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"I am a Arkansas Man:" An Analysis of African-American Masculinity in Antebellum Arkansas

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“I AM A ARKANSAS MAN:” AN ANALYSIS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MASCULINITY IN ANTEBELLUM ARKANSAS

By

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Abstract

This thesis examines the experiences of African-American men in the years leading up to and through the American Civil War in order to understand how they constructed their own sense of manhood. Contemporary slave narratives and abolitionists' expositions routinely tailored their definitions of manhood to white notions of gender in order to garner white support. Prominent abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass tailored their language of resistance against slavers to cast them as honorable martyrs as opposed to vengeful slaves so as to undermine racist caricatures of brute violence. But black southern men struggled against the confines of their bondage and the chaos of wartime to assert their own sense of manhood. This thesis asks questions about how these African-Americans moved within and beyond the boundaries and expectations of Arkansas's slave society, underscoring their attempts to define themselves as men. Making use of sources like WPA ex-slave interviews, court records, and other contemporary accounts, "I am a Arkansas man:" An Analysis of African-American Masculinity in Antebellum Arkansas, offers an understanding of the building of black masculinity within Arkansas, with implications for the African-American experience beyond.

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Introduction

"My father was a slavery man. I was too." stated Henry Blake of Pulaski County Arkansas in his testimony to Federal Writers' Project interviewer Samuel S. Taylor.[1] Born into slavery some years prior to the outbreak of war, Blake watched and learned how to be a man from his father, Doc Blake. Henry recalled that his father could be a "pretty mean man" when faced with danger. He carried a gun after the war, and even shot two or three men, presumably from the bullets he crafted himself.[2] Henry also described Doc as a dutiful father, providing for and protecting each of his nine children. Indeed, the picture Henry paints of his father embodies many common ideals of black masculinity during the period leading into and coming out of the Civil War. Enslaved men found affirmation in their work and through expertise in their craft, as well as in disrupting the slave system and resisting their enslavers through overt and/or subtle means while simultaneously providing for their dependents and raising children with their spouses. Yet these facets of Black manhood forged in the Civil War era went unacknowledged by their enslavers, and, for a time, by historians. As Henry put it, "One half of the world don't know how the other half lives."[3]

Blake described the system of chattel slavery in the southern United States as cold and profit-driven, recalling that, "In slavery time they would raise

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[1] Henry Blake in George E. Lankford, ed., *Bearing Witness: Memories of Arkansas Slavery Narratives from the 1930s WPA Collections.* 2nd ed. (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006), 320.
[2] Ibid, 321.
[3] Ibid.

children just like you would raise colts to a mare or calves to a cow or pigs to a sow. It was just a business. It was a bad thing."[4] Blake, like many of the formerly enslaved, downplayed the workload on the plantation, claiming that "there wasn't nothing hard about it." Blake added that while he received average treatment, he knew of others who "were not treated so well."[5] Despite this dismissive tone, perhaps crafted to signal his strength, Blake understood the value of his labor and the injustice he and others faced both during and after slavery. For example, Blake described how, "no matter how good account you kept, you had to go by [the former enslavers'] account" and that every sharecropper would be given, "enough to keep [them] alive," and "anything that kept [them] a slave."[6] Henry recognized the continuity in the aggressive exploitation of black bodies throughout his life, and his experience helps illuminate how black men understood and expressed their masculinity throughout the era.

While the systemic violence and dehumanization faced by those in bondage and in the Reconstruction era unfolded for each individual in unique ways, the foundation of what it meant to be a black man in the American South was built by men in slavery. Enslaved men sometimes mounted aggressive overt challenges to the system while others carefully worked to undermine their oppression through more subtle means. African-American men relied on the behaviors and attitudes learned early in childhood to carry them through the "business" of enslavement and exploitation. The ways in which these men

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[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid, 320.
[6] Ibid, 322.

adapted to their situations showcased their ability to find individual and communal masculine affirmation, but these men were not beholden to a particular formula of masculine behavior or expression. For instance, while one enslaved man prioritized the safety and health of his dependents, another sought to escape his enslavers above all else, thereby granting himself freedom and individuality. Each individual pursued multiple paths to manhood, often exhibiting behaviors from several archetypes of masculinity. This thesis explores the intersections of several common approaches to masculine affirmation within the enslaved community of Arkansas and the negotiation black men undertook to define themselves as men through the war and Reconstruction. Enslaved men in Arkansas created their own masculine identities through varying acts of resistance, adopting and fulfilling traditional familial obligations, and through competitive and cooperative interactions with other enslaved men within their communities. By analyzing how black men created a sense of self through acts of resistance and restraint, family care, and gaining respect within their community through friendships and shared experiences such as evading patrols, drinking, and enjoying time off together, one can better understand the enslaved experience in Arkansas.

For the purposes of this study, gender identity will denote the expected behaviors and beliefs of an individual's biological sex and, given the strict separation between sex roles in the nineteenth century, there was little fluidity in gender identities. So, actions deemed masculine would grant the actor masculine recognition and affirmation, regardless of biological sex. For instance, many

abolitionist writers conferred manhood on enslaved women who either fought against their enslavers or ran away from their plantations to freedom. Conversely, the enslaved men who remained behind were deemed feminine and weak.[7] While these gendered scripts were rigid and reinforced through cultural practice, they were not impervious to change and in fact routinely adapted to changing standards. Indeed, "No generalization about gender applies to all time and places," therefore it is imperative to understand cultural context, and to focus on the enslaved perception of masculinity, rather than apply white standards to black bodies.[8]

The concept of gender analysis, as Joan Wallach Scott argued in her well-known article "Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis" in 1986, rests on historians appreciating the cultural and societal expectations a population maintained for itself.[9] Indeed, David Doddington expanded on this concept, arguing that the "signs and symbols" within any given cultural framework are not determined by an outside power, but rather are utilized by individuals within that framework to, "position themselves within a given community."[10] The crux of this argument is that performative behavior showcases these symbols and through these actions, men and women demonstrate either acceptance or rejection of the gendered expectations within their culture. In other words, gender identity is a

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[7] Sarah N. Roth, "'How a Slave was Made a Man': Negotiating Black Violence and Masculinity in Antebellum Slave Narratives," *Slavery and Abolition* 28, no. 2 (August 2007).
[8] Teresa A. Meade & Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *A Companion to Gender History*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 2.
[9] Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, No. 5 (December, 1986), 1053-1075.
[10] David Stefan Doddington, *Contesting Slave Masculinity in the American South*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 3.

constant process of demonstration, not a fixed state of being. As R. W. Connell suggests, "it is a becoming, a condition actively under construction."[11]

Published nineteenth-century descriptions of black masculinity often limited definitions of black manhood by tethering it to white masculinity.[12] While the dynamics and connections between black and white masculine expression are significant, the primary focus of this study is to explain and contextualize black masculine identity and expression in its own right, based on black men's accounts, largely (although not exclusively) from their interviews with WPA writers in the 1930s. The Arkansas interviews are useful due to their abundance as well as their ability to shed light on an often-ignored geography, the Southern periphery, where the population was smaller yet growing more quickly than other parts of the South, and where the guerilla war was especially fierce. Their narratives of slavery, war, and Reconstruction reveal men's self-conception as resistors, family-focused, and community-oriented men. These roles demonstrated their beliefs about their own masculine identity and masculine expression apart from that of whites. Despite the social, cultural, and legal disparities between black and white men, enslaved men did not feel "less than men."[13]

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[11] R. W. Connell, *Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 4.

[12] Edward E. Baptist noted that contemporary black abolitionists, authors, journalists made the connection to white masculinity explicit. For example, Frederick Douglass equated a white man's ability to control his life with manhood while others, like fugitive ex-slave Lewis Clarke made the connection between enslavement and manhood explicit, claiming that "a slave cannot be a man," from Edward E. Baptist. "The Absent Subject: African American Masculinity and Forced Migration to the Antebellum Plantation Frontier," in *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 136-173.

[13] Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made,* (New York: Pantheon, 1974), 491.

Scholars have long been drawn to contemporary narratives (written by the formerly enslaved) for answers to questions about black men's experiences in slavery, like Frederick Douglass's recollection, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* or Henry Bibb's memoir, *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave*. Both of these texts come from the 1840s and offer compelling insight into how African American men viewed themselves both inside and out of the slave system. These narratives can serve to illuminate common characteristics of black masculinity shared between different enslaved populations around the country. For example, Sarah Roth's analysis of these published narratives finds that black men were seeking to be respected by the larger white society by combating the stereotypes that a black man possessed the mind of a child and the rage of a beast. These men carefully selected their language, creating self-portrayals that emphasized their strivings for justice. They declared themselves men to a world that considered them chattel. The underlying and unifying feature of all of the masculine characteristics Douglass and Bibb put forward is respect. Bibb's narrative referred specifically to his ability to "practice respectable masculinity" during his time held as a slave.[14] At the same time Douglass sought to demonstrate that enslaved blacks "possessed the kind of manly attributes antebellum Americans respected and rewarded."[15] Keith Michael Green has discussed the dissonance that enslaved men encountered when trying to express their manhood in terms of autonomy, family, and duty.

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[14] Roth, "How a Slave," 263.

[15] Keith Michael Green, "Am I Not a Husband and a Father? Re-membering Black Masculinity, Slave Incarceration, and Cherokee Slavery in 'The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave,'" *MELUS* 39, no. 4 (2014): 26.

Men like Bibb often found their identities in their roles as family men and through agitating for their freedom and the freedom of others. Using the desire for respect as a touchstone, Douglass and Bibb addressed three aspects that they considered to be integral to not only their own concepts of masculinity, but areas that could be easily identifiable to the white readers they hoped to convert to abolitionism: personal bravery, self-sufficiency, and family responsibility. Both authors understood the importance of these three areas in white society and chose to demonstrate that they were of equal importance to black men. This thesis explores those aspects of masculinity, while carrying the subtheme of the quest for respect.

In the broader historiography, scholars have styled enslaved black men as examples of both helpless sufferers and righteous resistors. Because whites dealt in black men as commodities, some historians have questioned enslaved men's ability to exert any control over their families or themselves. Contemporary white accounts often labelled black men as impotent bystanders. For example, Joseph Ingraham, a self-proclaimed Yankee travelling the south, suggested that enslaved men were so devoid of masculine drive that, "'southern ladies would laugh at the idea of being afraid of a negro.'"[16] Scholars in the twentieth century revived that characterization in their efforts to emphasize the brutality of slavery. Most famously, Stanley Elkins likened enslaved people to childlike "Sambos," rendered helpless by their trauma. John Blassingame helped to destroy this myth by exploring the personalities of enslaved men in such a way as to identify

[16] Joseph Ingraham, *The Southwest: By a Yankee, in Two Volumes, Vol. II*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835), 260-262.

various coping strategies: Sambo, who played dumb and submissive in order to survive, Nat, who fiercely resisted, and Jack, who generally tried not to draw attention.[17]

Scholars have since argued forcefully for enslaved men's ability to exercise agency. Chandra Manning, for example, demonstrates in *Troubled Refuge: Struggling for Freedom in the Civil War* that although whites considered black men to be outside the realm of politics, African-American men fought their way out of slavery and to contraband camps, seeking to establish themselves as members of their communities.[18] While masculinity is often implied or lightly treated in broader works, the scholarship on enslaved men's constructions of manhood remained relatively light. Indeed, Edward Baptist commented on this historiographical phenomenon, suggesting that historians used "resistance" as a "code for manhood" in their discussions of enslaved men.[19] This treatment of enslaved agency equated resistance with manhood, and failed to address other actions enslaved men took to exemplify their masculinity. Indeed, Baptist echoes the assertions of feminist scholars such as Deborah Gray White and Angela Y. Davis that since enslaved women rebelled against their enslavers, resistance was not monopolized by manly men.[20] Recent works in literature and American studies have revived the narratives of Frederick Douglass, Henry Bibb, and

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[17] John Blassingame. *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).
[18] Chandra Manning. *Troubled Refuge: Struggling for Freedom in the Civil War.* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016).
[19] Baptist, "The Absent Subject," 139.
[20] For more see, Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I A Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, 2d ed. (New York: Norton, 1999), 27-46; Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Vintage, 1981), 3-29.

others, which were written to demonstrate black men as respectable individuals who could assert their manhood.[21] Scholars find in these narratives evidence that enslaved men sought masculine traits to be recognized not only by whites, but by other blacks as well. These are supported by works covering the WPA ex-slave narratives which contend that black men throughout the South faced similar difficulties in creating and projecting their masculinity within their communities.[22] These men struggled to define manhood on their own terms but also to prove their worthiness to society at large.

Most enslaved men never got the chance to tell their own stories, however, especially in such a carefully curated way. This thesis mines the WPA ex-slave interviews, along with a few other sources, to investigate how enslaved men constructed and affirmed their manhood during slavery and the Civil War era. Black men found multiple avenues to create and reinforce their personal ideals of masculinity, but often found the most connection to others through these themes of bravery, self-sufficiency, and responsibility. Enslaved men sought to be respected as men above all and routinely employed these concepts to communicate and reaffirm their masculine identities.

The first chapter explores how enslaved men performed their masculinity through overt and covert displays of resistance against other men in their communities, both black and white, and received validation from their peers through such defiant actions. Physical altercations, threats of violence, and military service provided enslaved and formerly enslaved men with masculine

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[21] Keith Michael Green, “Am I Not a Husband and a Father?”.
[22] Doddington, *Contesting Slave Masculinity*.

affirmation and respect from their peers. These actions have often been seen as most emblematic of manhood under slavery; indeed they were championed by contemporary black authors, who often disparaged enslaved men who failed to live up to the righteous resistor motif employed in countless former slave narratives. Yet, less overt displays of resistance and the ability to navigate the inherently unequal power relationships between enslavers and enslaved provided enslaved men with masculine affirmation as well. Although these forms are less often associated with masculinity in the scholarship, refusal to work, running away for short periods of time, and evading slave patrols also proved to solidify an enslaved man's masculinity. Utilizing their limited autonomy to resist provided many enslaved men with a sense of manhood which could not be taken from them despite the horrors of the peculiar institution. Through conscious action and inaction, enslaved men demonstrated the ability to resist when necessary, and, importantly, to also exhibit restraint in order to mitigate their circumstances. These men understood that constant agitation would most certainly bring about harsh retribution from their enslavers, and worked, both by themselves and with others, to limit their exposure to violence and to destabilize and eventually destroy the peculiar institution.

Enslaved men also demonstrated that the formation of black masculine identity revolved around responsibility to their families and extended kin networks before and after the Civil War. The subject of Chapter Two, enslaved men's concern for family occupied them in providing for and protecting their wives, children, and relatives to the best of their abilities within the confines of bondage.

Many enslaved men demonstrated their allegiance to family and willingness to fight and negotiate for better treatment from their enslavers and other bondsmen. This emphasis on their volition mirrors the historiographical turn toward agency. Gone are earlier scholars' assumptions of apathy and irresponsibility by black men towards their wives and children, replaced by examples of bravery, ingenuity, and compassion. Many enslaved men employed resistance tactics in an effort to secure resources and treatment for their families, such as in the example of Peter Brown's father, who successfully negotiated lighter work and cessation of his mother's sexual labor by running away from the plantation.[23]

The fulfillment of masculine responsibilities to their dependents continued through the war and into Reconstruction as many enslaved and formerly enslaved men sought to provide their children with opportunities that they never dreamed possible for themselves, with the most overt example being education. Black men jumped on educational opportunities for their children as well as themselves, in some cases attending the same classes and learning the same lessons.[24] Such a focus on formal lessons demonstrated the growing association of academic achievement with black manhood, but more specifically that literacy allowed a child more opportunities to prosper and thrive as a black businessman and citizen.

Chapter Three takes a step back and examines the lives and interactions between men within the enslaved community. The chapter addresses the social

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[23] Peter Brown, *Bearing Witness,* 262-264.

[24] Scott Bond, who will be discussed later, recalled attending classes with his step-father in one of the newly established freedmen's schools in Arkansas.

implications associated with the varying avenues to black manhood and seeks to convey the complexities of navigating through bondage. The masculine identities formed during slavery carried men through the war and served as a foundation for how these men approached the war itself, and Reconstruction. The period immediately following the war thrust white and black ideals of manhood together and forced formerly enslaved men to readjust their conceptions of manhood. This resulted in adopting some of the dominant culture's identifiers of manhood, with the most prominent being a savvy businessman. Through this assimilation, black men demonstrated their ability to adapt to a changing worldview and showcase their manhood to a broader community.

