignity Ball'. [81] The *Barbadian* provides further proof that these events were still occurring in 1843, writing that a police officer was arrested at a 'mulatto dance'.[82]

The dates of the balls recorded in the *Barbadian* are notable, with 1841 and 1843 being after slavery had officially been abolished in Barbados. This reiterates that sexual violence against light-skinned women occurred in environments independent

[78] See T. Flucker and P. Savage, *African Americans of New Orleans* (Mount Pleasant: Arcadia Publishing, 2010).
[79] [untitled], *Barbadian,* 25 September 1841.
[80] N. Hawthorne, *The Yarn of a Yankee Privateer* (New York: Funk and Wagnall's, 1926), 104.
[81] PFC: Series 8-D, Wyvill, 'Memoirs', 1814.
[82] [untitled], *Barbadian,* 15 November 1843.

of slavery. Indeed, although the institution of slavery no longer existed, its legacies can be seen through the fact that this violence towards light-skinned women still prevailed, representing its ingrained nature in slaveholding societies.

An advertisement in an 1805 New Orleans newspaper marked the first official ball in Louisiana.[83] Parallel to Barbados, these balls were held over a substantial time period, as illustrated by John Latrobe, who attended one in 1834.[84] The time frames in which the balls existed largely correlate in Barbados and Louisiana, suggesting that sexual violence against light-skinned women developed in tandem across transatlantic societies. Furthermore, the occurrence of these events over prolonged periods in both contexts indicates that they became an accepted and regular form of sexual violence, products of its institutionalisation.

It must be acknowledged that the balls did not solely target light-skinned women, with darker-skinned females also featured. The balls in New Orleans included females 'varying in complexion from the slightest tinge of olive to the darkest shade of ebony' as one traveller described.[85] Similarly, The *Barbadian's* description noted that 'coloured women' attended, not narrowing its definition to light-skinned women.[86] However, the fact that one of the contemporary terms for these balls was 'mulatto dance' indicates that they would have predominantly featured light-skinned women.[87]

The balls in Louisiana mainly focused on light-skinned women, chiefly due to the popularity of 'plaçage' relationships as an established feature in New Orleans society. Although 'quadroon' by definition meant someone whose heritage was a quarter African, in the context of the balls this term encompassed several racial categories. This is evidenced by Latrobe writing that there were 'women present of all shades from the very dark mulatto to the light quadroon'.[88]

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[83] H. Kmen, *Music in New Orleans: The Formative Years, 1791-1841* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1966), 154.
[84] S. Wilson (ed.), *Southern Travels: Journal of John H. B. Latrobe* (Historic New Orleans Collection, 1986), 76.
[85] L. Tasistro, *Random Shots and Southern Breezes* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1842), 20.
[86] *Barbadian,* 25 September 1841.
[87] *Barbadian,* 15 November 1843.
[88] Wilson, *Southern Travels,* 77.

It is clear that in Barbados and Louisiana, despite their different social structures and historical contexts, light-skinned women were the main focus of these balls, which can be credited to the overarching factors explored in the first chapter. This encapsulates the intersectionality of their experiences, with the balls largely exclusive to light-skinned females due to them being so widely targeted with sexual violence.

These balls facilitated sexual violence towards light-skinned women, allowing it to occur in a unique way. The *Barbadian* described the women at the balls as being of 'ill fame', alongside the *West Indian* stating that they were 'of impure character', suggesting that they were a means for white men to meet prostitutes or prospective concubines.[89] Moreover, Wyvill describes the women as being 'splendidly dressed' and dancing 'uncommonly well', indicating that they were deliberately seeking to physically attract the men who attended.[90] Similarly, in New Orleans, George Featherstonhaugh wrote that the light-skinned females showed 'their accomplishments in dancing and conversation to the white men' at the balls.[91] It is therefore evident that the free light-skinned women who attended these events were aware of their sexual nature and consciously catered to this. This demonstrates a significant way in which the experiences of free light-skinned women diverged from their enslaved counterparts in contexts of sexual violence.

