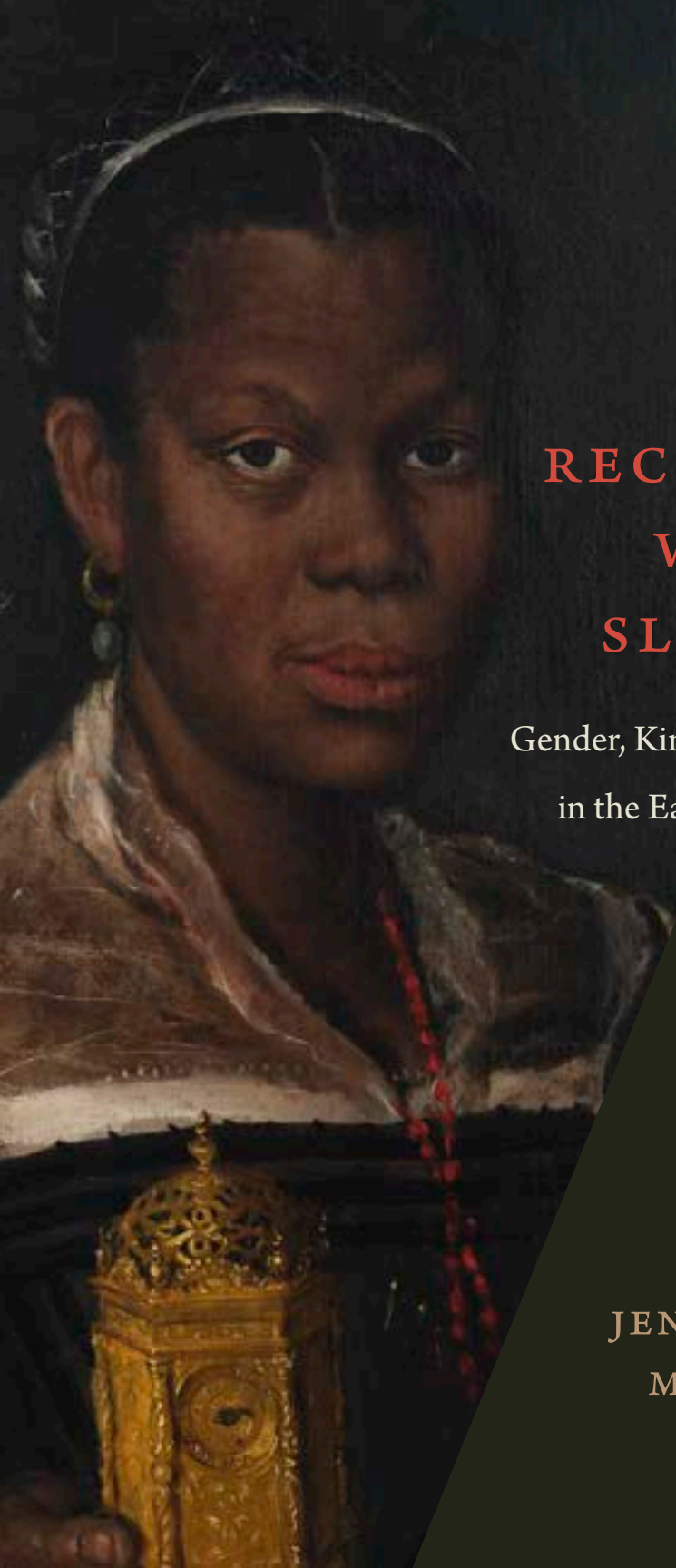

RECKONING WITH SLAVERY

Gender, Kinship, and Capitalism in the Early Black Atlantic

JENNIFER L. MORGAN

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Cover art: Annibale Carracci (attributed), *Portrait of an African Woman Holding a Clock*, detail of a larger painting, ca. 1580s. Oil on canvas, 23¾ × 15½ inches. Courtesy Louvre Abu Dhabi.

Dedicated to the memory of
John P. Morgan and Claudia B. Morgan
and to Adrienne Lash Jones.
Teachers.

I was desperate to reclaim the dead, to reckon with the lives undone and obliterated in the making of human commodities.
—SAIDIYA HARTMAN, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route*, 2008

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PREFACE

Sometime in the years before 1585 in the town of Bologna, Italy, the woman on the cover of this book sat for a portrait, painted by a man who would become famous. I won't give you his name because it's not important to the story that I am trying to tell. I can't tell you hers, although her anonymity is at the very heart of the story that I am trying to tell. As you can see in the portrait on the cover of this book, she is dressed well, and she holds an ornate clock that may indicate the kind of wealthy household she was a part of. The painting was damaged, so we do not know who else was in the portrait, only that—at one point—she was not alone. If you look closely at the bodice of her gown, you will see straight pins. She may or may not have sewed the dress and the decorative collar she wears. She may or may not have been a seamstress. She may or may not have been paid for her labor. She may or may not have been free. Hundreds of Africans, both enslaved and free, were in Italy at the end of the sixteenth century.[1]

At the time when the woman was painted, the legality of African enslavability had circulated around the Mediterranean for almost 150 years—but art historians don't know who this woman is. They can't. Black woman

1 On the long history of black women and men in Italy and in Italian art, see Kaplan, "Italy, 1490–1700."

with a Clock. Slave woman with a Clock. African Woman with a Clock.[2] She marks time with the object that she holds but marks so much more time with the gaze that holds us. Her visage conveys nothing if not knowing. She knows who she is in relation to the painter; she knows what she sees. She locks eyes with her viewers and comes close to dismissing us with the turn of her lip—dismissing, perhaps, our questions about who she is. When I look at her, I see someone who understands her own value—both the value that can't be quantified and that which can. I see a woman who reaches out across the centuries to say, "Look at me, and see what brought me here."

What follows is my effort to do so.

2 The portrait has been variously titled, most recently as *Portrait of an African Woman Holding a Clock,* Annibale Carracci, 1583/5. Tomasso Brothers, London. https://www.tomassobrothers.co.uk/artworkdetail/781241/18036/portrait-of-an-african-woman-holding.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project has been many years in the making. When it began, I felt as though I were working relatively alone, on questions that emerged on the edges of a range of fields—the history of political economy, of early modern slavery, of racial formations prior to the nineteenth century. But as I draw near completion, I see that I have many fellow travelers. The fact that this field has grown exponentially since I began is one of the unexpected pleasures of the long gestation of this book. I am now part of a community whose scholarship on the history of race and gender in the Black Atlantic world is fueled by our collective commitments to political intentionality. My work has benefitted tremendously from being part of the collective endeavors of my collaborators and interlocutors who work on the histories of gender and slavery. They include Daina Ramey Berry, Deirdre Cooper Owens, Erica Dunbar, Marisa Fuentes, Thavolia Glymph, Kim Hall, Tera Hunter, Jessica Johnson, Celia Naylor, and Sasha Turner. As this project came to a close, I have keenly felt the absence of Stephanie Camp, a feeling I know I share with so many. And, as always, I am deeply grateful for the trailblazing work and critical support of Deborah Gray White, whose scholarship continues to set the stage for those of us who follow in her wake.

I began working on this book as I joined the faculty at New York University. In addition to institutional support through the auspices of Deans Thomas Carew, Antonio Merlo, Joy Connolly, and Gigi Dopico, I owe much

to the conversations and exchange of ideas that I have been a part of in both the Department of Social and Cultural Analysis and the Department of History. I am particularly grateful to colleagues Carolyn Dinshaw, Lisa Duggan, Nicole Eustace, Ada Ferrar, Rebecca Goetz, Gayatri Gopinath, Phil Harper, Martha Hodes, Andrew Ross, and Deb Willis. When Covid made us feel like we were at the End of Days, the Future of America Working Group—Julie Livingston, Nikhil Singh, Thuy Tu, and honorary SCA-ers Herman Bennett and Behrooz Tabrizi-Ghamari—offered, as they always have, a rare overlapping space of love and scholarship. Deb Willis and Ellyn Toscano's Women and Migrations project provided a long set of critical engagements with colleagues at NYU and beyond. I am grateful to Uli Baer, who helped me reckon through a moment of serious trouble. Conversations with students have been both sustaining and generative, and I appreciate my work with Thulani Davis, Miles Grier, Laura Helton, Ebony Jones, Justin Leroy, Max Mischler, Samantha Seeley, Shauna Sweeney, Chinua Thelwell, and, currently, with Lila Chambers, Erica Duncan, Justin Linds, Alejandro McGee, Elise Mitchell, Joan Morgan, Shavagne Scott, and Amrit Trewn. I owe a particularly sweet debt to my colleagues (and former students) Ebony Jones and Shauna Sweeney, whose enthusiastic loyalty and support has lifted me (much more than they know) at crucial moments.