These components of black masculinity are found in WPA ex-slave interviews, published in George Lankford's edited work, *Bearing Witness: Memories of Arkansas Slavery Narratives from the 1930s WPA Collections.*[25] These narratives are roughly transcribed interviews conducted in the 1930s with men and women who lived in Arkansas as slaves. Accounts vary from person to person based on the style of the interviewer. Lankford suggests that the interviews possibly followed a standardized list of questions which covered: origins, conditions of slavery, marriages, the war, freedom, the ku klux klan, and suffrage among other topics. But while these interviews are incredible sources of information, Lankford does discuss some potential hangups to be conscious of while reading these narratives. The most important is that while it is the former slaves' experience that is being recorded, the recording is being done by

[25] George E. Lankford, ed., *Bearing Witness: Memories of Arkansas Slavery Narratives from the 1930s WPA Collections.* 2nd ed. (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006).

multiple, primarily white interviewers who all dictate the information according to their own styles and in some cases are personally known to those being interviewed as they share a community. This power differential surely influenced the responses of those interviewed.

The presence of the themes of bravery, self-sufficiency, and family duty in the interviews of Arkansas bondspeople lends credibility to the notion that these were common ideas of black masculinity among enslaved people across the South. Many of those interviewed tell of how their parents came from places like Tennessee, the Carolinas, or even neighboring Mississippi and so brought their constructions of masculinity with them to Arkansas. While the interactions between whites and blacks figured prominently in how a black man viewed his own masculinity, they were not the sole creators of black manhood. Further, the subjugation and humiliation of the enslaved male population is not the whole story. As interviews in *Bearing Witness* show, black men created complex systems of gender identification and affirmation. Black men absorbed the larger culture to create their own and cultivated personal relationships with friends and family. It is by examining the way that black men viewed themselves and their own masculinity in terms of family responsibility, personal bravery, and self-sufficiency that enslaved African-American men created and reaffirmed their own sense of masculinity to be respected within their community and beyond.[26]

[26] The interviews in *Bearing Witness* offer a wonderful primary source, yet the interviewer bias which Lankford diligently warns of in the introduction to his work can influence the analysis. For example, one of the more obvious influences comes across in the interviewer's selection of what they believe to be relevant information to discuss. For examples see pages 270 & 281.

Resistance

R. C. Smith of Washington County recalled a story that his father, referred to in the record only as Pappy, told him of his time in the Fayetteville prison. Pappy Smith towered over other men, and utilized all two hundred plus pounds of his body to resist being whipped by his enslaver. This refusal turned into a violent altercation which ended with Pappy Smith being hauled off to jail for sale. Due to his fierce resistance to coercive tactics, Pappy remained in jail long enough to get to know the jailer, Presley Smith. After overhearing a plot by two other inmates who planned to kill the jailer at mealtime and escape, Pappy decided to intervene. He waited until the appointed time and stopped the attempted breakout and potential killing of the jailer. This action prompted Presley Smith to buy Pappy from his former enslaver, teach him how to be a stonemason, and bring Pappy and his family to the Smith farm.[27] Decades later, R.C. told an interviewer that his father worked for Smith without resisting. Pappy and Smith had come to some understanding recognized by the community, as Pappy enjoyed the privilege of routinely traveling without the usual pass and without being harassed by slave patrols. Pappy had clearly earned the trust of most area whites, and used it to his advantage. R. C. Smith even recalled his father publicly challenging the magistrate over work on a fence.[28] The judge declared he would have Pappy whipped for back talking, yet Presley Smith protected Pappy from

[27] R.C. Smith in *Bearing Witness: Memories of Arkansas Slavery Narratives from the 1930s WPA Collections*, ed. George E. Lankford (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006), 389-390.
[28] Ibid, 392.

punishment. R. C. recalled that his father and Presley had established some level of respect, as much as possible given the power disparity.

Yet, this respect did not prevent Presley from taking a young R.C. with him to Texas at the outbreak of the Civil War, nor did it keep Pappy from fleeing towards Kansas with a number of enslaved men from the surrounding area for the purpose of joining the Union Army. Although his father died at the close of the war, R. C. remembered that Pappy fought hard for freedom and regretted that he did not get to enjoy it.[29] Whatever understanding Pappy and Presley had achieved, it was no substitute for freedom. Pappy Smith's choices showcased his ideals of black masculinity to himself, his family, and his community.

Despite the risks, many enslaved men expressed their manhood through overt and covert resistance. Indeed, black resistance has often been seen as synonymous with black masculinity. Whether by refusing whippings, fleeing, or attacking enslavers, black men in bondage demonstrated a resilience against brutality that earned recognition in the black community. Such resistance confirmed an enslaved man's masculinity both to himself and others within his community. For men like Pappy, resistance could not only provide a route to freedom, but could continuously demonstrate and reaffirm their claim to manhood. Indeed, many contemporary fugitive slaves likened active, overt resistance to manliness, while suggesting that passivity made an enslaved man feminine and weak.[30] Men like Henry Bibb and Frederick Douglass tailored their

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[29] Ibid.

[30] David Stefan Doddington, *Contesting Slave Masculinity in the American South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 27.

slave narratives to appeal to a sense of justice and honor in an attempt to create a shared sense of manhood between whites and blacks. In their attempt to sway potential converts, authors of slave narratives demonstrated their masculinity through resistance to violence. In his famous example, Frederick Douglass confronted the "slave breaker" Covey with the same ferocity which Covey leveled at him on countless occasions, eventually overcoming Covey and "becoming a man."[31] This dichotomy only left room for those who fought for freedom and, by extension, their manhood, and those who failed to live up to that masculine ideal, and lived as lesser men.

Revisionist historians acknowledged the stress slavery could put on the mind and body, but, compellingly argued that enslaved men did meet and exhibit masculine ideals, and, importantly, "not just through violent resistance."[32] Eugene D. Genovese argued that the relationship between enslaver and enslaved allowed for enslaved men to challenge slavery in smaller, everyday circumstances rather than rebel against the peculiar institution as a whole so as to improve their situation within the system to the best of their abilities.[33] Far from being uniformly docile, enslaved men were able to craft and legitimize their manhood before black and white men alike through violence and/or negotiation.

Indeed, enslaved men demonstrated that their individual and collective resistance could take many forms whether it be through direct confrontation,

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[31] Frederick Douglass, and William Lloyd Garrison. *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave*. Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1849.
[32] Ibid, 6-7.
[33] Eugene Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976).

sabotage, or by running away. Regardless of the form, enslaved men could receive masculine affirmation from their peers, and this was often through friendships. Indeed, Sergio Lussana described the strength and necessity of enslaved friendships not only to affirm one another's manhood, but to survive the harshness of chattel slavery. Lussana focuses on the homosocial world of enslaved men and concurs with the idea that enslaved men recognized and respected multiple facets of masculine expression whether through risk-taking behaviors, games, and drinking.[34] These masculine pursuits tested an individual's manhood and provided a means of bonding with others through shared experiences.

David Stefan Doddington is another historian to challenge the dichotomy, and also argues that multiple avenues of resistance, both overt and subtle, provided black men with homo-social affirmation and respect. Rather than all or nothing masculinity, Doddington examined the lives of enslaved men and gathered through memoirs, testimonies, and interviews that resistance took on many forms in the Antebellum South, and that many enslaved men did not embody the hypermasculine resistance model championed by abolitionists. Instead, enslaved men took various paths to manhood, and that these paths were accepted at varying degrees within the black community. Not all paths were equal and some men sought to stand out among their peers through bolder acts of aggression, either directed at enslavers or at others bondsmen, and this led

[34] Sergio Lussana, *My Brother Slaves: Friendship, Masculinity, and Resistance in the Antebellum South* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2016), 6.

some enslaved men to view their demonstrations of masculinity as greater than others around them.[35] Other men devoted themselves to perfecting a craft and attempting to gain some material advantage through their work in order to prove their manhood to their peers.[36] Enslaved men labored with these varied pursuits as they desired respect and recognition for being manly from other men in their community.

For many enslaved men, fighting against their systematic dehumanization proved to themselves and their community that black bodies deserved respect. Refusing punishments, verbally taunting or challenging their enslavers, and physically fighting back against abuse demarcate a clear response to white oppression which garnered universal recognition and respect among enslaved men. These acts typically, but not always, resulted in violent retaliation which served to solidify support for the resistant slave among the enslaved community and affirm their masculine behavior. Former slave narratives highlighted acts of resistance and WPA Ex-Slave Narratives affirmed the importance of resistance and acting against the brutalities of bondage. Perhaps the most recognizable way that enslaved black men displayed personal bravery was through acts of direct physical resistance. Bondsmen generated respect within black communities via the most overt display of resistance for a man in bondage: openly defying their enslavers through physical means. Physical prowess and resistance were closely associated with masculinity.

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[35] Doddington, 35.
[36] Ibid, 90.

Take for example the recollections of William Baltimore of Jefferson County. Baltimore recalled with delight how he challenged an overseer who threatened to whip him and declared that the overseer would have to prove to be a “better man”, in a direct challenge to the overseer’s masculinity.[37] Baltimore recalled this moment with a great deal of pride as it showcased the enslaved masculine traits of resistance and bravery in the face of brutality. While this confrontation did not result in violence, it establishes physical power as an indicator of masculinity in interactions between white and black men. Direct physical resistance served as a clear demonstration of black masculinity, and for some enslaved men, it became the defining feature of their manhood. For example, Joe Ray of Hempstead County recalled how his father had risen up and killed an overseer who threatened him with a lashing. Seeing his father directly challenge an overseer and assert physical domination resonated with Joe, leaving a lasting impression.[38]

Yet not all black bodies physically challenged their enslavers. Many utilized more subtle means of resistance, whether by sabotaging equipment, refusing to work, or taking the efforts of their labor for themselves. For example, George Kye of Crawford County recalled enslaved men and women sleeping during the day instead of working, and fleeing if threatened with a whipping or beating. While not as overt a challenge, these subtle efforts of resistance demonstrated a commonly held ideal of resistance between enslaved men which was affirmed and accepted as a form of masculine behavior. Acts of resistance

[37] William Baltimore, *Bearing Witness*, 181.
[38] Joe Ray, *Bearing Witness,* 141-144.

formed the basis for a more aggressive style of masculine behavior which could be widely recognized and affirmed within the broader black community.

One of the more familiar forms of resistance was running away, yet few made it to freedom. Indeed, the prospect of success seemed such a futile hope for many enslaved people. Some, like Senia Rassberry of Jefferson County, questioned where the enslaved ran to when they fled from their enslavers.[39] Most simply headed into nearby woods or a canebreak for temporary refuge. For example, Kittie Stanford of Jefferson County remembered that an enslaved man called Old Henry would flee the plantation, declaring that he would remain until his "bones turn white" but would find himself returning time and again when hunger compelled him.[40] Many enslaved men chose to flee and hold out for as long as they possibly could, knowing that freedom proved to be too far from their grasp. For instance, Columbus Williams of Union County recalled a man once escaping and living away from his enslavers for over a year before finally returning of his own accord.[41]

Echoing this bleak outlook of potential flights to freedom, Willis Winn of Hempstead County suggested that the enslaved largely refused to run North for fear of being captured and brutalized for their attempts. Willis recalled watching enslaved bodies broken on buck and gag benches and touted as a warning for those who dared step out of line. Despite this, Winn recalled seeing "too many try" to make the journey to freedom, only to be caught and savagely beaten upon

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[39] Senia Rassberry, *Bearing Witness*, 211.
[40] Kittie Stanford, *Bearing Witness,* 212.
[41] Columbus Williams, *Bearing Witness*, 375.

their return.[42] Indeed, Lewis Chase of Prairie County remembered being sold to a new plantation and running away due to the whippings he received. But even after repeated abuse, when an opportunity arose for Lewis to escape during the war, he ran again, showing his determination.[43] Although being beaten upon capture or return, enslaved men forced a certain amount of respect from their enslavers who were aware that these men would attempt the freedom run again. They also demonstrated their conviction and bravery through these masculine acts of resistance in the face of brutality and doubt from other enslaved men and women.

Another form of resistance manifested itself for enslaved men through their dodging of slave patrols after these men had deliberately broken the curfew for slaves. In a run-in with slave patrols in Ouachita County, Oscar Felix Junell recalled that an old slave man would stand his ground against the patrols, one time even going as far as to kill some of the men who had broken into his home. Junell goes on to remark on what must have seemed an exceptional case because, “they did nothing to the old man about it.”[44] Such bold actions bolstered a black man’s sense of his manhood and served to validate his masculine standing within the enslaved black community. And those who evaded patrols may have known safer routes to Union lines once Federal troops pressed into Arkansas. For instance, J. F.’s father Arthur Boone of Woodruff County routinely broke curfew and evaded slave patrols, despite being caught a number of times.

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[42] Winn Willis, *Bearing Witness*, 153.
[43] Lewis Chase, *Bearing Witness,* 308.
[44] Oscar Felix Junell, *Bearing Witness,* 258.

Arthur also ran to Union lines once they were within reach and proudly served as a soldier, keeping his uniform, pistol, and saber once discharged.[45]

Evasion of patrols allowed enslaved men to meet with friends, lovers, and family members from other plantations as well as demonstrate their unbridled manhood to their community. For example, Henry Blake of Pulaski County recalled his father, Doc, fleeing from patrols as Henry rode along. This behavior, alongside Doc's shooting of multiple adversaries resulted from Doc's ideals of masculine behavior, yet they scared his young son, who stopped being seen with his father for fear of what trouble might arise.[46] Yet for some enslaved children, evasion affirmed the father's masculinity in their young eyes. For example, Charlie Hinton of Jefferson County recalled his father's evasive tactics with delight, even comparing his abilities to that of a stout mule.[47] In another instance, Betty Robertson Coleman of Arkansas reminisced about how one night her father evaded a slave patrol so well he told Betty he had, "given them plenty of heel-dust."[48] Such evasion served as a performative example of an enslaved man's masculinity. For example, James Betrand recalled that his father, Mack, evaded slave patrols regularly. James went on to describe Mack with a sense of bravado due to Mack showing no concern over the potential whippings that would come if the evasive man had been caught.[49]

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[45] J.F. Boone, *Bearing Witness*, 398.
[46] Henry Blake, *Bearing Witness*, 321.
[47] Charlie Hinton, *Bearing Witness,* 201.
[48] Betty Robertson Coleman, *Bearing Witness,* 4.
[49] James Bertrand, *Bearing Witness*, 186.

Black men utilized both overt and subtle acts of resistance to negotiate for better treatment and more stable situations for themselves and/or their families. For example, Moses Jeffries of Arkansas recalled seeing runaways making a break for their freedom but returning due to being unable to provide for themselves and observing that the slaveholders, “wouldn’t punish them much… because they might run off again.”[50] Through their utilization of flight, the men Jeffries refers to were able to negotiate for a lesser punishment and leverage some control over their return to the community, demonstrating to others their bravery to risk punishment and return.

T.W Cotton of Monroe County also recalled that his father, Rob, routinely fled to the woods to show his displeasure to his enslavers. Cotton mentioned that Rob forced the enslavers to speak “quietly” to him to receive his compliance.[51] Such an interaction demonstrated that Rob understood there to be a floor on how poorly whites could treat him, and was willing to enforce it. T. W. further mentioned that his father worked hard and diligently, reinforcing the idea that Rob demanded masculine respect for his person and his work. With his father as an example, T.W. would later recall standing his ground against white men who challenged him in front of his wife on a train after the war.

Yet resistance took on different meanings for enslaved men as there was not one clearly defined route to manhood. For instance, Joe Ray of Hempstead County recalled his father killing an overseer after refusing to submit to a lashing.

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[50] Moses Jeffries, *Bearing Witness,* 8.
[51] T.W. Cotton, *Bearing Witness,* 244.

This left a strong impression on Ray as later in life he contemplated killing a man, but ultimately resisted.[52] While some viewed violent resistance to injustice and humiliation as a necessary response in order to demonstrate their masculinity, other enslaved men weighed their personal safety against expected backlash and exhibited restraint so as not to incur harsh retribution.