The free light-skinned women involved in these balls were asserting a measure of agency through capitalising on the sexual violence against them. Wyvill wrote that he attended a ball 'at Susy Austen's'.[92] Austen was a woman of colour in Barbados who owned a hotel-tavern, indicating that in Barbados the balls were not orchestrated by the men who attended them.[93] Furthermore, Frederick Marryat described the balls as being hosted by the 'most consequential of the coloured people' in Barbados.[94] Due to contemporary ideologies of race, it is probable that those considered the 'most

[89] [untitled], *West Indian,* quoted in a letter to *The Liberal,* 6 October 1841; *Barbadian,* 25 September 1841.
[90] PFC: Series 8-D, Wyvill, 'Memoirs', 1814.
[91] G. Featherstonhaugh, *Excursion Through the Slave States* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1844), 141.
[92] PFC: Series 8-D, Wyvill, 'Memoirs', 1814.
[93] N. Connell, 'Hotel Keepers and Hotels in Barbados', *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society*, 33 (1970), 168.
[94] F. Marryat, *Peter Simple* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1834), 261.

consequential' people of colour would have overwhelmingly possessed lighter skin.[95] This highlights that people of colour collaborated to take advantage of the institutionalised sexual violence against light-skinned women in Barbados, as Austen did with the free light-skinned women featured at the balls she operated.

In New Orleans, Santiage Bernard Coquet is the first identifiable host of the balls, indicating that they were not held by women of colour in Louisiana.[96] This discrepancy with Barbados can be credited to the more formalised infrastructure targeting light-skinned women in New Orleans. However, the free light-skinned women in New Orleans were similarly enforcing their agency through their involvement in the balls, primarily benefiting from the 'plaçage' relationships that formed as a result.

John Davis argued that in Louisiana the prices of the balls were in place 'so that only persons of the better class can appear there'.[97] Indeed, the balls in both Barbados and New Orleans sought to attract white men, who were considered 'the better class'.[98] This again was done with the purpose of capitalising on their sexualisation, although in each context the way in which this was done appears to have differed, in Barbados the focus tending to be on prostitution or concubinage, whilst in Louisiana on 'plaçage' relationships. Nevertheless, it is clear in both contexts that the balls were symbiotic in nature.

Marryat indicated that the balls in Barbados had an admission fee.[99] Similarly, in New Orleans, tickets had to be bought for the balls and 'subscription balls' were held.[100] This demonstrates further how the sexual violence towards light-skinned women was understood and exploited. Due to the differences in who operated the balls, in New Orleans the light-skinned women who attended the balls would have benefited from the immediate revenue generated less significantly, if at all, than

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[95] Marryat, *Peter Simple*, 261.
[96] R. Morazan, *Letters, Petitions, and Decrees of the Cabildo of New Orleans, 1800-1803: Edited and Translated* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1972), 44.
[97] J. Davis, 'Observations on the Negroes of Louisiana', *The Journal of Negro History*, 2 (1917), 180.
[98] Davis, 'Observations', 180.
[99] Marryat, *Peter Simple*, 261.
[100] K. Bernhard, *Travels through North America during the years 1825 and 1826*, (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Carey, 1828), 55.

those in Barbados. This can again be credited to contextual influences, with the light-skinned women who attended the balls in Louisiana doing so primarily to enter into 'plaçage' relationships, benefiting financially in this way. Featherstonhaugh encapsulates this, writing 'When one of them attracts the attention of an admirer, and he is desirous of forming a liaison with her, he…agrees to pay her a sum of money'.[101] It is clear, therefore, that although the ways in which light-skinned women benefited from these balls may have differed in Barbados and Louisiana, the women involved in the balls were primarily doing so for financial gain, exerting agency through this.

The fact that the balls in Barbados were run by women of colour such as Austen, and the females who were featured at them were 'willing' participants offers insight into the perspectives of light-skinned women. They demonstrate an awareness of the institutionalised sexual violence towards them. Choosing to capitalise on this indicates that they were exerting agency within this framework. Indeed, Joseph Tregle stated 'It was the free Negro women, actually, who proved themselves to be most enterprising…a large if undetermined number monopolized the task of accommodating the licentiousness of the male part of New Orleans'.[102] Tregle's statement is applicable to the balls in Louisiana and Barbados, reiterating that the 'enterprising' women involved were exerting control through acknowledging and taking advantage of the sexual violence against them.[103]

The involvement of light-skinned women in these balls must not be misconstrued as meaning that they were consenting to the sexual violence that they experienced. The balls were a manifestation of the institutionalisation of the violence against them. Indeed, the occurrence of these balls proves that free light-skinned females were not exempt from sexual violence due to its pervasive nature. The majority of free people of colour had limited social mobility, which was shaped by slaveholding societies.[104] It is therefore unsurprising that many free light-skinned women still existed in an