There are many colleagues who have read multiple drafts of this manuscript and whose suggestions and support have been essential to what you now hold in your hands. Being available to read again and again is an extraordinary mark of friendship and collegiality. Antoinette Burton has had faith in me for a Very Long Time. I cannot tally the debt I owe her. She has read every sheepishly sent draft and has offered enduring support. Her help in conceptualizing and finishing this project has been tremendous. Herman Bennett has always dropped everything at a moment's notice to read and engage with my work. Daina Ramey Berry has travelled miles to write and read together. Marisa Fuentes has become a crucial interlocutor, whose insight and probing engagement has helped me to clarify the stakes of my work. And Julie Livingston has read with care and offered generative support over innumerable anxious conversations. They all have read at least one full copy of this manuscript, if not more. I appreciate their time and attention tremendously.

Along the way, I have drawn strength from the engagement of friends and colleagues who have posed questions and offered support in ways that have incalculably contributed to this project and to my work more broadly.

For this I am deeply grateful to Sharon Block, Jennifer Brier, Christopher L. Brown, Catherine Hall, Kim Hall, Saidiya Hartman, Walter Johnson, Robert Reid-Pharr, David Scott, Stephanie Smallwood, Alys Weinbaum, and Karin Wulf.

I have benefitted from a long friendship with Joyce Seltzer, whose advice has been an important source of guidance as I navigated through the terrain of publication. I am lucky that this manuscript has found a home with Duke University Press and the enthusiastic support of Ken Wissoker. Anonymous readers at the press have strengthened this manuscript with their critical engagement. Thank you to Josh Gutterman Tranen, Lisa Lawley, and Kim Miller for bringing it across the finish line.

I've been in a conversation with Professor Julius S. Scott since I began graduate school more than three decades ago. Sometimes he is actually present, sometimes I am just imagining his response to my ideas, but always he makes me a more careful and grounded scholar. Similarly, and as I think we all do, I have a community of intellectuals and friends who comprise my ideal readers and with whom I have crafted so many of the arguments of this text in both actual conversation and in the kinds of exchanges that occur over the work that I strive to emulate. For this I am particularly grateful for the work of Vincent Brown, Marisa Fuentes, Saidiya Hartman, Walter Johnson, Fred Moten, Katherine McKittrick, Christina Sharpe, and Stephanie Smallwood.

Framing the work of the archive is, of course, a task of translation. Since 2010, I have appreciated Lynn Paltrow's insistence that I reckon with the contemporary consequences of the histories that I have traced both here and elsewhere. My time spent with her and my colleagues at the National Advocates for Pregnant Women saturates the work that I have done in this volume. Working with Stanley Nelson, Marcia Smith, and Naz Habtezghi and the scholars they have assembled for conversations about the slave trade has had a major impact on my efforts to clarify my thinking about the experience of enslavement. Zillah Watson and Andy Neather have constantly opened their home and their family to me and mine, providing a comfortable landing spot for those research trips to London. Conversations with Emma Morgan-Bennett concerning her work as a doula and an activist have brought crucial perspectives on the afterlife of slavery and reproductive justice to my scholarship.

I have presented versions of this work in so many venues that I am afraid to try to list them all! Suffice it to say that the reception of and engagement with my ideas has been hugely important as I attempted to reconcile

my efforts with my abilities. Generous invitations to share my work have placed me in conversation with colleagues and students at many institutions; this has made the book significantly better than it would have been had I worked in isolation. Thank you to Hazel Carby and African American Studies at Yale University; Chris Brown and the Society of Fellows at Columbia University; the Newberry Library; the Feminism and Critical Race Theory group at UNC-Charlotte; the Institute for Historical Studies at University of Texas, Austin; Rosemary Brana-Shute and the Carolina Lowcountry and the Atlantic World seminar at the College of Charleston; Alys Weinbaum, Stephanie Smallwood, and Moon-Ho Jung and the Empires of Capital symposium at the University of Washington, Seattle; Sharon Block and the Department of History at the University of California, Irvine; Alexandra Juhasz and the Monroe Center for Social Inquiry at Pitzer College; Jim Downs and his students at Connecticut College; Cynthia Young and the Department of African American Studies at Penn State; Tony Bogues and the Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice at Brown University; Justin Leroy and the Racial Capitalism Sawyer Seminar at the University of California, Davis; Kirsten Fischer and the Early American Atlantic Workshop at the University of Minnesota; Diana Paton and the Edinburgh Center for Global History at the University of Edinburgh; April Haynes, Pablo Gomez, the Program in Gender and Women's History, and the Plantationocene Seminar at the University of Wisconsin, Madison; Stephanie Shaw and the 1619 and Beyond seminar at the Ohio State University; the Center for the Humanities at the University of Miami; and Ayanna Thompson and the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies. More than a decade's worth of conversations with my colleagues at the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians—the Big and Little Berks—have shaped this project from its inception. I am deeply grateful to Barbara Balliet, Jennifer Brier, DeeDee Cooper Owens, Claire Potter, Susan Yohn, and so many others who have done the hard work to sustain the organization as a place for crucial conversation.

Many of the ideas that frame this project were developed in conversation with the Slavery and Freedom Working Group, which I convened at the Humanities Institute at New York University with support from Jane Tylus. A first draft finally came to completion while I was a member of the School of Social Sciences at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton under the direction of Didier Fassin, Danielle Allen, and Joan Scott. The opportunity to exchange ideas there with Brady Bower, Brian Connolly, Michael Hanchard, Julilly Kohler-Hausmann, Jill Locke, Maurizio Meloni,

Charles Payne, Sophia Rosenfeld, and Mara Viveros Vigoya was such a gift. Final thoughts came together while convening a year-long seminar on Gender, Race, and Finance at the Folger Shakespeare Library, through the support of Michael Whitmore and Owen Williams. There, bracing conversations with Vanessa Braganza, Holly Brewer, Urvashi Chakravarty, Sherri Cummings, Emilee Durand, Valerie Forman, Marisa Fuentes, Atsede Makonnen, J. E. Morgan, Kyle Repella, Ricardo Salazar-Rey, David Sartorius, Gregory Smaldone, Shauna Sweeney, and Andrew Young shaped the final version of the manuscript. I am grateful to the latter two institutions for their longstanding formal support, which allows scholars to share ideas in beautiful places while shielded, at least temporarily, from the distractions and enervations of daily life.

As it turns out, those who have nothing to do with the book actually are at its heart. Chris Veljovic and Ana Baptista have given me a place to regain strength and to laugh and remind me every week of the connection between mind and body; in particular, Chris has shown me that if you find the work, you end with exaltation. My Danby Harbor peeps personify my history, and for that I am always grateful to Peter Bergman, Benedicte de Montlaur, Lisa Waller, Sidney Whelan, and Keith Yazmir. Genevieve and Gabrielle Waller-Whelan, Chloe and Luca Goldmansour, and Susanna and Daniel De Martino have always honed my attention onto what is most important. Tim Tyson is never surprised. Marlene Brito and Marty Correia are daily reminders of all that is right with the world. Steven Amsterdam once said that I could do anything. I do not think that he was right, but his faith in me has been a touchstone. He and Corry DeNeef also offered me the time, space, and comfort I needed in the final stage of writing and revising amidst the kangaroos and wombats of Venus Bay. Abigail Asher is vital to whatever capacity I have to restore myself to balance in proximity to open waters. Lisa Waller and Kristen Goldman are my sisters in the truest possible meaning of the word and show me every day that there is actually nothing imaginary at all about fictive kin.

My children, Carl Fraley-Bennett and Emma Morgan-Bennett, have grown into astonishing adults as I have labored over this book. I love them beyond words. My brother and sister-in-law, Zachary Morgan and Cynthia Young, have always offered me unquestioning love and necessary laughter. Lee and Helga Bennett have been a beacon in a time of loss, and my beloved grandmother, Maymette Carter, is a source of enduring stability. Jaiden, Julian, and Oliver care not at all about this book, and for that I am forever in their debt! Losing both my parents during the time that I have

been working on this book was both devastating and disorienting. They were always my most constant supporters and I feel their absence almost every day. The dedication of this book would make perfect sense to them, and they would have also understood why I want them to share it. Professor Adrienne Lash Jones set me on a path in 1984 that I have continued to follow and provided me with a constant model of what it means to be, in the words of my father, a scholar and a gentlewoman.

Finally, everyone who knows us can see that Herman L. Bennett and I are indivisible. What they cannot always see is how much I have learned both from him and with him about the politics and pleasures of lingering. It would all mean nothing without him. Herman, "part of you flows out of me, in these lines from time to time." You know the rest.