Unfortunately most attempts at negotiation through direct physical resistance resulted in enslaved men being severely punished, sold, or killed. For example, the aforementioned George Kye recalled his father, Joe Kye, being sold off the Stover plantation as the result of his continued physical resistance. The impression Joe left on his young son carried through the years as George adopted Kye as his legal last name after being freed. Despite never seeing his father again, George both affirmed his father's lasting manhood and tied his own masculine ideals to his father's by legally changing his name.[53]

Perhaps in a more explicit example of leveraging one's resistance, Peter Brown of Phillips County recalled his father escaping from the plantation with his pregnant mother. Brown's father protected his wife while they camped out in the canebreak, even killing a panther in defense of his wife. Importantly, Brown's father negotiated a peaceful and beneficial return to the plantation, guaranteeing that he and his wife would not be punished, and even more substantially, preventing any further utilization of his wife's sexual labor for their enslavers.[54] Ensuring a safe return and preventing any further sexual abuse towards his wife

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[52] Joe Ray, *Bearing Witness*, 143.
[53] George Kye, *Bearing Witness,* 66.
[54] Peter Brown, *Bearing Witness*, 262-264.

clearly demonstrate the efficacy of utilizing resistance to improve their personal situations. In doing so, Brown's father outlined his view of proper masculine behavior to resist enslavers' abuse which left a lasting impression on Brown. Runaways in Arkansas faced a daunting task in their attempts to escape, often seeking refuge in the canebreak and relying on support from friends and neighbors. Enslaved movement proved to be an expression of black agency which served to reinforce a degree of black autonomy and manhood.

The power of flight increased as Union troops began to control greater areas within Arkansas as the Civil War progressed. As the prospect of freedom became a tangible reality, the risks associated with running dramatically increased. For instance, John Bates of Pulaski County recalled runaway slaves being harshly punished and/or killed if caught on their way to Union lines.[55] This echoes a recollection of Harry Johnson who detailed an enslaver and his overseer murdering over a dozen enslaved men at a time.[56] Running away carried the risks of extreme physical abuse and/or death yet enslaved men continued to flee. Some enslaved men bided their time until Union lines closed around them. Sometimes this involved resisting the enslavers' practice of forcing bondspeople to travel deeper into rebel territory, often going as far as Texas. Betty Coleman of Bradley County recalled such an example when a few enslaved men she knew waited for Union troops to arrive and then joined with them.[57] Some enslavers went as far as attempting to physically remove

[55] John Bates, *Bearing Witness*, 315-319.
[56] Harry Johnson, *Bearing Witness*, 10-13.
[57] Betty Coleman, *Bearing Witness*, 2-5.

bondspeople from Union wagons. Adriana W. Kerns of Dallas County, for example, watched as Union troops forced the enslavers to release her family and allowed the newly free family to travel with Union forces.[58]

While decisions to remain may simply have been due to age or physical inability to run away, it is important to note that many enslaved men chose to stay put during the war to fulfill their masculine obligations to their families. Since physical altercations often resulted in whipping, sale, or the fleeing men's inability to reconnect with family, many enslaved men resisted the call to physical violence in order to preserve their family units. This was a hard lesson learned under slavery, and prompted many men to take the safer, more reserved approach as Union lines crawled across Arkansas. This is captured perfectly in the recollections of Nelson Densen of Ashley County who suggested that many more men stayed behind and served as leaders of their families and tended to the crops and, "helped to take care of the old men and the women and children."[59]

The decision to remain behind did not suggest that enslaved men were averse to fighting, rather it demonstrated that these men recognized the ever-present danger of partisan fighting and guerrilla warfare that ravaged war-time Arkansas. Indeed, Daniel E. Sutherland described the brutal and personal nature of the war in Arkansas stating that, "once violence had been done to one's family, neighbors, or home, retaliation frequently followed."[60] Black men faced the

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[58] Adriana W. Kerns, *Bearing Witness*, 101-103.
[59] Nelson Denson, *Bearing Witness*, 44.
[60] Daniel E. Sutherland, "Guerrillas: The Real War in Arkansas" *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 52, no. 3, (Autumn 1993): 264.

constant threat of being kidnapped and removed to deeper parts of Confederate territory if deemed a flight risk or seen outside of their farm or plantation, but such travel during the war did allow for greater freedom of movement.[61]

While some men chose not to flee in order to stay close to family, others fled *to* their families. Fleeing for family rather than freedom is exemplified by the father of John Wells of Crittenden County, Joe Jones Wells. Joe told his enslaver that if he was not allowed to return home from their evacuation to Texas he would flee and "beat him back" to the plantation. Joe Wells exemplifies the responsibility that enslaved men felt towards their families and the lengths that these men would go in order to fulfill these familial obligations.[62]

Yet other enslaved persons recalled remaining on their plantations until the end of the war, subject to the jeering and judgment of passing Union troops, questioning why the enslaved chose to remain in bondage. Indeed, Katie Rowe of Hempstead County recalled Union soldiers asking her why the enslaved did not take up arms and run their enslavers out with their numbers. Katie's response mirrored the thoughts of millions of enslaved men and women across the South as she replied that the enslaved knew that the retaliation against them would be horrendous, especially when Union troops left.[63] Contemporary authors, specifically formerly enslaved abolitionists, cited the logistical impossibilities of

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[61] This phenomenon will be discussed in more depth in the Community chapter. For more information of black travel during the war years see, Rebecca Howard, "No Country for Old Men: Patriarchs, Slaves, and Guerrilla War in Northwest Arkansas," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 75 no. 4 (Winter 2016): 336-354.
[62] John Wells, *Bearing Witness,* 69-71.
[63] Katie Rowe, *Bearing Witness*, 144-150.

widespread insurrection within the slave states. Frederick Douglass suggested that the millions of enslaved men and women were disorganized and facing a formidable and entrenched adversary.[64] In his analysis of the enslaved community, Peter Kolchin also argued that the over exaggeration of a strong and cohesive slave community neglected the conflicts and tensions that presented themselves within the enslaved community.[65] Such seemingly insurmountable obstacles explain why enslaved men often utilized resistance as individuals rather than an entire community. Once again, the choice to remain behind contradicted hyper-masculine narratives of fighting for freedom and suggested that these men lacked manhood.

It is also necessary to note that a widespread fear of Union troops persisted within enslaved communities which may have contributed to the reluctance of some enslaved men to make the journey to Union lines. Indeed, Lewis Chase of Prairie County recalled that the majority of enslaved men and women did not know anything about Union troops outside of the horror stories told to them by enslavers.[66] This seemed to be particularly acute among enslaved children, as their parents often hid them away or took flight when word of approaching Union troops reached them. For example, Jim Ricks of Calhoun County recalled running away from approaching Federal troops due to his learned fear of white people.[67] In another example, Mary Myhand of Benton

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[64] Frederick Douglass, "The Revolution of 1848," *The North Star* (August 4, 1848), rbscp.lib.rochester,edu/4388
[65] Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619-1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 160.
[66] Lewis Chase, *Bearing Witness*, 308-309.
[67] Jim Ricks, *Bearing Witness*, 49.

County recalled hearing that the "'Feds' were coming through and [would] kill all of the old men and take all the boys with them." When her enslaver took her brother and attempted to flee South, Mary followed and begged to be allowed to go with them due to her fear of the approaching troops.[68]

This fear seemed validated for Sam Word's mother in Arkansas County, who recalled confronting a Union soldier over commandeering supplies from her home saying that the man came to fight for the enslaved, not steal from them. The pillager quipped back that he fought for the Union and fourteen dollars a month.[69] Hetty Haskell of Jefferson County likewise remembered being scared of Union troops and seeing them taking food stores, but also recalled rebel sympathizers taking everything they could get their hands on, including women's clothing.[70] But for those like Betty Brown of Green County, the potential harassment from Union troops paled in comparison to the brutality and murderous intent of rebel sympathizers.[71]

As expected, serving in the Union army and fighting against former oppressors proved to be the most explicit rebuke of slavery and its proponents. The call to arms and the prospect for personal freedom sometimes outweighed the familial obligations which many young black men had on the plantation. The idea of masculine responsibility to protect one's family could be overshadowed by the call to assert their manhood through force and take direct actions to free themselves and encourage the millions of bondspeople to resist until the end. For

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[68] Mary Myhand, *Bearing Witness*, 45.
[69] Sam Word, *Bearing Witness*, 35.
[70] Hetty Haskell, *Bearing Witness,* 198.
[71] Betty Brown, *Bearing Witness*, 130.

example, Mary Harris of Jefferson County recalled her father leaving the family to join with Union forces. She remembered the Union army welcomed and encouraged black men to join the war effort.[72] Another instance of a father leaving his family to answer this call to serve is found in the story of Omelia Thomas of Lee County. Thomas' father, a free black man who routinely carried a firearm while working, volunteered to join Union forces at the outbreak of war, fulfilling what he understood as his masculine duty.[73] A young John Jones remembered listening to cannon fire for the first time and asked his mother what caused the commotion. She replied, "war." When the Union soldiers came close enough, Jones' brother ran away from the plantation and joined the Federal encampment in Pine Bluff. With the prospect of personal freedom, and the ability to free his family through service in the Union army, Jones' brother took the risk, and demonstrated that his personal ideals of manhood required him to fight rather than remain at home with his mother and younger brother. Although John Jones did not say whether or not his brother died during the war, he did offer that war was bad, and he feared another on the horizon.[74]

Yet this call to resist split some families. Some left to fulfill their personal ideals of manhood while others acted on a different set of masculine standards. Take the case of John Young of Drew County. Young recalled passing Union troops' claim that the war was about freeing all slaves, and ending the corrupt institution of slavery altogether. This inspired Young and a few other enslaved

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[72] Mary Harris, *Bearing Witness,* 196-197.
[73] Omelia Thomas, *Bearing Witness*, 228-230.
[74] John Jones, *Bearing Witness,* 13-14.

men to run away to Little Rock and join up with Union forces. For John and his compatriots, joining the Union army symbolized the most explicit means to resist their enslavers and allowed them to fight back. Taking their bodies and labor away from their enslavers, and in turn, using those resources to destroy the institution of chattel slavery stood out as the most manly form of resistance within the black community. Despite seeing the young men run off to war, Young's grandfather chose to remain behind, eventually being pressed into laboring for his enslaver on the rebel front lines.

The men who did leave to join Union forces sought to earn the respect of those around them, black and white. For instance, when considering the masculine quality of personal bravery, it would seem logical that by serving in the Union Army a runaway would be demonstrating his manhood against his former oppressors, and thereby rebelling against the dehumanizing forces of Southern slave society. In *For Their Own Cause: the 27th United States Colored Troops* author Kelly Mezurek showcases how black men used military service to validate their claims to freedom and to fight for their place in larger society (as well as for personal reasons).[75] These validations reaffirmed the manhood of black service members both inside and out of the black community.

Black men who demonstrated their manhood by contributing to the Union cause sought respect while doing so. For example, when talking to Union commander George L. Stearns, a group of black men told him, "'We are willing to

[75] Kelly D. Mezurek, *For Their Own Cause: The 27th United States Colored Troops,* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2016).

work, if the Governmentt needs our services, with pay or without; but we don't like to be driven at the point of a bayonet.'"[76] For many formerly enslaved men, serving the Union cause did not necessitate their direct involvement as soldiers or in large scale pitched battles. In an example from Jefferson County Arkansas, Boston Blackwell proudly describes how he ran away from his enslaver to join the Union army and that he worked through the heat of battle by bringing water to put out fires on the cotton bale breastworks. This service to the Union fostered his sense of manhood although when he failed to receive a soldier's pension, Blackwell felt that his manhood had been disrespected by the federal government.[77]

Another example comes from Henry H. Butler also of Jefferson County who recalled his flight from his enslaver and being mustered into the Union Army. Butler remembered his service in the Battle of Pine Bluff vividly, and interestingly credits the victory to a ladies' sandwich squad that provided food and encouragement for the men on the battlefield. After taking a brief respite and being roused to their feet by the women challenging them to "be real men," Butler and the other men pressed forward to seize the day with the message of the sandwich squad still ringing in their ears.[78] Indeed, the ladies' call to arms played upon the soldiers' internalized sense of masculine obligation to fight and defend, and is something that resonated with Butler in his service in the military.

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[76]Manning, *Troubled Refuge*, 101.
[77] Boston Blackwell, *Bearing Witness,* 187-189
[78] Henry H. Butler, *Bearing Witness,* 194.

This sense of comradery and manhood solidified many relationships between those who served together and validated the struggles of each and every man. Take the case of John Roberts of Monroe County as an example of the communal aspects of masculinity. John Roberts served as a soldier in the Union army and told his son J how he did not expect himself to survive the war after being involved for a few months. Presumably prior to joining the Federal ranks, Roberts legally dropped his previous last name of “Collins” as it came from his enslaver. After surviving his tour of duty and with his service completed, John ensured that his brothers in arms received their well-earned pensions by validating their requests.[79] Recalling the horizontal axis of respect, John’s actions to recognize his comrades for their service proved to be a critical means of affirming the respect each of them was due for their military service.

As the war dragged on, resistance and flight to Union lines potentially offered a direct line to freedom, but also dramatically raised the stakes. John Bates of Pulaski County recalled that those caught fleeing towards Union lines were horrifically beaten and/or murdered for their attempts at freedom.[80] The opportunities created by the chaos of war brought the once very unlikely dream of fleeing or fighting their way to freedom perilously close to home in Arkansas. For instance, Hannah Allen of Randolph County recalled that only two of the (presumably) hundreds of enslaved men and women on the plantation she was bound to remained at the end of the war, with the vast majority fleeing the

[79] John Roberts, *Bearing Witness*, 251.
[80] John Bates, *Bearing Witness*, 315-319.

residence after hearing of emancipation.[81] Indeed, the aforementioned Kittie Stanford recalled several enslaved men stealing their enslaver's horses and riding away towards Pine Bluff to join up with the Federal outfit there.[82] In another example, James Gill of Phillips County recalled Union troops liberating those in bondage and most travelling with the troops to Helena in order to escape their enslavers.[83] The Union army's policy toward them, however, undermined some men's quest for acknowledgement as men. Seizing supplies and materials for war was a staple of warfare during the nineteenth century, but the classification of refugees from slavery as "contraband" allowed the Union army to remove the enslaved from such brutal oppression. However, as historian Amy Murrell Taylor noted in her work, the term and policy of contrabandfailed to address the human cost of chattel slavery.[84] Enslaved men and women did not reach Union lines and receive a certificate of freedom or a stamp of citizenship. These men and women often struggled, fled, and lived in an active war zone. [85]

This time of trial in refugee camps also saw many black men impressed into service due to "military necessity" as many Union commanders turned to black labor for the physically demanding and menial tasks of camp life.[86] Indeed, Lucindy Allison of Cross County recounted Federal troops impressing men she

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[81] Hannah Allen, *Bearing Witness,* 352-355.
[82] Kittie Stanford, *Bearing Witness*, 212.
[83] James Gill, *Bearing Witness*, 270-275.
[84] Amy Murrell Taylor, *Embattled Freedom: Journeys Through the Civil War's Slave Refugee Camps* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 11.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid, 54.

knew into Union service as well as raiding the food stores of the plantations.[87] Likewise, Tanner Thomas of Jefferson County recalled his father being pressed into Union service and dying of disease during the war.[88] But impressment did not preclude a sense of manhood or honor for those who served in the United States Colored Troops. For example, Solomon Lambert recalled being pressed into Federal service during the war. In his interview, Lambert recalled with pride his service in the Union army and the pension that it provided him in his old age.[89] Serving in the military granted Solomon an immediate and lasting claim to manhood based upon the typical resistance narrative. His subsequent pension also played into a growing narrative of living independently and providing for oneself that became an explicit comparison to white masculinity after the war.

For many enslaved men, serving in the Union army provided a perfect opportunity to resist former enslavers and demonstrate their manhood to others in their community. But this call to arms did not ring true for all enslaved men. For instance, Parrish Washington of Jefferson County recalled several enslaved men running away from a neighboring plantation to join the Union cause. Yet, two of the escapees returned after not desiring to stay and fight for the Union.[90] Their decision to return did not diminish the bravery it required to flee in the first place, and may have been prompted by a desire to return home and protect those they cared about once it became clear that the South could not win the war.