[101] Featherstonhaugh, *Through the Slave States*, 141.
[102] J. Tregle, 'Early New Orleans Society: A Reappraisal', *The Journal of Southern History*, 18 (1952), 34-35.
[103] Tregle, 'Early New Orleans Society', 34.
[104] See J. Williamson, *After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina During Reconstruction, 1861-1877* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975) and M. Kleijwegt, *The Faces of Freedom: The Manumission and Emancipation of Slaves in Old World and New World Slavery* (Netherlands: Brill Publishers, 2006).

environment which involved the marketization of their bodies, with the balls illustrating this. Although they may have experienced it differently, sexual violence impacted the lives of light-skinned women regardless of their status. The fact that the women who were involved with the balls deliberately sought to capitalise on this exploitation serves as a testimony to their resilience and ingenuity despite the challenges they faced.

The balls provide invaluable insight into the perspectives of free light-skinned women and highlights further the intersectionality of this group. Through participating in the balls, and in the case of Barbados, organising them, they were showing awareness of the sexual violence towards them and exerting agency and independence within this. The development of these balls in Barbados and Louisiana, despite their geographic and colonial differences, is remarkable, with it not being a widespread phenomenon across all slaveholding systems. This proves beyond doubt that on a transatlantic scope sexual violence towards light-skinned females was institutionalised and manifested in adjacent ways.

Conclusion

Through studying light-skinned women as an independent entity, this thesis has emphasised the importance of examining their experiences in isolation rather than as part of a broader narrative. The institutionalisation of sexual violence against light-skinned females on a transatlantic scope highlights the significance of this. As Chapter Two established, the violence against light-skinned women occurred in contexts of already pervasive sexual violence, however, the unique arenas in which it manifested towards them indicates the intersectionality of their experiences.

The comparative nature of this thesis has supported the overarching argument that sexual violence was institutionalised against light-skinned women. Indeed, the specific contexts of Barbados and Louisiana have proved invaluable, proving that despite significant contextual differences the ways in which light-skinned women were treated and experienced sexual violence still manifested in analogous ways. Chapter Two and Three encapsulated this by proving and exploring the exceptional occurrences of incestuous violence and ballroom dances. The importance of this cannot be overemphasised, as it demonstrates that the experiences of light-skinned women were self-replicating across transatlantic slaveholding systems. It can also be used to understand their experiences more broadly across slaveholding societies. Proving the institutionalisation of sexual violence against light-skinned women in two contrasting contexts has therefore added to the value of this study and the validity of the arguments made.

Establishing common reasons across slaveholding societies as to why light-skinned women were targeted with sexual violence also proved instrumental to this study, as was the focus of the first chapter. Not only did it frame the environment in which the abuses of the two following chapters occurred, but it also contributed to the overarching argument of the thesis. The fact that common areas were identified in Barbados and Louisiana immediately proved that sexual violence against light-skinned women developed in similar ways, encompassing the reasons why it initially occurred.

In both the second and third chapters the impact of the inherent sexual violence against light-skinned women was explored. This complemented the overarching argument, the persistent nature of the sexual violence further established through the awareness of it shown by light-skinned women, particularly through their involvement in the balls. It also highlighted the importance of this study, bringing to attention the lived experiences and direct impact of the sexual violence against light-skinned women, as encapsulated by Picquet in Chapter Two. This has allowed the light-skinned women studied throughout to be humanized, rather than depicted as a remote and inaccessible collective. It has also continued in the 'bottom-up' historiographical trend exploring enslaved and free people's experiences of slavery, as epitomized through the agency shown by the women involved in the balls. Through doing so, the experiences of light-skinned women have been recovered as accurately as possible despite archival silences.

This thesis encompassed the experiences of free and enslaved light-skinned women. The abuses examined in Chapter Two were identified as more applicable to enslaved females, whereas the balls in Chapter Three focused on free light-skinned women. This has illustrated that they were not a homogenous entity, there being complexities and differentiations that shaped light-skinned women's experiences of sexual violence. The fact that this violence was experienced by light-skinned women regardless of their free or enslaved status, albeit in different ways, has further proved that sexual violence towards them was pervasive in slaveholding societies.

Establishing the institutionalisation of sexual violence against light-skinned women in Barbados and Louisiana has contributed to more accurate understandings of sexual violence in slaveholding societies and the way such systems developed. This thesis has shown the importance of studying subgroups within slavery and seeking to recover their experiences in an independent framework. The original contributions offered have therefore supplemented broader fields of scholarship, alongside allowing a more comprehensive understanding of light-skinned women's experiences of sexual violence in slaveholding societies.

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