INTRODUCTION. Refusing Demography

In the 1640s, as a child, Elizabeth Keye found herself misidentified on an estate in Virginia. A white boy named John Keye called her "Black Besse." Overhearing it, the overseer's wife "checked him and said[,] Sirra you must call her Sister for shee is your Sister," whereupon "the said John Keye did call her Sister."[1] Keye, the daughter of a free white Englishman and an enslaved African woman, occupied a space in seventeenth-century Virginia in which she could simultaneously be "Black Besse" and the sister of a white boy. In this space a Black woman could claim ties of kinship that would be recognized and legislated, but this was both anomalous and temporary. In the coming years, the logic of the paternal link formally unraveled as hereditary racial slavery congealed. Kinship could be claimed only in freedom, and by the middle of the seventeenth century in the English colonies, Blackness generally signified freedom's opposite.

At some point in the late 1620s, the free white Englishman Thomas Keye, a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses, had impregnated Elizabeth's enslaved Africa-born mother. What this woman (who is never actually named, appearing only as "woman slave" in the documentary record) hoped or believed about her daughter's future is utterly lost. What is clear is that Thomas Keye's death threw that future into some confusion.

1 "The Case of Elizabeth Key, 1655/6," in Billings, *Old Dominion*, 195–99; Billings, "Cases of Fernando and Elizabeth Key."

Although Elizabeth had been placed in indenture as a child, after her father's death she (or her indenture) was sold to another Virginia landowner. Selling the remaining term of an indenture was not uncommon, but because she was the daughter of an African woman, her race made her vulnerable to abuses from which an Englishwoman would have been protected. Although the English had embraced the system of African slavery elsewhere in the Atlantic, in Virginia they relied on indentured servants, the vast majority of whom were themselves English. In the 1650s, there were fewer than three hundred Africans in the colony, or about 1 percent of the population of English settlers. There were many people like Elizabeth Keye, women and men of African origin or descent whose lives detoured from the trajectory of brutal racial slavery associated with Black people in the Americas.

For the historian Ira Berlin, Keye would count as an Atlantic Creole, a person who traversed the Atlantic in relative or absolute freedom in a milieu that was soon to generate hardened categories of racial subjugation.[2] In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, in Europe and in European colonies in the Americas, such individuals could acquire land, other forms of wealth, and the mobility conferred by these. The experiences of these women and men demonstrate the uneven development of racial hierarchy in the Atlantic world, a reminder that racial categories could be less fixed than they appeared.[3] Keye understood that she was in danger, that her color could indeed dictate her status.

Keye spent her life assessing the terrain of race, inheritance, value, slavery, and freedom in the seventeenth-century world, which was at once a localized space configured around the English Atlantic and also part and parcel of a multicultural, multi-imperial universe. She lived in a community that accepted her paternal lineage, but kinship faltered when its members were asked to testify about her status. Some said she was a slave, some that

2 While Berlin didn't discuss Keye in the landmark article where he introduced the notion of the Atlantic Creole, she would fit squarely in his exploration of seventeenth-century colonial Virginia and the Tidewater free Blacks he does name. Berlin, "From Creole to African," 276–78. The case plays an important role in Heywood and Thornton, *Central Africans*.

3 Along with the work of Berlin, historical biographies written by scholars like James Sweet, Linda Heywood, and Vincent Carretta similarly seek to wrench Black lives from the chokehold of the history of slavery. Similarly, Rebecca Goetz and others have carefully interrogated the history of race in the early Atlantic world in pursuit of the nuances that historicizing race reveals. See Carretta, *Equiano the African*; Goetz, *Baptism of Early Virginia*; Heywood, *Njinga of Angola*; Sweet, *Domingos Álvares*.

she was free, and some that she was indentured.[4] She had a child, fathered by a free white Englishman, but this brought no clarity. When she petitioned the court to affirm her freedom in 1655, she clearly had a precise understanding of how her statuses as a woman, as a mother, and as a descendant of an enslaved African intersected. Her suit was granted, then overturned, and finally won when the Englishman who was the father of her child brought her case to the General Assembly. After she was deemed free, the two wed, their marriage a buttress to the freedom of her descendants, as well as to her own.

For historians, the fact that she prevailed shows that in seventeenth-century Virginia, racialized categories of enslavement were neither inevitable nor hardened.[5] In the history that follows, within which Keye was situated, the life circumstances and experiences of those defined as Black were already brutally marked; the transatlantic slave trade had already indelibly shaped notions of race, the market, and the family. By the mid-seventeenth century, the underlying forces structuring the slave trade were steadfastly shaping ideas of difference, commerce, and kinship. This is not an argument opposed to historicizing the concept of race; rather, it brings kinship and commodification to bear on seventeenth-century ideologies to ask both how the obscene logics of racial slavery came to make sense to Europeans and also what Africans and their descendants in the early modern Atlantic could and did know about the terms of their captivity. It is also an effort to dislodge the English Atlantic from its anglophone perch by placing it firmly in the longer history of the Atlantic. To understand Keye and the forces she navigated, we must conceive of a history in which the notions of heredity, motherhood, commodity, and race all cohered in and on the body of the daughter of an enslaved African woman and a free Englishman.

For Keye, the case rested on the assumption that affective relationships—those between father and daughter, husband and wife, mother and children—would prove a bulwark against the intrusions of the commercial market into her and her children's lives and labors. Historians are accustomed to thinking of Keye as a woman enmeshed in these relationships, not as an economic thinker (a person versed in political arithmetic, speculative thought, and social calculation). Yet economic concerns were the source of danger for Keye, and economic concerns drove the legislators to revisit this case less than a decade later. In 1662 the colonial legislators reconvened to decree that in all future cases, the condition of a child born to

4 "Case of Elizabeth Key."
5 "Case of Elizabeth Key."

an African woman and a free man would follow that of the mother.[6] As English colonial settlers legislated new economic formulations that extended masters' property rights to other humans, they brought matters of intimacy and affect out of the household and into the marketplace. Using arguments based in law, religion, and race, they located Africans and their descendants in ledgers and bills of sale, not as members of households or families. This social transformation was saturated with both spectacular violence and the brutality of everyday cruelties.

The insinuation of economic rationality into colonial intimacies is the crux of the matter. The mechanisms and ideas that emerged in the early modern Atlantic world situated economy and kinship as not just distinct but antithetical. As anthropologist Claude Meillassoux noted more than three decades ago, slavery produced social relations that are the antithesis of kinship relations.[7] On the other side of the Atlantic, Hortense Spillers suggested that if scholars were to "overlap kinlessness on the requirements of property," it could enlarge our understanding of what enslavement entailed.[8] Examining the Keye case from these perspectives, we see that it refracted the gradual recognition among colonial legislators that intimacy needed to be carefully navigated because kinship posed dangers for an economic system in which race demarcated human beings as property.

The intimacy that concerned slave-owning legislators was sexual. But as the cultural theorist Lisa Lowe has argued, intimacy is a framework that reveals the relatedness of phenomena that have been constructed as distinct and unrelated. For Lowe, those categories are liberalism, the slave trade, settler colonialism in the Americas, and the China and East Indies trade.[9] She mobilizes intimacy as a category that exceeds the spheres of sexuality and household relations, writing that she uses "the concept of intimacy as a heuristic, and a means to observe the historical division of world processes into those that develop modern liberal subjects and modern spheres of social life, and those processes that are forgotten, cast as failed or irrelevant because they do not produce 'value' legible within modern classifications."[10] *Reckoning*

6 "Negroe Women's Children to Serve according to the Condition of the Mother," Act XII, in Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 170. The law was soon adopted by all English colonies as they defined the status of the enslaved. It stood as law until the abolition of slavery in 1863. For a fuller discussion of this case, see J. L. Morgan, "*Partus Sequitur Ventrem*."

7 Meillassoux, *Anthropology of Slavery*, 85–98.

8 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 73.

9 Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents*, 1–42.

10 Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents*, 17–18.

with Slavery is similarly concerned with the processes that divide people and economies along distinct axes of value and commodity. I draw on Lowe's methodological intervention to consider the relationship between early modern concepts of numeracy, slavery, and kinship in constructing the rationale for hereditary racial slavery and in positioning African women as particularly illegible—both historically and archivally.