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[87] Lucindy Allison, *Bearing Witness*, 71-72.
[88] Tanner Thomas, *Bearing Witness*, 214.
[89] Solomon Lambert, *Bearing Witness*, 249.
[90] Parrish Washington, *Bearing Witness,* 216.

Not all were afforded such a decision as a number of enslaved men found themselves coerced to the front lines to serve as forced labor for their enslavers, not to fight for the Union. For example, the previously mentioned William Baltimore languished as a laborer for the rebels until Union forces "captured" him. Baltimore subsequently joined up with Federal troops and served with the Union army from 1863 through the end of the war. Despite his forced removal to the frontline, Baltimore seized the opportunity to serve in a United States uniform and demonstrate his manhood as an employed Federal soldier.[91] In a similar example, George Braddox's father Peter fled from his enslavers in rebel lines to freedom in Union lines. Peter's flight and subsequent service with the Union army stemmed from his belief in the cause of emancipation, which had been the catalyst for his flight to Union lines.[92] Such examples showcased the personal bravery and determination enslaved men embodied as well as demonstrated the lasting power of masculine actions for those who fought during the war.

Quite a few of the men who found themselves forced to the Confederate frontline were killed during the war, such as the father of William Brown of Cross County. Brown's father died during his coerced service at the front. Later on, Brown's mother remarried a former black Union soldier, who then helped to raise young William.[93] Another previously mentioned young man, John Wells of Crittenden County, recalled his father yearning to escape and fight for the Union, but being compelled to serve his enslaver on the front lines of the war in order to

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[91] William Baltimore, *Bearing Witness*, 182.
[92] George Braddox, *Bearing Witness*, 306.
[93] William Brown, *Bearing Witness*, 87.

protect his family from retaliation. Both of these young men understood the necessity of their fathers going to the front with their enslavers and the experiences of their fathers proved to be another complex facet of their manhood. Being involved in the war effort, even dying at the front, should have earned these men masculine recognition and respect. Yet due to the underlying reasons for their presence on the front lines, it complicated the community's reception of their war service. Despite not resisting oppression in the same way running away and joining Union forces could be, the men who stayed at home did resist the call to abandon family and friends to the whims of enslavers. In resisting the extremely compelling urge to escape to freedom, these men demonstrated their belief in a masculine obligation towards their “neighborhoods” and protecting those closest to them from the repercussions which would otherwise accompany their flight to freedom.

For other black men in Arkansas, their military service did not loom so large in their constructions of their manhood. Solomon Lambert of Monroe County was fifteen when mustered into service. The young Lambert describes his fear of the “white man’s war” and the anxiety surrounding his daily expectation of being on the receiving end of gunfire during his service. Although Lambert does recall that the Army regarded him as a good soldier, he refrains from idealizing or romanticizing war which often accompanies young men who find themselves fighting in conflicts. Lambert also speaks with relief about not being involved in the larger military campaigns of the Helena regiment due to his timely enlistment and ultimately being relieved from duty without having

participated in a battle. But perhaps it is for this reason that his army days are but a small part of his larger recollection and that his military service to the Union was not a defining part of his own masculinity despite the pride he voices about his federal soldier's pension. What is more important is that Lambert recognized that he received the respect that he deserved as a soldier along with his pension and such recognition was integral in constructing black manhood.[94]

Whether through facing, fleeing, or fighting oppression, black men routinely demonstrated that they were men above all else, often affirming their manliness through risk-taking behaviors and outright challenging the system of slavery under which they lived. Men ran away, sabotaged tools or goods, stole food and essentials, met and spent time with friends away from their enslavers, and at the onset of war in Arkansas, joined Federal forces in reclaiming the state for the Union and freeing many of their fellow bondspeople. Through subtle and overt acts of resistance, enslaved men showcased their masculinity and affirmed the manhood of their friends and relatives along a horizontal axis of respect, which allowed black men to recognize and validate different, sometimes contradicting actions, as manly and deserving of respect.

[94] Solomon Lambert, *Bearing Witness,* 247.

Family

Laura Hart of Sebastian County made it clear to her interviewer that her family's history, and the actions of her parents were integral to the story of her years in bondage saying, "Now wait--I'm going to give you the full history."[95] Laura told of how her father became a freed man upon the death of his uncle and inherited his estate. This presented an issue for the newly emancipated man as he had his eyes set on Laura's mother, and unsuccessfully attempted to buy her from Sam Carson, her enslaver, so that he might leave the state with his partner. Undeterred and determined to be with the woman he loved, Laura's father chose to stay in Arkansas and work for Carson until she received her freedom during the war.[96] Choosing to stay and not exercise his freedom demonstrated that for some black Arkansans, family trumped flight.

Familial responsibilities lay at the core of enslaved masculinity, even when the family was headed by one parent. Indeed, Carl Moneyhon's analysis of enslaved families in Antebellum Arkansas found that the majority of families were headed by two parents despite the rate being less than older slave states.[97] Such evidence reinforces the argument that enslaved men valued their families and strove to be husbands and fathers. From providing food and shelter gained through work "after hours" to leading their dependents out of slavery and into freedom, young enslaved boys grew up observing their fathers or other enslaved

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[95] Laura Hart in *Bearing Witness: Memories of Arkansas Slavery Narratives from the 1930s WPA Collections*, ed. George E. Lankford (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006), 356.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Carl H. Moneyhon, "The Slave Family in Arkansas," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (Spring 1999), 35.

men interacting along what Jeff Forrett calls a “horizontal axis of respect.” In other words, black men in bondage expressed and affirmed each others’ manhood along socially equal lines.[98] Such a dynamic did not encourage one universally accepted form of manhood, but rather allowed for multiple paths. Enslaved male children began to develop their own sense of masculine identity as they grew older by accepting or rejecting the norms expected of their gender. As they began to internalize the importance of providing for the family, young enslaved men took on greater responsibilities in order to supplement and eventually overtake the contributions of the older men within the family unit. Tending to the old, caring for the young, teaching and playing with the children, and protecting the family all fell within the realm of black manhood.

As in achieving manhood through overt resistance, the masculine identities that enslaved men constructed within their families demonstrated a complex and diverse understanding of gendered roles in relation to their wives, children, and the extended kin for whom they provided and protected. Some enslaved men asserted masculine identity through familial relationships and obligations rather than through overt resistance and confrontation. This is not to suggest that such men were any less “manly” or that they lacked the drive to free themselves. Quite the opposite. Enslaved men deployed any means at their disposal to improve their own and their families’ material or social situations. Indeed, enslaved men in Arkansas fulfilled their gender roles as husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons while they simultaneously employed various

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[98] Jeff Forret, *Slave against Slave: Plantation Violence in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 288.

resistance tactics and navigated the social nuances of their communities. And while the threat of separation and brutal abuse loomed, enslaved men sought to love, teach, and spend time with their parents, partners, and children. Indeed, rather than allow coercion and abuse to destroy family dynamics, enslaved men often found avenues to assume leadership and protector positions to reaffirm the gender roles within their families. Enslaved black men entered into relationships with others, raised children, and worked on their limited personal time to provide for their families and others in their community.

In 1965, Daniel Moynihan published his report on black families in the United States, and claimed that chattel slavery destroyed black family life. Moynihan's work built on traditional historiography which surmised that brutal abuse, fear of sale, and a lack of control emasculated the enslaved male population. This, coupled with the forced matriarchal structure destroyed a black man's ability to control his family and pushed black men to abandon their families.[99]

But this understanding of enslaved family dynamics came under fire from Herbert Gutman, Eugene Genovese, among others sought to refocus the historiography on the strength of family bonds within the enslaved community and in doing so demonstrated that enslaved men routinely took risks to see, protect, and provide for their dependents by stealing goods and evading slave

[99] Daniel P. Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action.* (Washington, DC: Office of Policy Planning and Research, U.S. Department of Labor, 1965).

patrols.[100] This push to discuss slave agency also met resistance as it sidestepped the mental and physical effects of chattel slavery and failed to address crucial concerns of enslaved women and their experiences. The counter-revisionist arguments made by Deborah Gray White and others reasserted the centrality of homosocial groups in the enslaved community due to segregated labor practices and how this prompted enslaved women to depend on one another, rather than men.[101]

While not a complete refutation of the counter-revisionist arguments, recent scholarship has reaffirmed the strength of marital and familial bonds between enslaved men and women, such as with Emily West's discussion of enslaved men generally being the spouse to travel to and from neighboring plantations in South Carolina in order to visit and look after the other.[102] And works such as those by Sergio Lussana and David Doddington demonstrate how enslaved men defined their manhood through work, resistance, and friendship in relation to other men.[103]

Although historians used to debate the strength of family ties, the historiography has fully established that enslaved men actively participated in

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[100] Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. (New York: Pantheon, 1974).; Herbert George Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925.* (New York: Pantheon, 1976).
[101] Deborah Gray White "Female Slaves: Sex Roles and Status in the Antebellum Plantation South." *Journal of Family History* 8, no. 3 (Fall 1983): 248–61.
[102] Emily West. *Chains of Love: Slave Couples in Antebellum South Carolina.* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).
[103] Sergio Lussana. *My Brother Slaves: Friendship, Masculinity, and Resistance in the Antebellum South*. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press), 2016.; David Stefan Doddington. *Contesting Slave Masculinity in the American South.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

providing for and raising their families through extensive research into the testimonies like the WPA Ex-Slave narratives. In one such testimony, Frank Biles recognized his father's capability to provide for his family through his hard work on the plantation and his leadership of the family. Frank's father Moses excelled at his work and would also watch over young Frank in order to protect him and keep him from harm.[104] These and the other examples of manhood that follow demonstrate that the ideals of black masculinity were primarily started within the family unit with enslaved men participating through teaching their children both work and life skills regardless of gender. Fathers spent time and effort raising all their children and sought to establish loving relationships. This can be evidenced in the case of Dinah Perry of Jefferson County whose father taught her the words and spellings he had picked up during his walks to and from the schoolhouse with his enslaver's daughter. Perry's father transitioned his work into his daughter's enrichment as best he could. This care for female children is echoed in the fond memories of Betty Coleman who described her father, John, as a sweet man who would often tell her to go and rest in the shade while he took responsibility for her work in the fields.[105]

But physical altercations often resulted in harsh punishments including death or departure from the plantation either through the auction block or an enslaved man fleeing. While running away from enslavers took a great deal of personal bravery, many enslaved men would refrain from escaping due to their familial responsibilities although in some cases men would flee to be with their

[104] Frank Biles, *Bearing Witness,* 1-2.
[105] Dinah Perry, *Bearing Witness,* 208-210; Betty Robertson Coleman, *Bearing Witness,* 3.

families. The latter is exemplified by the father of John Wells of Crittenden County, Joe Jones Wells. Joe told his enslaver that if he was not allowed to return home from their evacuation to Texas he would flee and “beat him back” to the plantation.[106] Joe Wells exemplifies the responsibility that enslaved men felt towards their families and the lengths that these men would go in order to fulfill these familial obligations.

In another example, Peter Brown of Phillips County recalled a story about his father, William, leading his heavily pregnant mother, Jane, deep into the canebreak away from the plantation so that she could rest and give birth out of reach of her enslaver’s labor demands. Peter spoke with pride that his father had fought and killed a panther that had crept up on the pair in the canebrake, protecting his pregnant wife and providing for her as she gave birth in the woods. For Peter, his father exemplified the masculine qualities of a husband and father through his encounter with a mountain lion. Regardless of whether or not this recollection is fact, the elder man retelling a clearly cherished story demonstrated the impact that William had on his son. Peter understood his father as a man who went great lengths to protect his wife and child. This example exemplifies familial responsibility as a central feature to African-American constructions of gender, and how it could entangle with the values of bravery and resistance. Later when negotiating their return to the plantation, William was only swayed by when their enslaver promised that Jane would no longer be required to work in the fields and would be able to care for her children. The arrangement relied on the

[106] John Wells, *Bearing Witness*, 69-71.

exploitation of William and Jane's family life, however, as her enslaver prized Jane for her reproductive labor; she was considered a "fast breeder."[107]

WPA Ex-Slave narratives give invaluable insight into the formation of a masculine identity within the family because so many of those interviewed experienced bondage and the war at a young age, providing historians with a glimpse into constructions of enslaved masculinity prior to the war and how it was transformed during the conflict and immediately after. As David Doddington explains, "The [WPA] testimony also allows us to consider how enslaved parents (or parental figures) fashioned and performed gender to their children, as well as how this was remembered by the children and informed their own values."[108] Because gender is both created and performed within a shared space, and in this context a specifically black space, the WPA testimonies offer unparalleled access into the formation and expression of black manhood as created and shared within black families in bondage. Children learned and performed gender based on the expectations set out for them by their parents and other extended kin.

To this end, it is important to note that enslaved parenting presented children with the stark contradictions of accepted black behavior inside and outside of the black community. For instance, enslaved parents showed deference and acquiescence to their enslavers as a means to survive.[109] In contrast, enslaved men and women vocalized their frustrations and grievances with enslavers within the confines of their own quarters. Peter Bardaglio notes

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[107] Peter Brown, *Bearing Witness,* 262-264.
[108] David Stefan Doddington. *Contesting Slave Masculinity in the American South.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 14.
[109] John Blassingame, *The Slave Community.*

that enslaved men often assumed the role of provider and protector to control behavior and exert influence within the slave quarters, especially over children.[110] Such analysis builds on the arguments of Herbert Gutman, who noted that young enslaved men learned and understood their masculine roles from older enslaved men.[111] Yet this control did not translate perfectly within each family unit and men who behaved within gendered expectations did not assume complete control over their dependents. For instance, when her father, a well-known slave patrol evader, expressed his displeasure at a meal, Betty Coleman of Arkansas said with finality that the family wouldn't obey the command to remove the food, "just because father said to."[112] Black masculine authority was in perpetual conflict with the gendered expectations of how men were *supposed* to act, and how they were *allowed* to act in any given circumstance. While black men could and did challenge stereotypical assertions about their virility, authority, and masculinity, such challenges were fraught with peril.

For many black fathers, protecting and providing for their children was of the utmost importance, and they took this masculine role seriously. Bardaglio suggests that black fatherhood was inherently dichotomous, with the father taking on the role or provider and protector within the enslaved quarters and presenting a deferential posture in the presence of enslavers. Indeed, some

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[110] Peter Bardaglio, "The Children of Jubilee: African American Childhood in Wartime," in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton & Nina Silber, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 215.
[111] Gutman, 14.
[112] Betty Coleman, *Bearing Witness*, 2-5.

enslaved men took this approach to survival in order to minimize the risk of punishment and brutality towards themselves and their families. Take for example Frank Briles of Arkansas who recognized his father as the capable and responsible leader of his family and equally obedient bondsman who avoided trouble.[113] By educating his children about what was expected of them and leading by example, Briles' father exercised his masculine role as a black father.

According to Bardaglio, "the nuclear family represented the ideal in the slave community," yet it was "intricately woven into a larger pattern of associations and obligations."[114] The enslaved community expected men to provide and protect their families within black spaces, while it provided cultural education and communal support for smaller children who had not been forced into more physically demanding labor. For example, Emma Moore of Arkansas recalled a common technique for tending to children in which young children were corralled into a large room, typically overseen by an older enslaved woman.[115] This is echoed by Harriett McFarlin Payne of Arkansas County who recalled a similar division of parents and children during the day, with parents only allowed to collect their children at the end of the work day.[116] Augustus Robinson of Calhoun County also recalled such a room for children, and that his grandmother routinely snuck food into the children during the day while the adults were away.[117] As children grew older, they were generally allowed to venture

[113] Frank Briles, *Bearing Witness*, 1-2.
[114] Bardaglio, "Children of Jubilee," 216.
[115] Emma Moore, *Bearing Witness*, 14-16.
[116] Harriett Payne, *Bearing Witness*, 29-31.
[117] Augustus Robinson, *Bearing Witness*, 50-52.

where they pleased and gradually take on more responsibilities on the grounds. Yet Bardaglio notes that many enslaved children found themselves forced into greater responsibilities during the war as white men went to the front, forcing many enslaved men along with them.[118] Such was the case of John Jones who recalled being educated and put to work on the cotton gin at an early age. Jones learned to work the equipment from his father and prided himself on being able to take on the same responsibilities, not only helping to form his masculine identity, but affirm his father's role in the process.[119]

These men also routinely broke curfew and evaded slave patrols in an effort to acquire provisions and materials as needed by their families. Indeed, Emma Moore of Arkansas recalled that enslaved persons would routinely sneak out under the cover of darkness to cook and visit with their friends and family.[120] Such actions support Lussana's analysis that these actions were reinforced and promoted within the enslaved community which demonstrates that enslaved black men created their own sense of identity primarily through interactions within the black community.