Doing so highlights the range of meanings attached to Keye, her children, and her legal case. Virginia lawmakers faced the quotidian consequences of sex between free subjects and those who were or could be enslaved. Keye assumed she had a kinship relationship to her father. Her freedom suit was rooted in the notion that his paternal line was hers to claim. However, in the context of a labor system wherein white men routinely, and possibly systematically, raped the women they claimed as property, their own paternity could not devolve to their children. Indeed, in this system, only women who were the daughters of free white men and white women could convey kinship, and thus freedom, to their children. The legislative intervention associated with Keye's case did more than just clarify the heritability of slavery; it also assigned legitimacy to white women's kinship ties and white men's property claims. The inability to convey *kinship*—to have family represent something other than the expansion of someone else's estate—is at issue here. If the children of white men and African women could assert their freedom, the primacy of property claims would be dislodged. But Englishmen did not want their property rights unsettled by sexual congress. Reproduction (and thus enslavability) was tethered to enslavement in a way that foreclosed the possibility that kinship might destabilize capital. To be enslaved meant to be locked into a productive relationship whereby all that your body could do was harnessed to accumulate capital for another. In this case, sex, inheritance, property, race, and commodification were both displayed and delineated as the House of Burgesses amplified its core assumptions about the nature of racial inheritance in the New World.

Scholars who analyze the 1662 code reanimate the word *condition* as we discuss the implications of the rule that the condition of the child would follow that of the mother. But I am compelled to push back against that word and the stasis it invokes. In the historian Vincent Brown's engagement with Orlando Patterson's concept of social death, he concludes that instead of understanding slavery as a condition, we should see it as a "predicament, in which enslaved Africans and their descendants never ceased to pursue a politics of belonging, mourning, accounting, and

regeneration."[11] For Brown, the notion of social death as the condition of slavery fixes the enslaved person too statically in the category. I too want to problematize social death as a static condition that evokes but doesn't actually engage with the maternal figure who is incapable of counteracting natal alienation. I suggest here that enslaved parents understood the potential birth of children as a predicament that clarified the foundations on which their enslavement was erected. The violence that suffused that predicament was regularized and indeed world defining. In her critical formulation of social death, which she renders as *zombie biopolitics*, Elizabeth Dillon has argued that such violence produced the "resourced, white, genealogically reproductive, legally substantiated, Enlightenment man."[12] The archival silences around the lived experiences of enslaved women at the birth of racial capitalism are themselves the technologies that rendered those women as outside history, feeling, and intellect.

How were race, inheritance, trade, freedom, value, and slavery condensed in the competing desires of white men and of Black women and men as the former sought to retain property in persons by destroying kinship and the latter sought to produce families opposed to that destruction? Both white elites and the women whose corporeal integrity was so profoundly violated by the rule of property understood, experienced, and responded to these new ideas in ways that we still do not fully understand. Women who lived through the early decades of enslavement saw the identity of their children and the assumptions that governed their futures change drastically. That shift was rooted in a relatively new set of ideas concerning trade, value, population, and commodification, all of which might qualify as forms of numeracy. Spillers wrote in 1987 that the captive body becomes the site of a "metaphor for *value*" that renders useless any distinction between the literal and figurative violences that enslaved persons were subjected to.[13] Further, as I argue in this book, the metaphors of value and valuelessness owe at least part of their power to the knowledge regimes set in motion by the transatlantic slave trade. Rational equivalence was increasingly understood as the antithesis of social, emotional, or familial categories, which were simultaneously delimited as the sole purview of Europeans. As a result, African women and their descendants—all members of families—were locked together into the very space that built a market based on the denial

11 V. Brown, "Social Death and Political Life," 1248.
12 Dillon, "Zombie Biopolitics," 626.
13 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 68.

that they were there. This book argues that perhaps it is possible to discern the developments that brought these categories into being in the modern world when we examine them from the point of view of these women.

How does the concept of value, or currency, or marketing, connect with the experience of being enslaved? How did enslaved people interpret the illusory claims of rationality when such claims laid a price on both their heads and those of their unborn children? As early as 1971, the scholar and activist Angela Davis asked historians to consider the trauma that enslaved women experienced when they "had to surrender child-bearing to alien and predatory economic interests."[14] Answering such questions calls for a reading and a research strategy that takes as its starting point the assumption that both enslaved Africans and their captors simultaneously enacted meanings as they navigated the very new terrain of hereditary racial slavery and its consequences. By examining the moments when ideas about rationality and race appear to cohere, we can unearth the lived experiences and analytic responses to enslavement of those whose lives have most regularly and consistently fallen outside the purview of the archive. The question, as posed by the anthropologist Stephan Palmié, is, How did enslaved women and men "not just experience but actively analyze and render comprehensible" the violent transformations wrought upon them?[15] Being locked into a juridical category of perpetual servitude based on an inherited status had particular meaning for those who produced that inheritance inside their own bodies. To return to Davis's important work, enslaved women were positioned to "attain a practical awareness" of both the slave owner's power and the slave owner's dependence on her productive and reproductive body.[16] Thus, these women embodied both the apex of slavery's oppressive extractions and its potential undoing.

If we assume that Elizabeth Keye entered the House of Burgesses with little ability to comprehend the calculus working on and through her, we overlook her relationship to and understanding of all that was unfolding around her. She was embedded in a foundational epoch from which race, forced labor, capitalism, and modern economies emerged. While the actions she undertook to protect her children show that she did not see herself as commodified, they offer tacit proof that she saw that some around her were. What can we learn from the moments when those being commodified catch the process

14 Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role."
15 Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists*, 3.
16 Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role."

in action? From actions that reveal layers of meaning and complexities? It is obvious that Keye experienced this transformation, but might she have formulated thoughts about what she glimpsed? The seventeenth-century English Atlantic world was a tangle of overlapping hierarchies, ideas of difference, and newly sharpened ideas about rationality and value. Concepts about race entwined with those about value, and ideas about inheritance with those about social reproduction and childbirth in ways that we still do not adequately understand.

Thus, we need to reexamine the new ideas about commerce, finance, value, and money that came to be understood as the heart of what was rational, knowable, and scientific. In the early modern period, the number of people in England with numerical literacy increased significantly across the population, including among the writers and critical thinkers of the time. Keith Thomas argues that the field of seventeenth-century political arithmetic emerged from a "faith in the power of statistics to resolve the problem of government and administration."[17] But it was also the product of a faith in the work that rationality could do. Faced with the notion that an investment in forced labor could become a valuable asset for individuals and for the nation, Europeans ascribed stable value to Black bodies as commodities and claimed that the province of assessing value belonged only to whites (that is, to those who came to see themselves primarily as white). However, if we read race back onto political arithmetic, its faulty calculus and claims to logical certitude become increasingly apparent, as do the roots of racial thinking at its core. There was nothing purely rational about the turn to racial slavery, regardless of the wealth it produced. Yet the self-evidence of that statement still requires a caveat concerning the role of racism in rendering slavery irrational. In the arena of culture, racial slavery made no sense. In the realm of the economy, however, it did.

Locating the connections between the history of difference and the history of value demands a recognition that ideas about value developed alongside other concepts that were meant to position economics as the site of rationality and knowability. The same process that led the accounts of courts, trade, commerce, and governments to be archived ended with no accounting at all of the lived experiences of Africans as commodities, of the lives of seventeenth-century African women and their descendants.[18]

17 K. Thomas, "Numeracy in Early Modern England," 104.

18 Gregory, "Cowries and Conquest," 207. In *A History of the Modern Fact*, Mary Poovey asks us to "map the complex history of the relationship between numerical representation

It is impossible to approach the histories of slavery and gender without confronting the problem of the archive. As Marisa Fuentes has generatively shown, doing so requires us to understand that "enslaved women appear as historical subjects through the form and content of archival documents in the manner in which they lived: spectacularly violated, objectified, disposable, hypersexualized, and silenced. The violence is transferred from the enslaved bodies to the documents that count, condemn, assess, and evoke them, and we receive them in this condition."[19]

Fuentes's observations are crucial. The processes she describes apply to the production of these women and to the production of the ideas that situated them as counted and condemned. Before we received these women, they were captured by the Atlantic market through a set of ideas and practices that enabled the damage white people did to them and ensured that such damage could only result in archival obscurity. Making visible the process by which this happened is as important as recognizing the problem of its outcome. If the archives make it impossible to receive African women as other than historically obscure, damaged, and violated, then redressing that damage requires a clear understanding of what situated them as such. And while the manifestations of racial hierarchy are inescapably violent, they gestate in the claims of neutrality, calculability, and rationality. The practices that locate trade as rational and Black women as entries in ledgers transformed these women from subjects to objects of trade through the concepts of population, value, market, currency, and worth. So much has been lost to the pages of legislative debates, merchant ledgers, and calculations of risk, finance, fluctuating value, tariffs, products, and trade. The archives of gender and slavery emerged in a maddening synchronicity of erasure and enumeration.[20]

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and figurative language" (26). (In this foundational text, Poovey completely omits any discussion of race and its connection to the accumulation of wealth in early modern Europe.) And in *Wizards and Scientists*, Palmié worries that the "truly stunning wealth of aggregate data" on slavery and the slave trade may form a "mounting heap of abstract knowledge that . . . may well contribute to blocking from view" the ghosts of the men and women who are our concern (8).

19 Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*, 5.

20 More than thirty years ago, Sidney Mintz and Richard Price argued that the core contradiction of American slave societies was the assertion that the enslaved were not fully human even as slave owners lived intimately with those they enslaved and thus were fully cognizant of their humanity. The records perform a similar act of recognition and disregard. Understanding the role of numerical abstraction in the reduction of persons

In recent years, scholars of slavery have attended carefully and productively to the archive, insisting on recognizing the particular problems that archival research poses for the study of gender, power, and enslavement. Social historians who focus on the issue of resistance are also intent on unearthing the lives of the enslaved by reconsidering the nature of archival evidence. While both of these historiographical trends are critical to the state of the fields in which this study is situated, here I want to emphasize something that has all too often been lost. Elizabeth Keye and the other women with whom I am concerned were sentient beings who themselves generated an intellectual and political response to the profoundly new circumstances that were unfolding around them. To center the cognizant work of enslaved women, this study seeks to denaturalize the systems of thought that were only just emerging in the early modern Black Atlantic. It considers economy, ideology, and kinship as mutually constituted and explores *how* they are mutually constituted. Insisting that the logic that defined slaves and a range of seventeenth-century commodities and values was shaped by the concept of race and racial hierarchy enacts a methodology of relatedness. In what follows, I use the sources and techniques of social history and of Black feminist theory together in an effort to excavate hauntings. I am interested in articulating a set of relationships and ideologies that emerged in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (the period that is my primary focus) but that congealed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries into commonsense understandings whose ghosts, implications, and undercurrents are with us still.

Reckoning with Slavery is concerned with the triangle of economic logic, the Black radical tradition, and kinship as the basis of both racial formation and Blackness as enslavability. It is the symbolic underpinnings of race and capitalism that I am after, and in the archival places where the details of those underpinnings are legible, I will follow them with fidelity. But I also write in the tradition of Hortense Spillers and Cedric Robinson—indeed, I am trying to understand some of the viscera of what Spillers laid out so brilliantly when she mobilized the notion that enslaved women were forced to "reproduce kinlessness."[21] This project reads across academic disciplines and geographies and takes on the archival data produced in this

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to commodities is another way to unpack the contradictory source of the violence inflicted on both the Africans caught in the slave trade and their descendants. Mintz and Price, *Birth of African-American Culture*, 25.

21 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 74.

historical moment as a space of collusion with the politics of erasure that has for so long produced segregated inquiries into the Atlantic past. My work here is that of a historian who is deeply committed to interdisciplinarity and is in dialogue with diasporic theorists of race and slavery. As I hope to illustrate through this study, the work of excavating the history of the Black Atlantic—the categories it produced, the violent destructions it wrought—requires a broad set of approaches united by a political and ethical stance toward academic practices that is capacious and omnivorous.[22] Racial identity, economy, value, and sociality emerged—and thus must be examined—in proximity to one another.

The explicit link between human commodification and the rise of market economies expands the impact of slavery beyond the cultural and ideological problem it has posed for social and intellectual historians in the past. The imperative to clarify the provenance of race and racial ideology produced a scholarly focus on the history of ideology, exemplified by the crucial work of scholars like Winthrop Jordan. This work sets aside the economic impact of racial slavery in a quest to understand the problem of race as a matter of culture. Jordan and Alden Vaughan mounted arguments that England's alleged insularity from contact with Africans rendered the experience of racial difference a shock.[23] New scholarship on slavery and capitalism reframes the economic by insisting on its social and ideological valence and takes Eric Williams's *Capitalism and Slavery* as its starting point.[24]

This book contributes to that reframing and insists that we still need to attend to beginnings, to how "a seventeenth-century faith in a well-regulated marketplace as a mechanism . . . of social and economic inclusion" produced instead an increasingly fixed and identifiable social category of exclusion.[25] Kim Hall observed in 1995 that "the many ways in which African trade

22 The work that follows has been shaped by and through the scholarship of Herman Bennett, Christopher Brown, Vincent Brown, Ada Ferrer, Marisa Fuentes, Kim Hall, Saidiya Hartman, Jessica Johnson, David Kazanjian, Lisa Lowe, Katherine McKittrick, Fred Moten, M. NourbeSe Philip, Neil Roberts, David Scott, Christina Sharpe, Stephanie Smallwood, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Sasha Turner, Alexander Weheliye, Alys Weinbaum, Sylvia Wynter, and others who work across disciplines and across time periods.

23 Jordan, "Modern Tensions"; Vaughan, "Origins Debate."

24 Smallwood's *Saltwater Slavery* exemplifies (and indeed in many ways inaugurates) this effort to think through the cultural weight of economy.

25 Briggs, "John Graunt, Sir William Petty," 20.

provided the practice, theory, and impetus for English trade [in the Elizabethan and Jacobean ages] remain unremarked."[26] The twinned concepts of social and economic inclusion produced categories of humans and markets that were excluded. There is no need to revisit the extensive scholarship here on medieval and early modern notions of difference. We understand the multiple taxonomies of savagery and monstrosity that came to undergird the emerging categories of race. The work of Renaissance scholars Kim Hall, Imtiaz Habib, Elizabeth Spiller, and others on the circulation of free and enslaved Black people in late Renaissance and early modern England has clarified that English merchants and elites were far less vulnerable to the shock of encounter with racialized difference than was earlier presumed.[27] Yet the connection between, on the one hand, new notions of population and ascriptions of racial difference to categories of people and, on the other, the new frameworks that valued and commodified human beings remains undertheorized. The history of slavery has been routed down one path or the other—economy or ideology. The division between these two paths owes its distinction, in part, to the work that the transition to racialized slavery performed in the formation of the Atlantic world.

In the sixteenth century, the space of the Atlantic was becoming manifest for traders, rulers, colonists, and courtiers in both Europe and Africa. As vistas expanded, a range of material and ideological technologies came into play for rulers, merchants, ideologues, and travelers in both Europe and West Africa. Numeracy—fluency in the concepts of trade and exchange, as well as attention to demographics—was just one of many new modes of thinking that accompanied the origins of the modern Atlantic world. There were always arguments about whether slavery was right or not, which suggests that from the onset European slave owners had to create some rationalizing meaning out of what would otherwise be clearly understood as irreligious abuse. In England and on the West African coast, traders and scholars were reconsidering their understanding of economy alongside its components: wealth, trade, and the notion of population. For English theorists, *political arithmetic* came to mean the ways that states benefited from a clear understanding of their demographic strengths and vulnerabilities; this theorization developed concurrently with the slave trade, yet

26 K. Hall, *Things of Darkness*, 16.
27 K. Hall, *Things of Darkness*; Habib, *Black Lives*; Spiller, *Reading and the History*.

has been sublimated by both contemporaries and their historians.[28] As some persons were transformed into mercantilist units of production, others became subject to the demographic manipulations of the state.

As we untangle the connections between early modern English ideas about the body, the emergence of a capitalist trade in human beings, the emergence of "population," and the discursive construction of race as logic, we need to pay particular attention to the process by which the strange became the fungible. At the end of the Middle Ages, Europeans understood Africans as oddities—as spectacles, objects that indicated strangeness (such as monstrous, quasi-human beings with eyes in their chest or breasts on their backs) to be displayed on the stage and at the fair. Their strangeness was defined through their exhibition. But "the circular procession of the 'show' [was replaced] with the arrangement of things in a 'table.'"[29] Over the course of the sixteenth century, white elites moved Africans from the stage to the double-entry record books of slave traders and buyers. Africans were no longer primarily spectacular; they had become speculative items of calculus. But turning African human beings into commodified objects was neither a simple nor an untempered process. The language of commodity, of sale and value, of populational assessments and equivalent currencies, all of these instruments of numerical rationalism sat quite uncomfortably upon human beings. As much as mobilizing these instruments was an act of distinguishing Europeans from Africans, the proximity between them continued to upset the claim that people could ever be fully reduced to things.

The enslavement of Africans raised moral and ethical questions in Europe to be answered or evaded as the slave trade became increasingly central to the growth of European economies. The possibility of European commodification and the intense need to interrupt it laid the foundation for racialist philosophies, articulations of the interconnected logic of

28 An attentive reader will recognize *political arithmetic* as a potent turn of phrase in Saidiya Hartman's introduction to *Lose Your Mother*. Here, as she defines the afterlife of slavery, she writes that "black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago" (6). It is instructive to me that her recourse to calculus in 2007 was rooted in a seventeenth-century phrase designed to capture the ideological reverberations of demographic data.