Family, like resistance, formed a core foundation upon which black masculinity was built and sustained. From childhood, young black men projected the type of masculinity they learned from kinship networks, often emulating the older men they interacted with on a daily basis. Enslaved men could either reinforce or reject the portrayals of masculinity they witnessed as they grew older

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[118] Bardaglio, "Children of Jubilee," 220-221.
[119] John Jones, *Bearing Witness*, 13.14.
[120] Emma Moore, *Bearing Witness*, 14-16.

and carved out their own sense of self and identity within the confines of the not so peculiar institution. These young children also had to contend with the brutality of the slave system, often being forced to watch their parents and others receive beatings at the hands of their enslavers. Witnessing such actions led some historians to characterize the relationships between fathers and their children as inherently distrustful and contentious since the beatings were beyond the fathers control. Yet as Peter Bardaglio argues the beating of a parent or child "did not necessarily shatter the bond between parent and child or undermine the respect that children had for their parents."[121] Such actions against enslaved bodies demonstrated the inequalities of the system while simultaneously forcing black children to cope with the abuse of family members.

The core of Southern white masculinity rested in a man's control over his dependents. His work, family, and honor all required his overarching control to prosper and be recognized within his community. Enslaved men, on the other hand, did not have "control" over their dependents or themselves in this sense. This precluded them from contemporary discussions of respectable and affirmable masculinity.[122] While enslaved men could demonstrate characteristics of manhood, such as bravery, intelligence, or physical prowess, they would never be recognized as men by white society. But recognition from their oppressors was not necessary for enslaved men to define themselves as men. Indeed, Jim

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[121] Bardaglio, "Children of Jubilee," 215.
[122] Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Cullen detailed that masculine affirmation as a father and husband weighed heavy on the minds of enslaved men, as they sought to fulfill the duties and expectations of those roles.[123] Black men could never fit established nineteenth-century concepts of manhood; they had to make their own. Ideals of white masculinity argued that no true man would submit himself to bondage, denoting a man's ability to control his own life as the mark of manhood. Yet for enslaved men, to escape could mean abandoning family. To privilege freedom over family contradicted the notion that men had an obligation to protect their family. Yet black men were keenly aware that their protection of their family was forever limited in bondage; for some escape alone was their best hope. By and large, enslaved men demonstrated time and again the centrality of family and its importance to the black community.

While masculine authority within enslaved households was founded in cultural gender norms, it existed on a spectrum and, in comparison to rigid Southern codes of white masculine behavior, proved more flexible and dependent on female acknowledgement of authority. For instance, as a means of protecting their investment in human flesh, enslavers often decried physical abuse by enslaved husbands against their spouses, despite utilizing physical correction within their own marriages.[124] Although their husbands faced greater restrictions within enslaved unions, black women were afforded greater leniency by whites to give a "sharp-tongued" scolding to their husbands.[125] While

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[123] Jim Cullen, "'I's a Man Now': Gender and African American Men" in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton & Nina Silber, 89.
[124] Forret, *Slave against Slave*, 266-267.
[125] Ibid.

enslaved husbands were still afforded the “rule of thumb” to discipline their wives, enslaved unions did not mirror the same power disparity that existed within white unions, and were comparatively more egalitarian. Indeed, Hannah Jameson of Howard County shared with her interviewer that she ended her marriage when her second husband failed to live up to the masculine norms she and her community expected of him.[126]

The circumstances of enslaved couples’ unions meant that they were never completely free to court and build relationships without some level of white interference. Overall, enslavers encouraged marriage (albeit without legal sanction) but their meddling included the ever-present threat of forcing pairs meant to produce desired offspring. However, the sources suggest that most enslaved unions formed as the result of choice, usually by enslaved men either asking the enslaver to marry an enslaved woman, or, as Columbus Williams of Union County said, “you would court a woman and just go on and marry. No license, no nothing.”[127] Regardless of their start, enslaved marriages bore similar characteristics to white unions, with men leading theirwives and children and providing for material needs. Enslaved men also exerted sexual dominance as a means to demonstrate their manhood. As Doddington explains, “While ultimately constrained within a racist and oppressive system, some enslaved men believed that they could, and even should, be sexually dominant, using this to construct an identity based on virility and power.”[128]

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[126] Hannah Jameson, *Bearing Witness*, 163-166.
[127] Columbus Williams, *Bearing Witness*, 377.
[128] Doddington, *Contesting Slave Masculinity*, 131.

Charles Dortch's experience is revealing of the tension that sometimes existed between black men's desires to be dominant while serving as protectors. Dortch fashioned a sense of manhood as a partner, that he later altered--his second wife left him after he slapped her during a heated argument.[129] What is interesting about Charles' experience is the drastic change in behavior during the course of both of his marriages and how it altered his masculine identity. Charles was a small child during the war and looked up to his father who he recalled as a "kind of boss" on the plantation where they were enslaved. During his interview, Charles mentioned the many jobs his father performed and admired the way other enslaved men addressed his father. This social standing certainly influenced the young Charles as he matured during Reconstruction and sought to establish himself as a man like his father. This led Charles to embrace a more brash representation of masculinity, evidenced by his altercation in a bar. Charles also exhibited this bravado while accompanying his wife home on a train. Charles used his standing as a train porter to force three white men off of the train. Charles recalled that his first wife, Lillie, was an "angel" and was saddened by her death three years after they had been married. During his first marriage Charles exhibited all the characteristics of black manhood that he admired from his father. He found pride in his ability to stand up for himself and his wife, and enjoyed the social standing being a porter provided him. He enjoyed a sense of manliness drawn from having power and offering protection.[130] Yet this ideal of manhood was challenged after Charles drove his second wife away.

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[129] Charles Green Dortch, *Bearing Witness*, 94-101.
[130] Ibid, 99-100.

It is telling that Charles suggested that Lillie was an angel yet called his second wife, a "good woman, just marked with a hot temper" and refrained from naming her.[131] For Charles, the later separation with his second wife resulted from "some foolishness" that occurred when he expressed jealousy over one of his wife's friends. This perceived threat to his masculine claim over his wife led him to instigate a confrontation and ended when he slapped his wife across the face. This challenge to his manhood prompted violent retaliation. Charles also recalled attempting to find his wife and his friend when she fled, claiming that he wielded a shotgun to stop them. And although Charles expressed relief for not coming across the two, it is clear that his sense of manhood revolved around his ability to control his wife and maintain his social standing during the post-war years. His masculinity forged in power over his spouse had overcome that rooted in the protection of her.[132] In the end Charles demonstrated remorse for his actions and a sense of failure to live up to the example set by his father.

It is also important to note that Charles' sister, Adriana Kerns, lived next door to him at the time of the interviews. For Adriana, their father, Reuben, also served as a role model to her as he protected his family during the early stages of the war, and eventually joined up with Union troops in Little Rock where he served out his enlistment. It stands to reason that through Reuben's position as a "kind of boss" on the plantation, he was able to keep his family relatively safe despite troops skirmishing in and around the plantation. For instance, Adriana recalled her father persuading Union troops to cease their harassment of the

[131] Ibid, 100.
[132] Ibid.

plantation owner for the plantation horses. Reuben negotiated his enslaver's release on the condition that the horses be returned in the morning.[133] Yet this assistance did not prevent Reuben's former enslavers from attempting to coerce Adriana into staying with them on the plantation by claiming Reuben had been killed during the war. They knew that a desire to seek the protection of her father would always trump the "protection" whites offered.[134] Reuben served as a role model for his son and his daughter and his legacy lived on in their memories for the remainder of their lives.

Protecting and providing for their dependents remained a staple of black masculinity through the Civil War. For instance, the primary tension in Henry Bibb's famous narrative came from his desire to rescue his wife and child and reassume his masculine roles as husband and father. The ultimate expression of black manhood came as a result of being the head of household and leading his family into freedom. Although unsuccessful, Bibb took solace in the fact that he suffered incarceration and further enslavement on behalf of his family, allowing him to assume the role of a "resilient, selfless" protector.[135] These values are echoed in the story of Victoria Taylor Thompson of Arkansas, whose father relentlessly pursued her kidnapper after she was stolen away. Shortly after the end of the Civil War, Victoria's father, "Doc" Hayes, learned that one Judge Wolfe refused to release Victoria to return home after being hired out as a maid. Doc then hired a man to steal Victoria away from the Wolfe's and return her. As

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[133] Adriana Kerns, *Bearing Witness*, 101-103.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Green, "Am I Not?," 26

payment Doc sold his labor to the Native American man he hired to retrieve Victoria.[136] For many enslaved men, living without their family was not living at all.

Although enslaved men who fought or fled from their enslavers took the lion's share of masculine praise, many more enslaved men refrained from fleeing and/or overtly attacking those coercing their labor. Despite the explicit connection between military service and manhood, many enslaved men found the risk and the uncertainty of serving in the Union army too steep to attempt, a point more fully covered in chapter one of this thesis. For example, Joe Jones Wells of Crittenden County desired to break away from his bonds and fight for the Union cause. Unfortunately Joe's enslaver, Confederate captain R. Campbell Jones, forced Joe to accompany him on campaign, preventing him from carrying his family to freedom.[137]

Numerous enslaved men were forced to accompany their enslavers to the frontlines or to labor on behalf of the Confederacy. Dennis Nelsen of Ashley County expressed a common sentiment, recalling that "every man was thinking of his mother, wife, and family" on the eve of battle. Although not a soldier, Nelsen's experience with war saw him pulled to the front alongside his enslaver as a teenager, and his thoughts of home and family echoed those of other black men. Forced away from their families to support the Confederate cause served a double-punch against enslaved men's notions of manly responsibility. Leaving

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[136] Victoria Taylor Thompson, *Bearing Witness*, 19-21.
[137] Kelly Houston Jones, *A Weary Land: Slavery on the Ground in Arkansas*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2021), 181-183; John Wells, *Bearing Witness*, 69.

the family for the Union cause at least would have been an honorable reason to leave family behind, whereas leaving home for the sake of the rebels served neither the resistance or family man constructions of masculinity. Nelsen admired the black men he heard about fighting for the Union, but suggested that many more men remained on plantations because of their concern for their families.[138] Indeed, black men who served in the Union army often conveyed that their thoughts dwelt on the safety of their families, such as with the case of Reuben Dortch and his quest to reunite with his family after serving in the Federal army.[139]

The onset of conflict threw into contrast the desire to run for freedom and the need to protect one's family. This tension had already existed, but the war had raised the stakes higher than ever. For those without family ties to give them pause, the escape towards Union lines in Arkansas proved the most accessible route to freedom most ever dared hope for. Some saw freeing themselves as a means to eventually free their families. Many former slave narratives extolled this behavior as it not only deprived enslavers of labor, and thereby weakened the system itself, but equally affirmed a male centric hierarchy, where men were by and large the only actors capable of agency. Indeed, John Wells of Crittenden County recalled his father expressing a desire to flee to Union lines and the freedom that it promised. Yet Wells' father ultimately resisted the urge to flee to freedom since he could not guarantee his family's safety.[140]

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[138] Dennis Nelsen, *Bearing Witness*, 43; Jones, *Weary Land*, 190-191.
[139] Adriana W. Kerns, *Bearing Witness*, 102-103.
[140] John Wells, *Bearing Witness,* 69-71.

Especially for men who had a partner and/or children, such a flight could provoke fierce retribution from enslavers. With Union lines being crowded with refugees and thereby depriving the South of its labor force, confederate sympathizers and slave patrols exacted harsh punishments for those who the enslaved who made the flight to freedom and failed. Countless former slave narratives describe the brutal nature of slave patrols, underscoring the heightened risk most enslaved persons recognized and internalized.[141] Despite the prospect of freedom tantalizing closeby, many men regarded flight as unmanly, and believed their manhood dictated that they stay and watch over their families and others during this time of national upheaval. Indeed, as Doddington notes, "some enslaved people felt that to answer the rebel's call was to abdicate masculine responsibilities as a provider and protector, and that to remain in chains to support dependents was not a mark of weakness."[142] As the war came dangerously close to home, some chose to stay in familiar territory, hoping to ride out the storm while others took themselves, and sometimes their families towards Union lines in hopes of freedom. To do so proved an increasingly difficult decision as Union lines encroached further into rebel territory, and many men took the opportunity to escape with their families once the Federals were close enough.

For instance, Matilda Hatchett of Yell County recalled her father hiding the children from both rebel and Union troops in order to protect them from potential

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[141] Betty Coleman, Joseph Samuel Badgett, Betty Brown, Eva Strayhorn, and J. F. Boone were just a few of the enslaved who noted the patrols in their interviews.
[142] Doddington, *Contesting Slave Masculinity*, 103.

threats.[143] Such a reaction to approaching Confederate troops is understandable to modern readers while it appears odd to have the same reaction to the "liberating" Federal troops, but it is important to remember the limits of the enslaved information network, as well as the fact the vast majority of enslaved Arkansasans lacked access to outside resources, routinely finding themselves at the mercy of concentrated Southern disinformation campaigns. Peter Bardaglio comments on this through his explanation of enslavers detailing the "demonic appearance of the Yankees" to children to frighten them and prompt them to flee Union advances.[144] Indeed, many enslaved people hid from approaching federal troops due to widespread fear about kidnapping and forced impressment into the army, subsequently being used as cannon fodder, or being forced into laboring for the Union army. Liza Stiggers of Phillips County remembered fearing Union troops and hiding whenever she heard of their approach.[145] Attempting to protect and hide their family members when faced with the unknown further demonstrated the connection that enslaved men had to their families and communities.

But not all men who remained behind were able to tend to their family's needs. For instance, Eva Strayhorn of Johnson County recalled all able-bodied men and boys being sent away with their enslavers in an attempt to escape advancing Union lines, forcing many fathers away from their wives and children.[146] This division of the family unit also occurred when fathers who

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[143] Matilda Hatchett, *Bearing Witness,* 401-405.
[144] Peter Bardaglio, "Children of Jubilee," 222.
[145] Liza Stiggers, *Bearing Witness*, 288-289.
[146] Eva Strayhorn, *Bearing Witness*, 221-228.

enlisted could only bring part of their family with them as they mustered out. Maggie Wesmoland of Prairie County serves as an example since her father was only able to take Maggie's mother and some of the other children when her stepfather mustered out of the area.[147] Being a black father during the Civil War forced many men to make incredibly difficult decisions for their families and themselves as the risks involved ascended to new heights. Others, like Matilda Miller's father of Arkansas County, used the war as an opportunity to escape and start new lives.[148]

Take the curious case of Albert Crane as an example of the strength of familial bonds. Albert Crane's life did not differ greatly from the other enslaved black men in Arkansas at the outbreak of war. He grew up on a plantation and bore the scars of his mistreatment at the hands of his enslaver's wife. When Union forces pushed their way up the Arkansas River, Albert made the daring dash to link up with Union forces in Little Rock in order to escape his cruel past, and serve as a soldier with his brother. But Albert and his brother were separated into different companies and forced to serve away from one another. In order to serve with his brother and ensure that they could protect one another, Albert swapped identities with a man named Howard Davis in his brother's company and lived a double life. Unfortunately Albert's brother, Lenzy, died from disease while camped in Little Rock at the end of the war.[149] For Albert, as is the case

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[147] Maggie Wesmoland, *Bearing Witness*, 311-314.
[148] Matilda Miller, *Bearing Witness*, 26-27.
[149] Affidavit of Alice Crane, Pension Application no. 1302087, for service of Albert Crane alias Howard Davis (54th USCT), Civil War and Later Pension Files, Department of Veterans Affairs, Record Group 15, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

with most enslaved men, his claim to manhood came through multiple channels simultaneously. In joining the military, Albert demonstrated not only his willingness to fight and showcase his resistant manhood, but also stood by his familial obligations by switching places with another man in order to serve alongside his brother. Albert's example perfectly demonstrated the connected nature of resistance and family for black men and how both served as expressions of black masculinity.