29 Foucault, *Order of Things*, 131. Absent from this, and most work on the early emergence of modernity, is a discussion of how this move into tables and record books was experienced by Africans.

natural philosophy, political arithmetic, and the theories of value exemplified by the trade in human bodies across the Atlantic. On the African coast, traders began to see populations as marketable in new and more fungible ways as slavery came to mean something entirely different than it had before—premised on an unspoken assumption that the enslavable population was clearly definable, permanent, and infinite. Simultaneously, the languages of race and racial hierarchy changed long-standing conceptions of who was different, who was foreign, who was an ally, and who was an enemy. These changed ideas shaped the trade in slavery, the goods produced by slave labor, and the settler colonialism that would become the core means by which wealth was transferred across and around the Atlantic. Both the application of numerical abstraction to goods and people and the race thinking that it compelled were shaped by the social and cultural processes that attended their use. Neither was a fixed or static tool, but together they forged meaning through the interplay between the supposed logic of calculus and the alchemy of race making.

Despite their historical proximity, numeracy and race have rarely been examined under the same lens. New ways of thinking were the norm in the seventeenth-century Atlantic world. Contemporary observers understood that significant shifts in the roles merchants and traders played in producing the wealth of monarchies and states were underway and took pains to explore and understand them. Seventeenth-century English policies related to trade and commerce reflected a crucial moment in the development of Atlantic markets. This was the moment when the English state made foundational commitments to an empire that was rooted in colonial commodities markets and was dependent on slave labor. The transformations that led up to these commitments were the products of many political, material, and ideological convergences: a monarchy open to new kinds of growth, the shifting parameters of commerce and credit, the fact that a portion of the population was willing to resettle, shipbuilding technology that brought both the western African and eastern American coasts within reach, and an ideological shift in how people and things acquired factuality in the service of secular governance—to name just a few. The growth of England's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade coincided with currency crises rooted in (though not limited by) the false hope of New World gold, the escalation of intra-European military conflicts fueled by claims on emerging markets, and the ascendency of a pseudoscientific moralistic ideology of race, money, and civility that justified the relentless violation of human community.

The slave trade—the reliance on slave labor to extract commodities and to function as currency—was not simply one trade system among many. Rather, slavery exemplified the brutal logics of a new order, one based on a form of wealth that was produced not by exalted bloodlines but by commodity exchanges that were increasingly dependent on the invention of race to justify the inheritances of slavery—both those that adhered to the slave owner and those that adhered to the enslaved. The role of hereditary racial slavery in consolidating modern economic systems has been either overlooked or misplaced as marginal to the core text of early modern economic formations. Historians understand the relationship among early modern Atlantic settler colonialism, commodity extraction, and the transatlantic slave trade, but scholarship on the relationship between money (or, more broadly, the systems of abstraction that I link in this study as numeracy) and the transatlantic slave trade as simultaneously an economic and a cultural phenomenon is rare.[30]

Arguments about the origins of racial thinking turn on economics to explain the why of slavery but don't consider that economics and race might be mutually constitutive. To approach them, then, as two distinct arenas of thought misses the ways in which, for example, ideas about the English population are linked to ideas about Africans. The constellation of early modern ideas related to trade, currency, population, and civility that formed the ideological foundation for the logics of race produced categories of thinking that depended on the ejection of reproduction from kinship and women from the category of the enslaved. Sexual violence, reproduction, and the conceptual importance of infants and children undergirded the work that race would do in justifying Atlantic slavery and had brutal consequences for women and men exploited by regimes of terror and control in slave societies across the Americas.

Much of the historical attention to the relationship between slavery and capitalism is framed by ideas of cause and effect—does slavery undergird capitalism, or does capitalism produce the conditions that allow slavery to develop? The way I navigate this question is substantially influenced by the foundational work of the political scientist Cedric Robinson, whose 1983 text *Black Marxism* has enjoyed a well-deserved resurgence in the fields of African American history and philosophy since its republication in 2000. Robinson rereads the history of feudal Europe's turn to capitalism and critiques Karl Marx for situating capitalism as the revolutionary rejection of

30 For a crucial provocation along this line, see Smallwood, "Commodified Freedom."

feudal economic relations. Instead, Robinson argues that both capitalism and racism emerged, simultaneously, from the European feudal order, that the earliest proletariats in Europe were racialized, and that this gave rise to a modern system rooted in both slavery and violence. Here I join scholars of slavery and its afterlives (like Walter Johnson, Robin Kelley, Stephanie Smallwood, Alys Weinbaum, and others) to build on Robinson's work by exploring the fixed categories of labor, hierarchy, and race.

In particular, I engage Robinson in tandem with the concept of reproduction—both as used by Marx and as used by scholars of gender and slavery. Slavery is not a residual form in emergent capitalism, nor are reproductive capacities and the gendered meanings attached to them residual to the emergence of early modern racial formations.[31] How, then, does the notion of reproduction undergird the emergence of the category and the practice of slavery and slave labor? How might the experience of enslaved women have given rise to a Black radical tradition (another of Robinson's core interventions) that was rooted in the intersections between birth and commodification? These questions emerge by centering enslaved women—and suggest that racial capitalism offers us a way not just to understand the simultaneity of these large historical forces but also to see how the logics of reproduction undergird both. It is only recently that historians of capitalism have considered slavery as central to the emergence of capitalism in the early modern Atlantic world.[32]

But questions remain as to how slavery might be understood not just as bound up with the emergence of capitalist economies but as constitutive of commerce, value, money, and the new cultural logics embedded therein. The questions I engage in this study are clearly related to and in dialogue with the newly invigorated scholarship that has revisited Eric Williams's foundational *Capitalism and Slavery*.[33] Building on these ideas, I exam-

31 The relationship between the appropriation of women's reproductive lives and the emergence of capitalism has long been at the core of feminist Marxist scholarship. My interest here is in elaborating the relationship between the history of racial capitalism and the production of enslaved women as vectors of kinlessness.

32 For an overview of this turn, see Beckert and Rothman, introduction, 1–28.

33 In "Reckoning with Williams," Russell Menard offers a good overview of why Williams's work is crucial to the history of slavery in the colonial Americas. For a clear and generative articulation of why capitalism and slavery should no longer be thought of as two distinct things, see W. Johnson, "To Remake the World." For more on the resurgent engagement with Williams's *Capitalism and Slavery*, see Beckles, *Britain's Black Debt*, 100–108; Draper, *Price of Emancipation*, 1–16.

ine the emergence of a cultural logic that regarded a specific category of human beings as commodities and, based on that belief, created the slave-based economies of the early modern period. These economies, rooted in the sixteenth-century Spanish colonies in the Caribbean and Latin America and expanded by the Dutch, English, and French in the seventeenth century, are crucial to understanding the historical connections among slavery and capitalism as well as the cultural and ideological formations that undergirded those connections.

While we are quite certain about the role the American colonies and the trade associated with them played in transforming European states into empires, questions remain around the cultural and economic connections between the rationalizing of the transatlantic slave trade, the political economy of settler colonialism, and the efforts on the part of the enslaved to refuse their commodification. These three areas of historiography—racial ideology, economics, and the political life of enslaved peoples—are most often addressed as distinct by scholars trained in subdisciplines of history that continue to be seen as merely adjacent rather than co-constitutive. As Kris Manjapra has argued, contemporary racial capitalism "depends on the financial apparatus to conceal"—and such dependence has deep roots.[34] There are obscene abstractions at the heart of the slave trade that reverberated across the social and economic categories that racial slavery would call into being—race thinking, speculative economic thinking, political economies of both enslaved people and slave owners, arguments about ethics and finance, and the relative autonomy and safety of family life among people of European and African descent. They set in motion a series of relationships and inequities that are at the heart of modern capitalism and whose half-lives we can only fully comprehend through an accounting practice rooted in the traditions and interpretive strategies of Black radicalism. These connections are at the heart of the intervention I seek to make with *Reckoning with Slavery*.

In 1776 Adam Smith argued in *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* that the crucial mark of the civilizing process was the accumulation of "objects of comfort." Such commodities were the things that distinguished the "savage" from the "civilized and thriving nation."[35] By the latter part of the eighteenth century, it was clear that such a division existed, even as political economists like Smith struggled to articulate the

34 Manjapra, "Necrospeculation," 34.
35 A. Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 2.

logical connections between wealth and national sovereignty. That connection was often made manifest through metaphors of the body. This was a body, according to philosopher Susan Buck-Morss, "composed of things, a web of commodities circulating in an exchange that connects people who do not see or know each other. These things make it a civilized body."[36] But by the time Smith wrote *The Wealth of Nations*, it was taken for granted that the commodities that distinguished one "great body of the people" from others could in fact *be* bodies. The false universalism embedded in the corporeal metaphor is thus already a violation, an act of erasure that ensures the exclusion of Africans from the categories of civility, citizenship, and nationhood, all of which rest on the accumulation of capital.