Indeed, enslaved men's responsibility to family was not limited to their roles as fathers. Men in the black family unit were to care for their brothers and sisters, and when the time came, for their parents. This was the situation remembered by T. W. Cotton of Monroe County who fulfilled his masculine responsibilities by caring for his aging father, "for the last five years of his life." It was culturally expected for enslaved men to help provide for their families as long as they could due to the limited amount of resources with which they could obtain. And when the need arose it was important for men to protect their siblings. Take for example the case of Sallie Crane of Hempstead County who had tried on multiple occasions to run for her freedom. After her failings and being brutalized, her brothers implored her to allow them to rescue her so that they could protect her from the plantation mistress. Enslaved men reaffirmed their manhood by ensuring the continued care and protection for their families to their utmost ability.[150]

[150] T. W. Cotton, *Bearing Witness,* 244; Sally Crane, *Bearing Witness,* 135.

Sometimes when black men failed to live up to their roles as fathers, other family members stepped in. Joe Golden's father, of Hot Spring County, abused and stole from his children. He regularly took money and bought alcohol in order to get drunk and failed to provide for his family. Years later, Joe regarded this as a failure on his father's part to live up to expected standards of manhood. A failure to parent is further echoed in the tragic story of Louis Lucas. Louis' stepfather, Bill Cardrelle, was openly hostile towards Louis which culminated in Louis' departure for the home of his father, Sam Lucas. But Sam, who had been married to Louis' mother Louisa before freedom, rejected Louis as his biological son and refused to legally marry Louis' mother as a free man or help to provide for Louis, thereby forsaking his masculine responsibilities. But this responsibility is taken over by Louis' brother who would care for him once again demonstrating that men were responsible for all of their family. Louis' example highlights the tensions within some black family units which would persist through the antebellum period, through the war, and beyond.[151]

This responsibility extended outside of direct family units and often incorporated other enslaved blacks within the same community. These connections manifested themselves within and between plantations which expanded the number of men young boys could interact with and learn from in order to develop their sense of manhood. Young enslaved men pulled from multiple sources outside of their immediate family and sometimes valued these

[151] Joe Golden, Bearing Witness, 158-161; Louis Lucas, Bearing Witness, 202-206.

relationships more than those with their immediate family.[152] For example, James Baker of Hot Spring County did not live with his father, instead choosing to live with a man he called Uncle Billy. Uncle Billy treated James "like his own children" and guided James until the young man was able to continue on his own. James shows the utmost respect for Uncle Billy which suggests that the young James looked to Uncle Billy as a model for his own masculinity. This relationship highlights an interaction which promoted growth and self-sufficiency for a young man who otherwise would not have been able to count on a male role model in his life and demonstrates that masculinity was not relegated solely to the family unit.[153]

It is also critical to acknowledge that caring, providing for, and protecting their family was not the case for all enslaved men and some men embodied conflicting ideals of black masculinity. Take for instance the military service and prolonged absence of Matilda Miller's father after the war. Matilda recalled that her father left behind his wife and daughter to fight for the Union cause, but failed to return after the war ended and freedom attained. In describing her husband's twelve year absence, Matilda's mother suggested that her husband took up with another woman and lived with her for over a decade, abandoning his role as provider and father to his first family.[154] Although Matilda's father's military service would have affirmed his masculinity within his community, his refusal to return home and continue his masculine role as father and husband would have

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[152] Anthony Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).
[153] James Baker, *Bearing Witness,* 157.
[154] Matilda Miller, *Bearing Witness*, 26-27.

been met with disapproval, particularly if his absence was the product of an adulterous relationship.

Cultural expectations of the parent-child relationship typically led the younger generations to care and provide for their elders when such assistance became necessary. Numerous WPA interviewers remark that interviewees were being assisted by or looked after by their children. Indeed, some of those interviewed discussed how elderly slaves were treated with respect and provided with food and shelter and how enslaved men were expected to ensure the safety and health of the eldest among them. Yet these expectations were not always met as some men left their parents behind as they either escaped to freedom, or moved away from their plantations after emancipation. Take for instance the experience of Louis Young of Phillips County, a former slave who left his mother with their enslaver after the war ended. Faced with the prospect of freedom at the end of the war, Louis left the plantation of his enslaver due to being "strongheaded" and desiring a life away from his enslaver.[155] Louis' masculine affirmation centered around time spent with friends on Saturdays as the week's work came to a close.

For the majority of enslaved men, family played a prominent role in guiding and defining their masculine identities. While each individual's experience shaped him, the connection and support of the family as a cohesive unit was undeniable. Men provided and fought for their wives, children, and siblings both on the plantation and on the battlefield. As fathers, husbands,

[155] Louis Young, *Bearing Witness*, 297-298.

brothers, and sons, black men demonstrated their understanding of black family life within the larger context of the slave society which imprisoned them, and how they maneuvered in and out of those binds. In doing so, these men found and reaffirmed their sense of manhood. While overt and covert resistance offered black men an avenue to demonstrate their manhood, it proved to be an intensely personal endeavor with each man determining what level of resistance to employ, if any. But when resistance and family intertwined, it becomes clear that the black community had cultural expectations of black men to protect and provide for the family. Depending on their personal adherence to these standards, black men how far they were willing to go in order to fulfill their gendered familial obligations. For many black men, providing for and protecting their wife, children, and extended family served as demarcations of genuine manhood. As fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons, enslaved men formed family connections and connected their masculine image to cultural expectations. Through acts of resistance, protection, or through providing essentials, black men communicated a preferred form of masculine identity to their children and the wider community, affirming their masculine role within that community.

Community

The antebellum years saw many enslaved men demonstrate their conceptions of manhood through subtle and overt resistance to violent dehumanization while simultaneously striving to provide for and protect their wives, children, and extended kin network. Indeed, many men sought to pass on these conceptions of what it meant to be a leader, hard-worker, and compassionate man in the face of cruelty and trauma. As David Doddington explains, enslaved men understood themselves in relation to other enslaved men as well as their enslavers and drew from both cultures to create and demonstrate their own conceptions of manhood. For instance, enslaved men could find affirmation in physical domination of other enslaved men just as well as they could from a sense of industry and the economic success of the plantation. These men also sought to establish themselves within the political community as the Civil War opened opportunities for freedom and advancement for formerly enslaved men. Indeed, Chandra Manning demonstrates that when African-American men fought their way out of slavery and to contraband camps, they were in part seeking to establish themselves as members of their communities.[156]

Formerly enslaved Arkansans' stories of these trials and triumphs highlight the conceptions of manhood through the antebellum period and further illuminate the changes within the black community as it fought for equality during the war, Reconstruction, and onward. And while collective understandings of respect,

[156] Chandra Manning, *Troubled Refuge: Struggling for Freedom in the Civil War,* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016).

honor, and manhood help to facilitate ongoing discussions of how black men viewed themselves, it is imperative to recognize the individuality in every narrative, story, and self-conception of manhood. Each man embodied different interpretations of similar experiences and circumstances. They arrived at varied understandings of their relationship to the broader black and white communities around them and in turn carefully discerned what actions to take based on those relationships. Indeed, Doddington explains that in "establishing a gendered identity, enslaved people accepted, rejected, and refashioned the ideals and influence of those who sought mastery over them" and utilized these uniquely shaped understandings to create their own masculine worldview.[157]

This chapter will look at the ways enslaved men shaped their masculine identities within their communities, and how those ideals were strained or strengthened during the war and how these dynamics adapted to a life after the war. The enslaved black community consistently demonstrated that an ongoing dialogue existed on the question of what made an enslaved man "manly" and that multiple, sometimes conflicting, avenues to manhood were viable. Yet all of them were formed in relation to community. In their desire for masculine affirmation, enslaved men fought with and for their fellow bondsmen, and in doing so, shaped their communities through their actions. They sometimes pushed back against fellow enslaved men who worked or held (limited) authority over other bondsmen, with some former slaves placing those in such trustee positions alongside enslavers in the line of rhetorical fire. The experiences of enslaved

[157] David Stefan Doddington, *Contesting Slave Masculinity in the American South,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 10.

men in Arkansas demonstrate that their community life offered multiple, overlapping routes to manhood.[158] These paths often hinged on a few common themes that resonated with enslaved men regardless of their particular situation. One man may view himself as strong and manly based on his ability to thwart a white overseer's attempts at punishment, thus aligning himself in the resistance framework. Another may find pride in providing for his family or helping them to escape from their enslavers thereby privileging family and familial security over individual resistance. Yet it is also imperative to recognize and acknowledge that these categories are only useful in analysis, and do not represent the only understanding enslaved men had of their individual and communal manhood. That each man expressed some of the virtues of resistance and felt responsibility towards their family members is a given, whereas how much each of these pillars of masculinity guided them should be addressed within the appropriate context: the enslaved community. The enslaved men of Arkansas pursued diverse paths to forming masculine identities, such as through leadership, supporting others, and ingenuity, and often used competition and/or cooperation with other enslaved men to affirm these constructions of black manhood.

The study of enslaved gender history arose out of a necessity to combat racial stereotypes about men and women of color in United States history. Discussions of black masculinity in early works from Kenneth Stampp and Stanley Elkins were tied to the inability of enslaved men to protect their wives and children from the abuse of enslavers. These discussions focused on the

[158] Ibid, 2.

victimization and emasculation of enslaved men, asserting that the process of chattel slavery irreparably destroyed the black family.[159] This hypothesis was seemingly solidified through Daniel Moynihan's *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. In his government-funded report, Moynihan argued that chattel slavery forced the black family into a "matriarchial structure" which further degraded the black male's role in the family.[160]

In opposition to the works of Kenneth Stampp, Stanley Elkins, and Daniel Moynihan, revisionist historians sought to demonstrate that black men fought against dehumanization and emasculation by showcasing their resistance in the face of overwhelming odds. Historians like Eugene Genovese and Herbert Gutman argued that enslaved men embodied the same masculine characteristics and ideals as white men during the antebellum period, and fulfilled such obligations despite constant oppression and threat of retaliation from enslavers.[161] Yet, some historians like Deborah Gray White clarified that while enslaved men did seek to fulfill masculine roles within the enslaved community, they were often prevented from doing so. This in turn prompted enslaved women to rely more on other enslaved women than enslaved men, as they had more

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[159] Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South*. New York: Knopf, 1956.; Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).
[160] Daniel P. Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action.* (Washington, DC: Office of Policy Planning and Research, U.S. Department of Labor, 1965).
[161] Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, (New York: Pantheon, 1974).; Herbert George Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925.* (New York: Pantheon, 1976).

daily interaction with other women and could not rely on enslaved male protection.[162]

Historians have continued to discuss the worlds enslaved women and men inhabited every day, and discuss those interactions as part of a more focused conversation about how gender shaped the lived experiences of those in bondage. In this vein, authors like Sergio Lussana describe all-male spaces and the interactions enslaved men had with one another which allowed them to demonstrate and affirm their masculinity.[163] While historians have noted the segregated work lives of men and women in the antebellum south, this did not preclude men and women from interacting during the day, nor does it cover their interactions away from the enslavers' gaze.

The enslaved community served as the anvil upon which black men hammered out their definitions of manhood and masculine identity. While these men could embrace different techniques for forging their masculine identity, they were forced to temper their steel against the commonly held beliefs of their community. Depending on their behaviors, enslaved men could form and shape their manhood based on communal assumptions of manhood which the men could either accept or reject. It is equally important to recognize these dynamics as part of a community in which men themselves could be accepted or rejected

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[162] Deborah Gray White. *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South.* (New York: Norton, 1985).
[163] Sergio Lussana. *My Brother Slaves: Friendship, Masculinity, and Resistance in the Antebellum South*. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2016).; David Stefan Doddington. *Contesting Slave Masculinity in the American South.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

based on their behavior and masculine expression. For instance, George Washington Claridy of Howard County recognized his drunkenness and violent behavior as integral to his personal identity, yet understood that this made him a wicked man in the eyes of others and to himself.[164] Claridy's understanding of his role within the community denoted the differences between acceptable and unacceptable behavior as viewed by the larger black community.

Arguing for a relational conception of manhood is not to say that all members of an enslaved community or neighborhood got along. In his analysis of the enslaved community, Peter Kolchin also argued that the exaggeration of a strong and cohesive slave community neglected the conflicts and tensions that presented themselves within the enslaved community.[165] In fact, constructions of manhood could manifest in disputes between enslaved men. Black men fought with other enslaved men when confronted with threats or violence. In *Slave Against Slave,* Jeff Forret suggested that black male honor codes often coincided with the white male honor codes of the South and black men were equally ready and willing to use violence against other people of color to demonstrate their manhood or defend their honor.[166] As Forret explained, violence between enslaved men could play a constructive role in determining social status or solving disputes.[167] Much as with their white counterparts, black men used violence to retaliate against slights to their honor and standing in the community.

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[164] George Washington Claridy, *Bearing Witness*, 161-163.
[165] Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619-1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 160.
[166] Jeff Forret, *Slave Against Slave: Plantation Violence in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 288.
[167] Ibid, 25.

But this is not to suggest that black men unquestioningly accepted their enslavers worldview, but rather black men adapted it to fit within their own cultural understanding.[168] This practice persisted from the antebellum period through the war and Reconstruction.

For example, Joe Ray of Hempstead County recalled his father as a strong and honorable man. Joe mentioned that his father worked with enslaved men and women as they made the transition from cargo to chattel in New Orleans for a time and how he had killed an overseer who attempted to lash him.[169] These demonstrations left an impression on Joe that he must act to maintain his position within the black community and use violence when necessary to preserve his status. This belief became action when Joe caught the man who had slept with his wife along the river and he aimed to shoot the man, but ultimately refrained due to the presence of law enforcement at the boat landing.[170] In a similar instance of masculine retribution, R. B. Anderson of Pulaski County recalled being cheated out of his property after the war by a friend, and threatened to kill his friend, only to be stopped by his wife.[171] Indeed these vocalizations, even many years after the fact, demonstrate Forret's assessment that black men explicitly expressed their manhood by showing their readiness and ability to use violence to protect their honor against others in their community.[172] These actions helped to demonstrate that formerly enslaved men

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[168] Doddington, *Contesting Slave Masculinity*, 68.
[169] Joe Ray, *Bearing Witness*, 142-143.
[170] Ibid*,* 143.
[171] R. B. Anderson, *Bearing Witness*, 315.
[172] Forret, *Slave Against Slave*, 297.

sought to defend their social standing through violence or threats of violence after the war ended and through Reconstruction.

The resistance put up by enslaved men, as described in the first chapter, provided affirmation primarily along an individual basis while communal aspects of resistance took the form of sneaking away from enslavers during the night to trade goods, fellowship with one another, and enjoying entertainment. Enslaved men routinely utilized this time to fulfill their masculine roles as providers and protectors, as described in chapter two, and demonstrate them to their community. For instance, Emma Moore of Arkansas recalled bondsmen stealing food away in the night and meeting up with friends and relatives to cook out and ensure adequate food and provisions reached enslaved families.[173] Meeting the needs of their extended communities served a critical function in establishing and affirming gendered roles for enslaved men. Ellen Briggs Thompson of Howard County recalled a similar secret meetings amongst the enslaved in her community as enslaved men and women would play the fiddle and cook after dark away from the plantation. Thompson also noted that bondspeople bartered, allowing an opportunity to acquire needed goods and materials.[174] Such bartering allowed enslaved men to utilize their skills to create as well as offer an opportunity to interact within a marketplace setting where a good reputation and status would naturally benefit their ability to negotiate effectively with others.

Enslaved men also evaded patrols during the night in order to fellowship with friends and family. In doing so, enslaved men found masculine affirmation

[173] Emma Moore, *Bearing Witness,* 14-16.
[174] Ellen Briggs Thompson, *Bearing Witness,* 170.

not only in their displays of resistance, but also through interactions with other men. Being away from an enslaver's gaze, even just for a few hours, allowed black men to solidify fraternal bonds through shared experiences and entertainment, creating a community of manliness. As Anthony Kaye described in his work *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South*, enslaved men operated within their own realms of influence that centered around their plantation and the surrounding plantations. This focus on local power dynamics influenced how enslaved men transmitted information/gossip, collaborated with other men in their area, and formed friendships with those they worked alongside.[175] This also privileged those within one's neighborhood over runaways from outside their communication networks. This allowed those within a neighborhood to coordinate meeting places and times to trade, talk, and enjoy fellowship with others.

Indeed, Hannah Jameson of Howard County recalled that dances and music were routinely held away from prying eyes after a day's work. The parties left such an impression on Jameson that she was able to relay the lyrics to two songs to her interviewer.[176] Solomon Lambert of Monroe County also remembered dancing and music being a staple of the enslaved community of Arkansas. Lambert described the music and dancing as integral to the enslaved experience claiming that, "We made our music. Music is natural with our color."[177] Such recollections shine a light on one of the few interactions in which

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[175] Anthony Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).
[176] Hannah Jameson, *Bearing Witness*, 165.
[177] Solomon Lambert, *Bearing Witness,* 248.

enslaved men were able to demonstrate their masculine qualities in front of women and to seek out romantic partners. Enslaved men utilized the opportunities afforded to them in worship to vent frustrations and seeking communal affirmation in shared experiences. Indeed, O. W. Green of Bradley County recalled enslaved men and women sneaking out after dark to "pray and preach and shout."[178] The catharsis available to enslaved men proved to be limited to situations where they were able to express control over their surroundings and enjoy time with their family and friends. These unobserved interactions provided much needed opportunities for diversion, relief, and essentials to the enslaved community and the enslaved men who sought to provide for and protect it. These undercover rendezvous also provided an excellent opportunity for enslaved men and women to vent their frustrations, enjoy music and dancing, and exist as people, not property.

Christianity also provided men with an avenue to masculine affirmation through religious leadership and participation in their communities. Chrisitian ideals certainly guided the behaviors and actions of many enslaved men, but not strictly in the stereotypical "submissive slave" role that was attributed to them by contemporaries. Indeed, Albert J. Raboteau described how enslaved religious experiences varied from plantation to plantation, with some enslaved preachers parroting the sermon of their white counterparts and others calling for righteous resistance and pushing for freedom.[179] It also must be said that not all enslaved

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[178] O. W. Green, *Bearing Witness,* 48.
[179] Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The 'Invisible Institution' in the Antebellum South*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

men participated in religious practices, and even if they did, how closely they followed its teachings varied widely. For instance, George Kye of Crawford County admitted to his interviewer that he attended church while in bondage, but was always a “scoundrel for dancing” implying that he did not live up to the standards set for him through the church’s community. This dissonance continued through the war and into Reconstruction, where Kye met his wife and promised her father to right his wrongs and “go to the mourners bench” if only he could marry Sal. Sure enough, Kye joined the church and served as head of Sunday School as well as deacon to the church shortly after his marriage, thereby fulfilling his promise to his father-in-law and solidifying his manhood by his church’s communal standards.[180]

Pastors and religious leaders were able to stand out in their communities through weekly sermons despite working alongside their congregants during the week. Such burdens did not allow most enslaved preachers to venture very far from where they lived and worked. In fact, most preachers were confined to their immediate locality and were not ordained by white religious institutions. Moses Mitchell of Arkansas County typified the experience of an enslaved preacher, sharing his faith within his area of influence for fifty-five years while he worked other jobs as a bondsman, or for modest pay to support himself after the war.[181]

Such actions demonstrated to the community that men like Moses were able to live up to the standards set by Christianity and also maintain good standing within their communities. Indeed, Elmire Hill of Jefferson County noted

[180] George Kye, *Bearing Witness,* 68.
[181] Moses Mitchell, *Bearing Witness,* 28.

the importance religious leaders played in their communities as she recalled that her second husband served as a local pastor and afforded her the love and respect denied to her in her first marriage.[182] Betty Coleman mirrored this assessment of preachers as she told of her marriage to Joe Coleman. Betty recalled that Joe fulfilled his masculine expectations as a husband and pastor so that after his death, "all other men seemed ordinary to me."[183] Through their marriage, Joe exhibited the masculine traits of a husband and preacher and found affirmation through his wife and congregation.

While enslavers routinely employed Biblical rhetoric to solidify their claim to mastery over an entire race of people, enslaved men, unsurprisingly, did not accept such a view of scripture. With stereotypical representations of enslaved men like Uncle Tom from Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* being peaceful, submissive *Christian* slaves in the face of cruelty, Chrisitian submission became synonymous with black passivity. Stowe utilized former slave narratives to create her fictional characters, yet honed in on black submission in bondage, claiming it was in accordance with God's will and a display of true faith.[184] But enslaved people and their captors knew different. Nat Turner's revolt of 1831 had lain bare to antebellum whites the subversive Christianity of enslaved people.[185]

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[182] Elmire Hill, *Bearing Witness*, 200.
[183] Betty Coleman, *Bearing Witness,* 5.
[184] Sarah Roth, "'How a Slave was Made a Man': Negotiating Black Violence and Masculinity in Antebellum Slave Narratives" *Slavery and Abolition* 28, no. 2, (August 2007): 267.
[185] Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Indeed, John Bates of Pulaski County recalled his uncle Ben, could not only read the Bible, but deployed it in attacks against the institution of slavery, proclaiming that the Bible spoke of freedom and equality.[186] Uncle Ben did not hide this interpretation of scripture and preached this message before his congregation on Sundays and in the quarters during the week. Bates furthered recalled that once while speaking in the quarters, their enslaver overheard Uncle Ben talking of freedom and scoffed, suggesting that the enslaved men would remain in bondage till their deaths because they did not "have sense enough to make a living if [they] were free." The man may have laughed but he took Ben's activity seriously and proceeded to confiscate Uncle Ben's Bible and forbid further worship services since "that book put bad ideas in [their] heads." But Uncle Ben continued his work, obtaining another Bible and keeping it hidden away from disapproving eyes.[187] Through his employment of the very text used to oppress him, Uncle Ben displayed his ability to challenge the assumptions about black men and their adherence to Christian doctrine while fulfilling his masculine role as a leader with a message of hope to his enslaved community.

But not all enslaved men viewed Christianity as a necessary part of their manhood, with some like Anthony Taylor of Clark County arguing that a man could be just as good outside of the church as in it.[188] Such a sentiment came from an understandable suspicion over the religious institution due to enslavers fondness of using Biblical references to justify the continued enslavement of

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[186] John Bates, *Bearing Witness*, 317.
[187] Ibid.
[188] Anthony Taylor, *Bearing Witness*, 60-64.

black bodies. Indeed this distrust of the church and its members persisted for some enslaved men after the war ended. George Washington Claridy certainly raised questions about the legitimacy of the church and its congregants, as he suggested members desired money more than anything and that they lived a double life by "singing and shouting on Sunday and raising the devil with [the] neighbor on Monday."[189]

One of the most profound ways black men exhibited their masculine responsibilities was through attempts to improve the lives and well-being of their communities. In many ways this was tied to the other two themes addressed in this work: resistance to oppression, and familial obligations. Yet a sense of masculine obligation to the larger community proved to be a defining feature for many enslaved and formerly enslaved men during this time. This often took the form of men educating others and serving as conduits for information within their communities, and in some cases physically providing for dependents within the community. For instance, Silas Dothram of Pulaski County expressed frustration in his old age for being unable to work to provide for himself and his wife. With the government and broader community failing to adequately provide for his needs, Silas recalled that the only person to help him was the black man he used to work for. The act of providing for him led Silas to labelling his former employer, "a man" and suggested that his expectations of being able to rely on the black community in his old age were not met, except by one true man.[190]

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[189] George Washington Claridy, *Bearing Witness*, 163.
[190] Silas Dothrum, *Bearing Witness*, 324.

There also existed a substantial push for education during and in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War in Arkansas. Enslaved men understood the value of education and often attempted to learn to read on their own, although with limited success. But as war ignited, raged, and eventually settled, many black fathers attempted to provide a better future for their children in providing access to resources which were previously unthinkable. Indeed, Horatio W. Williams of Jefferson County expressed such a sentiment, claiming that he gave all of his children the opportunity to learn that he never received.[191] This desire for education was present during the antebellum period, but typically confined itself to parents teaching their children what little they could glean without formal schooling. Most instances followed an example recalled by Dinah Perry, who stated that her father tried to teach her to read based on what he gathered in taking the enslavers' child to school every day.[192]

Formal education for black children would not come about until after the war, but Charlotte Stephens of Pulaski County recalled that her father taught at the first school for black children in 1863 as the war raged around the state.[193] Charlotte recalled in her biography that her father, William Wallace Andrews, acted quickly to enact his long standing plan for black education once rebel troops vacated the town.[194] Wallace Andrews opened the doors of an old Methodist church to a surging crowd of over one hundred formerly enslaved men,

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[191] Horatio W. Williams*, Bearing Witness*, 218.
[192] Dinah Perry, *Bearing Witness*, 208-210.
[193] Charlotte Stephens, *Bearing Witness*, 335.
[194] Adolphine Fletcher Terry, *Charlotte Stephens: Little Rock's First Black Teacher*, (Little Rock: Academic Press of Arkansas, 1973), 42.

women, and children of all ages soon after Federal troops occupied Little Rock and sought to teach each and everyone despite an acute lack of books.[195] Julia A. White of Pulaski County similarly recalled her parents being highly concerned with her education and continuing education in their surrounding area.[196]

The desire to educate the black community prompted many black men to send their children to school and/or help to provide or maintain access to education. For example, Parrish Washington's decided to serve as school director for six years during Reconstruction.[197] Scott Bond also started a school where he learned to read alongside his step-father.[198] Access to education provided black men an opportunity not only to learn themselves, but to provide an indispensable asset to future generations of black children so that the black community might prosper. Indeed, Tom Haynes of Drew County believed that the younger generation within the black community failed to capitalize on the educational opportunities that had been denied to the enslaved population for generations.[199] While some formerly enslaved interviewees expressed a disdain for schooling, most of those interviewed expressed a desire to see the black community educate its youth in the hope of a better life and future. This desire that once was but a few smoldering embers grew into a fire which would only continue to grow with each passing generation.

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[195] Ibid.
[196] Julia A. White*, Bearing Witness*, 345.
[197] Parrish Washington, *Bearing Witness*, 216.
[198] Scott Bond, *Bearing Witness*, 85.
[199] Tom Haynes, *Bearing Witness,* 118.

It is also crucial to address the presence and nature of hierarchies within the enslaved community. This social structure allowed for some black men to stand above their fellow bondsmen, whether as an overseer or plantation trustee, but it did not (express) itself along a vertical axis that demanded deference to those above from those below. Instead it operated along a roughly equal axis of respect which allowed for greater understanding and sharing of honor and respect between enslaved men. This heightened enslaved men's sense of their place along this axis and made them more responsive to demonstrations against their manhood whether it be through aggressive language or physical confrontations. For example, Harriet McFarlin Payne of Arkansas County recalled a distinct difference between field and house bondspeople.[200] Payne described a system where field hands and enslaved people who worked in the main house were separated and treated differently. Such a system naturally stoked frustrations and tensions within the black community and gave some enslaved men a sense of superiority.

Enslaved men in Arkansas desired respect and affirmation from their black and white neighbors but did not beholden themselves to the judgment of their enslavers. Remembering the context of the WPA interviews, it is understandable that most interviewees did not wish to bring critical attention to themselves and thereby single themselves out in their communities. Many of those interviewed identified themselves in relation to their former enslavers and attributed the cruelties of bondage to *other* enslavers within their communities. This was

[200] Harriet McFarlin Payne, *Bearing Witness*, 29-31.

coupled with the fact that some formerly enslaved men heavily identified themselves with the larger white community and sought to demonstrate that their standing within the community had been affirmed by other black and white men. Indeed, a number of testimonies demonstrate that formerly enslaved men associated themselves with traditionally white masculine qualities such as a strong mind for business, negotiations, or understanding of the markets in an effort to showcase their separation from racial stereotypes about black men and more in line with stereotypes about white men.

Sometimes this association could be born out of a desire to present an easily recognizable form of masculinity with the white community. For example, Sam Keaton of Arkansas County recalled his father fulfilling his masculine and civic duty through voting. Yet Keaton distanced himself from his father's strong Republican record by pointing out to his interviewer that he had refrained from voting for fifty years due to his lack of political understanding (while suggesting others were equally ignorant on the subject) and further argued that women did not have any reason to vote, and should stay "at home" to raise children and tend to the home.[201] These assertions played on common themes of Southern white masculinity, and demonstrated the similarities between white and black conceptions of manhood while allowing Keaton to appear non-threatening to the larger white community. Keaton also expressed his frustration with overwhelming debt and being unable to receive government assistance despite his status as a landowner and farmer. Keaton's frustration played on assumptions that as a

[201] Sam Keaton, *Bearing Witness*, 25.

participating member of the community he should be entitled to some benefits when down on his luck and aligned with ideals of communal assistance prevalent within the enslaved community where he was raised.

Jeff Forret's argument of vertical and horizontal axis of respect on which black men interacted with those inside and out of the black community shows how enslaved men interacted differently with each other than with whites. In relationships with enslavers, men of color were forced by necessity to operate along a vertical axis of honor which placed enslavers above them socially, and thus forced them to show deference. It is important to address the whole enslaved community and eventual emancipated community to properly address the unique social and cultural pressures that arose during the antebellum period and through the war years. While enslaved men often defined their manhood through resistance to white oppression and fulfilling the gendered expectations of their families, these men also negotiated their manhood through social interactions, disagreements, and even violence within the black community. Enslaved men sought to exert their influence, demonstrate their abilities to other blacks, and defend their honor in an effort to gain social standing and solidify their respectability within their communities. This desire continued through the war and allowed black men to utilize their skills and abilities to solidify their standing within their communities. But in their interactions with other enslaved men along the horizontal axis of respect, enslaved men negotiated their standing through interactions with others that were roughly their equal. This is not to suggest that no hierarchies existed among enslaved communities. Instead, this

axis of respect allowed men to stand out based on their personal abilities, prowess, and intellect. For example, when an enslaved man demonstrated his ability to provide information and serve as an effective communicator between plantations, he gained the respect and social standing that affirmed his manhood in the eyes of the community. Through this hypothetical driver's position, he could utilize his position for the greater good of his community, thus allowing him to "perform masculine provider roles" as a provider and protector.[202]

This idea, explored in Doddington's work, highlights the decisions and internalizations made by enslaved men who were placed in "trustee" positions. Doddington noted that the men placed into overseer roles generally demonstrated traditionally masculine qualities such as strength, honor, and respectability prior to their "promotion" to an authoritative role. The hope from enslavers centered around connecting the plantation's profits to the self-worth of a black overseer to encourage the enslaved man to identify with his enslaver's interests and compel others to work harder to fulfill these goals. But enslaved men did not uncritically accept this view of such a role, and often used overseer roles to express their ideals of manhood through industry and command the respect of those within their communities.[203] This allowed enslaved men to not only utilize their roles to protect and provide for those under their watch, but to also solidify their personal drive to work and demonstrate their ability to tackle the challenges of such a role head-on. In doing so, enslaved men found a way to

[202] Doddington, *Contesting Slave Masculinity*, 64.
[203] Ibid, 55.

work within the confines of a slave system to challenge prevalent, racist stereotypes and combat their dehumanization.

For instance, Eva Strayhorn of Johnson County recalled an enslaved man named Solomon running the plantation for his absentee enslaver. Solomon earned a great deal of praise for his ability to manage the plantation and utilized his ability to read to great effect. Solomon taught himself to read as he escorted his enslaver's child to school and demonstrated his aptitude for management by maintaining the plantation in the almost complete absence of his enslaver, who served as a state legislator.[204] This recognition of his abilities gave Solomon higher standing within the enslaved community and served to affirm his manhood.

Indeed, such "self-making" through their roles and jobs allowed enslaved men a degree of autonomy in constructing their masculine identities and opportunities arose during the war as Federal troops began assigning newly freed blacks to plantations in an effort to utilize their labor. One such instance occurred when the former enslaved overseer of the Trulock plantation outside of Pine Bluff, Reuben Blackwell, served as head of a Federal plantation. Reuben Blackwell's enslavers installed him as overseer by at least 1846 as Amanda Trulock, Blackwell's female enslaver, wrote of his importance to plantation operations to her sister in her discussion of the new plantation in Arkansas.[205] Indeed, Brooke Greenburg speculates that Reuben may have even been

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[204] Eva Strayhorn, *Bearing Witness*, 221-228.
[205] Amanda Beardsley Trulock to Marcia Beardsley, March 16, 1846.

overseer for Trulock's plantation in Georgia, prior to their move to Arkansas.[206] This experience undoubtedly came into play when Reuben fled the Trulock plantation to Federal lines and soon asserted himself into the conversation of Federal plantation management. In his report on the development of such plantation projects, Major William G. Sargent remarked at how well Reuben managed the project and relayed comments that Reuben made about his ability to manage the Trulock plantation for years before the war.[207] The fact that Reuben felt and communicated this feeling of pride suggested that such a position provided him with masculine affirmation and served as a defining part of his manhood within his community.