While invulnerability and bodily integrity were by no means assured in an era of plagues and famines, Barbary captivity and indentured servitude, the ability to accumulate things ultimately defined some bodies as decidedly not things. They were instead subjects whose identities were coterminous with the political and economic project of the nation, rather than objects whose value fueled it. These bodies were demarcated as white, civilized, and sovereign; they were defined in contradistinction to the enslavable, the commodifiable, the countable, and thus the unfree. That the Enlightenment notion of the universal subject rested on the erasure of another's corporeal integrity warrants careful consideration. Indeed, it may well have been the most foundational concept in the making of the modern world.[37]

Writing about the concept of "wealth in people" as a metaphor for understanding the ways human beings could be valued in Africa, anthropologist Jane Guyer insisted that "the history of exchange and the history of relationships must permeate one another."[38] While narratives about trade, commerce, and the exchanges that led to the transatlantic slave trade frequently situate African women at the margins of the relationships deemed critical, they were crucial indicators of the boundaries of sovereignty, of the customs that ultimately marked Africans as different, and of the potentialities of hereditary enslavement. The cultural shifts that marked the

36 Buck-Morss, "Envisioning Capital," 450. Identifying the circulatory paths of wealth—like blood—through the body politic was a crucial task for Enlightenment thinkers, who were often driven to metaphors of the body.

37 Michel-Rolph Trouillot's elaboration of the unthinkable brings the diaspora and its consequences to bear on Michel Foucault's anemic and deracinated notion of what it is impossible to think. See Foucault, *Order of Things*, xv–xxiv; Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*.

38 Guyer, "Wealth in People, Wealth in Things," 87.

emergence of modernity for late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England, including the decoupling of wealth from nobility and the capacity to relocate and remain English, depended on the possible commodification of all bodies. And it was in the bodies of the enslaved that this fundamental transformation found its rawest and most devastating articulation.

Descriptions of women as part of diplomatic or trade negotiations, as an index of the strangeness of African customs or as evidence that reproduction took place in the absence of kinship, all became part of the arsenal of difference and enslavability deployed by European writers in defining their relationship to the African continent and its people. Elsewhere, Guyer asks why so little sustained social history or social theory exists that explores African concepts of self-valuation.[39] She poses this question while considering a very different time and place than the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century origins of the transatlantic slave trade, but that question of the history of self-valuation persists. As women and men were forcibly removed from their homes and communities, they carried a deep and multivalent sense of value across the Atlantic. They knew their own value as kin, as producers, as reproducers, as marketers, as objects of trade, as currency. It must be considered, then, that during the Middle Passage they might have begun to discern the larger meaning of their capture.

In the seventeenth century, Elizabeth Keye inhabited a world in which the languages of trade, equivalency, and commodification had seeped into the worldviews of Europeans and West Africans alike. European expansion and its cultural logics significantly altered the geographies of trade and affect in which Keye lived, but because those transformations involved her parents and her children, indeed because it depended on them and all they represented, the ability to read the parameters of that expansion became part of her commonsense understanding of the world and of her place in it. The calculation of value, worth, and commodity and the extent to which they impinged on human life was not just the jurisdiction of slave owners and merchants calculating worth, of indentured servants calculating time, or of white women and free Black men calculating risk. It featured in the thinking of the Keye family as they calculated freedom through a newborn who evidenced the interdependency between the receding possibilities of her future and her newly calculated value.

As we will see, traders and shell divers, philosophers and griots, outlaws and Irishmen, were all embedded in patterns of thought about rationality,

39 Guyer, "Wealth in People and Self-Realization," 243–65.

numeracy, and calculability that were being newly honed and becoming rationalized. In the process, they produced knowledge systems that were isolated from one another in the binaries of the sacred and the profane, the sentimental and the analytic, and the economic and the poetic. All of this removed the stench of bruised and putrefying flesh from the bookkeeper's ledger. The end result was so exquisitely rendered that Keye's comprehension of her embeddedness in Atlantic modernity fades from view. It is left out of the archives we have inherited and created because motherhood came to occupy a different location than economy. But of course that was not the case for Keye.

Kinship, motherhood, population, currency, migration, commodification, and race were conceptually intertwined, both for those who were slave owners and for those who were enslaved. However, the latter population tends to fall out of our studies of early modern Atlantic slave societies because of the limits of both our archives and our analysis. How can we comprehend the alchemy of commerce, race, and slavery in women's lives when those who chose which documents to archive so consistently erased its traces? Perhaps we must insist that in the fields of meaning that were coming into practice in the English Atlantic in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, racialized maternity was entirely synchronous with commodity.

Susan Sontag has argued that "the sufferings most often deemed worthy of representation are those understood to be the product of wrath, divine or human."[40] Those of us who study the impact of the transatlantic slave trade often find that the victims of wrath have disappeared into merchant ledgers, planter inventories, and modern databases. This renders the processes that put them there indiscernible. Despite what we know to be the case, the range of emotions associated with human wrath—acquisitiveness, selfishness, greed, and rage—don't figure in these accounts; they are neutralized as they are transformed into commerce.

And, indeed, it is hard not to believe that recourse to the logics of trade and commerce was the first effort to cover up the bodies. The bodies we can no longer see or even conjure up enter the historical record, then, only as numbers—or sometimes as the familiar cross section of the slave ship *Brookes,* in which the very quantity of bodies is the evidence of their disembodiment. As far as slave owners and settlers were concerned, there was

40 Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others,* 7, 40.

no divine or human anger here, no spectacle, nothing to see. But one of the less common meanings of the word *wrath* is "to afflict harm or injure; to bring to grief or disaster."[41] And even without the help of etymological investigation, it isn't too difficult to locate wrath in the transactions of the transatlantic slave trade. Wrath is intimately connected to the violation that transforms a human being into a commodity, but because that transformation takes place through the calculus of trade, the violation that we identify most immediately is how racism interrupts and perverts humanity. We overlook the process that fixes human beings in the ledger books and accounting practices of merchants on both sides of the Atlantic.

This, then, is a question of knowledge production. It speaks to the project of knowing Man—the rational, spiritual, economic, and political universal male who was forged in the ideological spaces of the early modern. How does the history of slavery comport with the ideological processes that positioned public and private life as oppositional, defined the citizen, and delimited reason and intellect as the province of only the European man? As enslaved people were produced as outside the category of humanity, the notion that enslaved women or men could generate coherent assessments of the terms of their enslavement fell increasingly outside the realm of the possible. Slave owners, ministers, chroniclers, European travelers, and economic thinkers all managed to both record and erase the presence of Africans in connection to structures of community that they claimed were the sole province of Europeans, such as family, church, trade, and markets. European writers produced copious records in the wake of contact with Africans that reflected both mutual confusion and disdain but also a burgeoning interest in quantification and in understanding populations as distinct, quantifiable, and transferable.

Historians have used these data to reveal the violence of the transatlantic slave trade and the suffering it caused. But rarely do we see these data as part of the prisons of meaning enslaved people struggled against. Too often the quantitative evidence of Black suffering and commodification is treated as if it is irrefutably transparent. The data are situated, albeit with regret, as all that historians have. This kind of evidence is both efficacious and dulling—it makes a certain kind of scholarship possible while rendering another quite impossible. By carefully tracing the ideological

41 *Oxford English Dictionary*, online ed., s.v. "wrath, v.," accessed April 16, 2019, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/230557?rskey=l8z9WI&result=3&isAdvanced=false.

work attached to the reputed logic of trade, taxation, and migration in concert with that of inheritance and race, we can more fully understand the emergent overlapping logics of race, gender, and numeracy in the early modern period.[42]

A political economy of women in early modern slavery is called for, and with it a new methodology. Our ability to excavate men and women embedded in social, ethical, and political lives from the sedimentation that is commerce, colonialism, abolition, and moral suasion is profoundly compromised not just by the archives we inherit but by the siloed categories of knowledge that accompany the production of those archives. The economic goals of the transatlantic slave trade—the transformation of humans into cargo—mobilized discursive strategies that became embedded in the logics of market capitalism and the efforts to oppose them. To argue that the Middle Passage was embedded in a particular script is not to suggest that the corporeal agony of the journey is not real. Rather, it is to take seriously the work of generations of cultural critics who have argued that the discursive fields in which social-historical experiences occur not only matter but are analytic categories that fully shape both our rendering of those experiences and the experiences themselves.

Writing the history of Black people, particularly in the early modern period, continues to be a struggle against the disciplining forces of knowledge production and the claim that Africa is a place without history. The longstanding accusation that Africans have no legible past is older than Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and as contemporary as the hundreds of lives lost to the Mediterranean Sea as North African refugees desperately tried to enter Italy in recent years.[43] Efforts to rewrite the history of slavery and the Middle Passage, to restore African captives to the narrative of events that so profoundly shaped them, sometimes reproduce the very narrative structures that positioned Africans as outside historical change. The Middle Passage becomes the raw material through which the violences of early modern capital are rendered legible, a script whose "stains won't wash out."[44] But we still need to ask what it means to write histories that acknowledge

42 Stephanie Smallwood and Daina Ramey Berry both refuse the kind of static relationship with numerical data with which I am also concerned. Berry, *Price for Their Pound of Flesh*; Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*.