Not all such social elevations garnered respect. Indeed, John Blassingame suggested that the role of a driver or manager elicited hate and repulsion from the enslaved community due to its association with white authority.[208] For example, many enslaved men were put in charge of day-to-day functions of plantations at the behest of absent or apathetic enslavers only concerned with profit margins. While such a placement could affirm an enslaved man's sense of his own manhood, it did not always translate to communal affirmation from those he now had a limited power over. Such was the case for

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[206] Brooke Greenberg, "'Ties That I Have to Bind Me Here:' Amanda Beardsley Trulock in the Arkansas Delta, 1845-1866." Arkansas Historical Quarterly 77, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 21-44.
[207] W. G. Sargent to Col. John Eaton, Jr., July 1, 1864, Records of the United States Army Continental Commands (Record Group 393), Part I, Geographical Divisions, Departments, and Military (Reconstruction) Districts, file G-103, series "Letters Received, 1864-67" (entry 269), National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.
[208] John Blassingame, "Status and Social Structure in the Slave Community: Evidence from New Sources," in Harry P. Owens (ed.), *Perspectives and Irony in American Slavery* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1976), 140.

Annie Page who recalled that some newly appointed enslaved men became "uppity" and looked down on by the rest of the enslaved community.[209] Indeed, this distrust of those in trustee positions is echoed by Willis Winn of Hempstead County as he recalled that the enslaved men who told on other bondsmen were referred to as "pimps" and held in contempt by the black community.[210] Yet recent scholarship looks to fully develop the multiple avenues to black manhood that previously found themselves lumped together in a revisionist argument which suggested that the resistance model served as the only claim to manhood for enslaved men. As the discussion of black masculinity moves forward, it is important to understand the individual and communal aspects of gender identity in order to represent all aspects of manhood within the enslaved and newly emancipated black community.

Some formerly enslaved men found the war and their changed status to be an avenue to solidify their claims to manhood through industry and intellect. Some black men capitalized on the uncertainty and fluidity of movement within Union controlled areas within Arkansas to maneuver the social climate of a war-torn state and successfully develop credibility and respectability within their communities. In one such instance, Wesley Dodson of Washington County demonstrated his industry and standing within the community through his interactions with Union troops moving through the area. Despite being enslaved at the outbreak of war, Dodson quickly demonstrated a propensity for business as he tended a small stable of horses during the war. Dodson bought older work

[209] Annie Page, Bearing Witness, 368-370.
[210] Willis Winn, *Bearing Witness*, 152.

horses and nursed them back to proper form. But as Union troops moved through the area, they requisitioned Dodson's horses. In their response to his petition to the Southern Claims Commission, the administrators cited Dodson's industriousness and his good standing within the, albeit, white community as a viable reason to award him most of the claimed sum.[211] Through his diligence and intelligent use of resources, Dodson demonstrated his masculine claim and received affirmation as well as one hundred and forty dollars.

Rebecca Howard described a similar instance in Washington County with Wesley Mecklin who also utilized the freedom of movement as a result of the increased presence of Union troops in the area. Wesley's enslaver, Robert Mecklin, had taken to hiding as much as possible to avoid passing guerrilla troops and Unionists seeking a signature on an oath of loyalty.[212] During this time Wesley demonstrated his aptitude and capability as a man by tending to duties on two separate farms, collecting firewood and game for sale, communicating sensitive information to Union forces, and even taking up arms as he "helped defend Fayetteville when the place was attacked by the Rebels."[213] These examples contrasted the stereotype of a weak and unintelligent subhuman employed by former enslavers seeking to reestablish control. It also demonstrated the adaptability of many black men who found themselves in an

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[211] Wesley Dodson deposition. Wesley Dodson (Washington Co., AR) claim no. 19121, Approved Claims Files of the Southern Claims Commission, 1871-1880, Records of the House of Representatives, 1789-2015, Record Group 217, NARA, reproductions at Fold3.com
[212] Rebecca Howard, "No Country for Old Men: Patriarchs, Slaves, and Guerrilla War in Northwest Arkansas," Arkansas Historical Quarterly 75 no. 4 (Winter 2016): 336-354.
[213] Wesley Mecklin deposition. Wesley Mecklin (Washington Co., AR) claim no. 9234, Barred and Disallowed Claims Files of the Southern Claims Commission, 1871-1880, Records of the House of Representatives, 1789-2015, Record Group 233, NARA, reproductions at Fold3.com

advantageous position as the war coarsed around them. Remembering that masculine roles were dictated and affirmed by cultural expectations, examples like the Wesleys' demonstrate the ability of formerly enslaved men to navigate a changing environment and shape it to their benefit. Such actions further demonstrated the growing ability of black men to shape their own lives and in doing so strengthen their claims to manhood.

In a different understanding of manhood, the idea of "passing," or in other words, a person with mixed heritage appearing and being accepted as white in their community, makes the process of understanding black manhood that much more complex. For instance, many enslaved men either recognized or learned that they were the offspring of their enslaver. In some instances this led to them being given a more prominent role on the plantation as either a foreman or a driver and sometimes being allowed a degree of education. These positions and education carried social weight and offered easily recognizable paths to masculine affirmation due to their importance and access to places and people many enslaved men and women would never receive. In an atypical example, Charlotte Stephens recalled her father's, William Andrews, enslaver (and father) being an Englishman who gave William an education. During the war, William utilized this education to teach at the first school for black children in Little Rock in 1863 and continued his work through the war and into Reconstruction.[214] For William, his sense of identity came from his understanding of his heritage and from the privileges he had been afforded. This sense of masculine responsibility

[214] Charlotte Stephens, *Bearing Witness*, 335.

prompted the young minister to share his knowledge with the black with the black community in an effort to improve their station.

The story of Scott Bond is perhaps the most eye-catching, even if incomplete, testimony of all the formerly enslaved Arkansans. Bond's interview set the stage for the grandiose nature of his recollections, and highlights a few key themes which have yet to be discussed in this account while affirming some that have. Bond, a "self-made" businessman during the post-war years recalled that his early years were spent on adventures with other boys his age and going out after dark to enjoy hunting with older enslaved men. After his mother's death and due to his repeated inquiries, Bond came to understand that he was the son of a white man who had hired out his mother as a domestic enslaved woman. This undoubtedly had an effect on his sense of manhood and identity as Bond strove to become a successful entrepreneur and businessman. Indeed, in the opening section of his narrative, Bond resoundingly aligns himself with what he viewed as the greatest successes by African-American men up and to that point: Booker T. Washington and Granville T. Woods accomplishments, and black troops saving the Rough Riders at San Juan Hill as well as fighting overseas in the Great War.[215] These examples relied on easily recognizable instances of masculine affirmation: business and military success.

Yet an incident in Ravenden Springs, Mississippi helps one understand the convergence of white and black ideals of manhood. During a trip in search of his father, Bond was assumed to be a white man by locals and treated as such in

[215] Scott Bond, *Bearing Witness*, 72.

public. Instead of correcting this assumption, Bond allowed his stage-coach driver and others in his travels to assume he was white and carried on about his business in order to avoid danger. Such acquiescence came from understandable apprehension about revealing himself in the Deep South, but his interactions with his white family speak to his understanding of manhood and success, since it was a sense of duty and desire for information that brought Bond on the trip.

Indeed, Bond claimed that his journey to Mississippi came from a desire to know his father, and to provide monetary assistance if his father needed it. Bond remarked to Mr. Goodlow, his biological father's uncle, that he understood many successful southern men had lost their greatest assets (read slaves) during the war, and offered to help his father if he had fallen onto hard times.[216] In this interaction, and through his interaction with the formerly enslaved coach driver, Bond clearly demonstrated his assumption that black men had a role to play in their communities and sought to affirm their masculinity by being beneficial to that community through hard work and enterprise. For instance, Bond attributed great perseverance and resourcefulness to the black coachman who had suffered many injustices as an enslaved man, but who had, in Bond's view, shown those hardships to be "blessings in disguise" through his exhaustive work to survive.[217]

This is the key to understanding Bond's views of manhood as a biracial man: work ethic. For Bond, and for many of his contemporaries, the idea that

[216] Ibid, 80.
[217] Ibid, 77-78.

formerly enslaved men should work to better themselves and their communities proved to be the ultimate mark of masculinity. Such a worldview, as contentious as it was/is, provided the window through which men like Scott Bond understood themselves and other black men after the war and through the turn of the century. It also, conveniently, allowed for an easy explanation for why many men could not bring themselves out of poverty: they simply failed to work hard enough. There also existed a racial undertone to the idea of capitalistic success which attributed good "business sense" to the white heritage of biracial men like Bond. In other words, to be a successful businessman, one had to be a "white" man.

Indeed, this racial prejudice proved to be a common justification for the success of black overseers during the antebellum period. For example, the interviewer of Charles Dortch of Dallas County suggested that Charles' father, Reuben, owed his position and capabilities to his white heritage, not his work ethic or drive. But Charles recalled that his father, Reuben, exerted his authority over other enslaved workers without "any unfriendliness" towards him, which, it could be argued, stemmed from being the son of the enslaver.[218] This certainly solidified Reuben's sense of manhood and his position within the enslaved community, despite being in a potentially contentious position as a trustee. Yet, Charles' sister, Adriana recalled that their father had left the plantation and joined up with Union forces in Little Rock to secure his family's freedom. While Reuben certainly felt some responsibility for his enslaver's property, as evidenced through

[218] Charles Green Dortch, *Bearing Witness*, 95.

his intervention in a dispute between the enslaver Hays, and Union troops looking for horses earlier in the war, it did not prevent him from aligning himself with Federal troops and seeking to end the peculiar institution.[219]

The black community served as the crucible where enslaved men created and maintained a masculine identity. These examples demonstrated that while black men expressed concern and sometimes compassion for former enslavers, the sense of self and identity created as men did not rely on white approval or affirmation, but rather exhibited characteristics found in both white and black cultural traditions that were largely informed by personal experience and perception. Many biracial children understood their mixed heritage, but still identified with the black community due to shared experiences. Black men, regardless of the varying levels of pigment in their skin, understood the expectations for masculine behavior within their communities and sought to meet those expectations in order to maintain their manhood and place in social hierarchy. Enslaved men, and the children they raised routinely provided for and protected their brothers and sisters in bondage but were not afraid to meet challenges to their manhood or honor with violence and/or threats of violence. It must also be noted that enslaved and emancipated black men who adhered to Christian values did not uniformly accept nor believe their oppression or enslavement resulted from divine intervention. In fact, some men utilized religious authority to speak out against their oppression and attempted to spread hope to the hopeless. Black masculinity within the black community of Arkansas

[219] Adriana W. Kerns, *Bearing Witness*, 103.

did not require adherence to one particular theme or path, but instead reaffirmed Doddington's analysis that black masculinity was as diverse as the men themselves.

Conclusion

While enslaved men in Arkansas constructed and demonstrated varied concepts of masculinity in the years leading up to and through the Civil War, clear patterns emerge. Black men took pride in their work, fought for freedom, and served as leaders and providers in their romantic and familial relationships. Whether through hard work, bravery, or via their actions as family men, enslaved men garnered the respect of their fellow bondsmen and interacted in predominantly all-male environments along a “horizontal axis” of respect. This relatively equal playing field allowed enslaved men more social mobility, and is the reason black men could pursue multiple avenues to recognizable manhood among their peers. As demonstrated through the preceding chapters, enslaved men created, demonstrated, and affirmed their masculinity through individual and cooperative actions of resistance, fulfilling gendered expectations of family life, and establishing and maintaining lives within the enslaved community beyond the oversight of their enslavers. This study builds upon current and developing research into the gendered context of enslaved life which concludes that enslaved men built, maintained, and affirmed a sense of manhood despite the constant oppressive and dehumanizing aspects of the slave system. While the burdens of chattel slavery affected each individual differently, there were commonly accepted forms of masculine affirmation. Through overt and subtle acts of resistance, entering into romantic relationships, and enjoying friendships, enslaved men buck stereotypes of timidity, passivity, as well as depictions of subhuman intelligence and proneness to aggression or animalistic impulses.

Enslaved men were human, and fought against a system that denied this basic fact.

The enslaved men of Arkansas embodied commonly held ideals of manhood across the slave-holding states, evidenced by the fact that many of those discussed were forcibly brought between several states to make it to Arkansas. Each individual created and maintained their own sense of self and masculine identity based on commonly held cultural standards. In their attempts to challenge their oppressors, the black men of Arkansas fought directly and covertly against their enslavers in both individual and collective acts of resistance. These risk-taking behaviors demonstrated an individual's manhood to the broader community, earning him respect and affirmation. In their interactions away from enslavers, enslaved men recognized each other's honor and standing within the community through acts of bravery, daring, and cunning. Far from being brutalized into docility, enslaved men actively showed deference in order to survive and routinely employed subtle means of sabotage or resistance. While chattel slavery brutalized and destroyed countless lives, it did not succeed in uniformly deconstructing humanity. Indeed, such brutality reinforced the idea that those in bondage cried out for recognition of shared humanity between themselves and their enslavers. This desire to be considered human, and more to the point, to be considered men, should not be forgotten.

Enslaved men also participated in family life and sought to raise their children alongside their partners. Many black men learned directly from their fathers or other male family members and formed families of their own, fulfilling

their roles as husbands and fathers in their own right. Black men wanted to be husbands and fathers, often travelling to visit and provide for spouses on neighboring plantations and farms. Their desire to raise and provide for their families prompted enslaved men to rebel against enslavers and in some cases flee to safety with their families, and once the war came to Arkansas, many sought freedom and refuge within Union encampments.

While contemporary slave narratives showcased the resistant model of masculinity which sought to defy the Southern slave society, the WPA narratives demonstrated how formerly enslaved men altered their views of black manhood in the years following the war. These interviews also serve as a memory project. The recollections offered insight into the memories of those interviewed and helped to explain how the enslaved community viewed black masculinity. These recollections served as excellent templates for understanding the actions and stories which left such lasting impressions on those interviewed. Those interviewed shared a lived experience, and in doing so gave voice to a people long silenced. While both examples of narratives undoubtedly proved fallible due to the situations in which they were created, yet it still allows for a better understanding into the mindset and belief system of the black community as it struggled, and eventually attained, freedom. The attributes of strength, intelligence, and honor permeated black manhood throughout the antebellum period and into the post-war world, only varying in their expressions. For instance, an enslaved man who exhibited great industry and a mind for work undoubtedly saw this as part of his masculine identity regardless of the fact that

his legal status remained equivalent to property. It is critical to remember that each individual created their own sense of self and tempered that with communal expectations of what it meant to be a man.

The ideals of manhood forged during the antebellum period carried former slaves through the war and into the Reconstruction period. Earning their freedom through flight, military service, or protecting those at home allowed black men to demonstrate that their masculinity was equal to that of their former enslavers. But as the smoke cleared, black men faced a multitude of challenges, both old and new. New ways of disenfranchisement and oppression forced formerly enslaved men to adapt their masculine identities in subtle ways in correlation to their developing situations. This new world also prompted many younger black men to either accept or reject the masculine identities of their fathers and older blacks in their communities. Indeed, many young men declared that African-Americans could not be considered free until they were considered equal and took political action to achieve that end, demonstrating their manhood in the process. The masculine identity of enslaved men influenced the behaviors and actions of generations of freed men, and the cumulative effects can still be seen to this day. Whether through calls to action or demonstrations of resiliency, protecting their loved ones or enjoying a night with friends, the actions of enslaved men, and the manhood they exhibited, deserves recognition and study so that future generations may understand how the “other half” lived.[220]

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[220] Henry Blake in *Bearing Witness: Memories of Arkansas Slavery Narratives from the 1930s WPA Collections*, ed. George E. Lankford (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006), 322.

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