43 For a foundational discussion of the role of discursive erasures in European thought, see Gates, *Figures in Black*, 14–24.

44 Kearney, "Swimchant," 62–63.

that the silences in the records are evidence of "an irrecoverable w/hole."[45] These histories are often a search for surrogates, an effort to find stand-ins for "the missing voices of those enslaved, dead and forgotten."[46] The Middle Passage and the logbooks that record it mark an archive of beginning: "This is where historic blackness comes from: the list, the breathless numbers, the absolutely economic, the mathematics of the unliving."[47]

My work here is an attempt to write a counterhistory of the origins of racial slavery, one that is not an effort to restore an irrecoverable whole but rather a response to Katherine McKittrick's exhortation that we can "write blackness" by "reading the mathematics of [anti-black] violences as possibilities that are iterations of black life that cannot be contained by black death."[48] Doing so requires us to inhabit multiple spaces: the deadening enumeration of the slave trader's account book and the slave owner's plantation inventory, the absence of women in discursive records except as wenches or madwomen, and the refusal to imagine that a rebel might also be a woman.

What follows is not a formal history, for gathering a series of archive-based linear narratives is not possible here. Indeed, the very idea of a formal history is predicated on rules of evidence, sources, and strategies of interpreting that depend on the very denial that Black people are the agents and subjects of such formal histories. *Reckoning with Slavery* is an interdisciplinary examination of ideas newly circulating in the early modern Atlantic world, their consequences, and their reverberations. It considers the writings and experiences of Africans, Iberians, and English by drawing on records produced in the context of contact and trade with the aim of understanding something about the current of ideas that would shape the experience of enslavement in English colonies in the seventeenth century. I use sixteenth-century sources and evidence concerning English, Iberian, and West African notions of trade, wealth, and encounter to provide a context for ideas that would cohere later on. I also lean heavily on the work of historians, geographers, anthropologists, legal scholars, cultural critics, and literary scholars whose close reading practices offer grounded theoretical insight.

45 Shockley, "Going Overboard," 806.

46 Tillet, *Sites of Slavery*, 108. For a discussion of contemporary efforts to reconcile the absences produced by the Middle Passage, see Tillet, *Sites of Slavery*, 95–131.

47 McKittrick, "Mathematics Black Life," 17.

48 McKittrick, "Mathematics Black Life," 17.

While my commitments to archival research drive this project, part of my intention is to interrogate the impasse that the social historian of Black women's early modern history faces, to engage the extant source materials with care, and to bring as broad a methodological arsenal as I am capable of to bear upon these sources. The women who are my primary concern occupied a crucial conceptual position in the unfolding of racial slavery in the Americas. Their presence as laborers was dependent on their absence as historical subjects. But that absence fluctuates. Women appear in some archives and disappear elsewhere. Instead of lamenting the woefully uneven record, the chapters that follow weave extant evidence about enslaved women with the ideological developments that produced their absence. The book argues that embracing and legitimizing the appropriation of enslaved women's and men's bodies depended on fields of meaning that were coming into being at the time. These are not reducible to racism or colonialism, even though the admixture of new ideas produced those concepts.

At the core of that process of appropriation are, of course, the men, women, and children who were taken captive and sold as forced laborers in the Americas. Thus, chapter 1 begins with a review of what evidence we have concerning the numbers of women on board Atlantic slave ships and how we come to know them. We need to ask both how the presence of those women affected the construction of the racialized category of the slave in the eyes of European traders and settlers and what the consequences of such enslavement were for how early enslaved Africans understood the violent transformations that they endured. Such transformations, I suggest, need to be considered a kind of alchemy: slave traders had the notion that they could transform human beings into wealth, assigning them a value that rendered them exchangeable and distributable through transport and markets. The foundations for this alchemy are laid in both the materiality of the slave trade and the records produced to render it legible—records that situate kinship as commodity. Here I introduce a key question that runs throughout this project: In the face of the commodification of human beings, what did New World kinship come to mean?

This question hovers in the background of chapter 2, which considers the problem of evidence regarding the scope and scale of the slave trade from the perspective of the history of mathematical thinking and record keeping. I argue that Europeans' growing conviction that they could trade in human cargo and still retain their moral core was more closely entwined with numeracy than we have presumed. Neutral categories of thought

such as "population" and "currency" came into circulation in England at the same time that commitments to the slave trade were becoming more robust. As English writers mulled over the new landscape of currency and wealth, they did so in relationship to the idea of Africa and the wealth of the Americas. The categories of thought that distinguished spaces of scholarly inquiry—economy, culture, literature, and politics—were emerging at this juncture in ways that were deeply influenced by concepts of difference and human hierarchies.

Chapter 3 extends this discussion of numeracy to the West African coast. Here I discuss how African women and men on or near the coast would have encountered commodification both before and after European contact. I also consider how Europeans wielded numeracy in their arsenal of meaning making in a way that denied African people sovereignty and autonomy. Such denials were at the core of how the subject with universal rights came to be so narrowly defined. Thus, they need to be understood not just as impacting the Africans whose numerical literacy and economies were mobilized against them but also as shaping the archive that erased Africans.

The second part of *Reckoning with Slavery* follows enslaved Africans across the Atlantic and into the colonies. Chapter 4 considers women's experience of capture and the Middle Passage. Exposed to the sexual predation of crew members and tasked with the care of infants and children on board, women experienced a multifaceted and profoundly inhumane passage. Centering these women undoes the refusal of ship captains to acknowledge their presence in their formal records and casts a critical eye on the production of silence in archival remnants of the slave trade. Further, it suggests that erasure was important for the ideological production of race as a vector of human hierarchy. Finally, I argue in this chapter that African women who endured the Middle Passage were uniquely positioned to understand the role of kinship at the heart of early modern slavery and thus to understand racial capitalism.

This capacity to know is also at the core of chapter 5, which explores the phenomena of sales and the experience of being sold. The sale of human beings was a clear and intimate lesson in how racial capitalism was unfolding, both for those being sold and for those doing the buying and selling. Here I explore the concepts of value and alienation that were unearthed at the moment of the sale, using advertisements posted in colonial newspapers as an entry point into this conversation. The proximity of advertisements of slaves for sale and advertisements for runaways generates a discussion on

the idea of "stealing oneself" and a consideration of the potentially liberatory counternarratives of commodification.

Finally, chapter 6 considers a range of efforts by enslaved women to disrupt their commodification on both small and large scales. Here I revisit the question of archival tracings, centering the ways that the ideological edifice of slavery meant that English slave owners were disinclined to report or acknowledge women's participation in marronage or slave revolts. By situating a discussion of women's rejection of the terms of enslavement at the close of this study, I intend to highlight the productive consequences of early modern racial capitalism. Here we understand that the assumptions that drive histories of slavery wherein women's lives and experiences are cordoned off as falling within the realm of family are entangled with the structures of knowledge production that produced these women's enslavement in the first place.

My overarching concern is how the use and abuse of enslaved women reverberated in the development of the slave-owning Atlantic world. I situate these women through a discussion of the role of kinship in authorizing hereditary racial slavery and in shaping the development of slavery as a financial and commercial instrument. Understanding the role of numeracy and accounting practices that both recognize and sublimate gender is critical to my intervention—these practices and processes have made finding these women difficult in both our archives and in our conceptions of the past.

In producing a study of women's lives that is also concerned with mapping ideologies and knowledge production, I attempt to integrate social, economic, and cultural histories while being attentive to the impact of such histories on our ability to think through or past these categories. The notion of palimpsest is helpful here because it marks a transformation that builds on earlier forms of knowing even as it produces new ones. Those old forms of knowing are not confined to a single African or European time or place even though they called very specific times and places into being. Thus, while this study is rooted in the English Atlantic world of the seventeenth century, it detours into fifteenth- and sixteenth-century West Africa and Iberia and calls for a methodology that centers enslaved women over geographies. Loosely, this book follows an Atlantic arc that begins in Iberia and England, moves to the West African coast, crosses the Atlantic in the Middle Passage, lands in the Caribbean, and works its way up to the North American colonies. Throughout, I ask where and how enslaved women were situated by the European men who claimed them as objects of com-

merce and what effect that had on the women so positioned and the ideological formations that swirled around them. I am interested in both the social history of enslaved women—their material experiences—and the ideological consequences of that materiality on them and on those who appropriated their labors.