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Intersectionality and Exploitation The Commodification of the Bodies of Marginalized Women

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Intersectionality and Exploitation

The Commodification of the Bodies of Marginalized Women

Ocean Royalty

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Intersectionality and Exploitation
The Commodification of the Bodies of Marginalized Women

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Ocean Royalty

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Throughout history, countless women have suffered at the hands of men. Women were (and are) viewed as easy to manipulate and exploit; belonging to other marginalized groups only intensifies the abuse that they have faced. Men who sought to make profit have objectified and commodified the bodies of young women and impoverished women in the past as well as the present. Within these categories of women, one subset stands out. The exploitation that women of color have experienced has disproportionately affected them on both a systemic level as well as an individual one—the potential for exploitative treatment increasing when a woman’s identity occupies more than just one marginalized category.

In this paper, I will discuss the specific exploitation via commodification faced by women who belong to marginalized groups over three centuries. To do so, I need to acknowledge my own place of privilege. I am a cisgender, white woman who has benefitted from that classification. These women’s stories are not my own. My voice should not overpower the voices of women of color or disabled women or women from any other group that I do not belong to. But I believe these women deserve to have their stories told and the injustices that they faced exposed, and that is why I will contribute to this discussion. I also need to acknowledge that through writing their stories I am continuing to exploit these women for my own personal advancement. I am not seeking to sensationalize these women or to benefit from their stories in any way other than to bring light to the suffering that they have faced and the unjust system that had allowed it—even sanctioned it—and continues to do so.

I also want to note the different formatting that I will use for the naming of these women. Traditionally in academia, people are referred to by their last names, but I will

use the first names of the women whose stories I will tell, if history was even kind enough to remember their names. This will leave out their surname, traditionally a man's name, taking away the power that men have held over their identities. I intend to humanize these women, and posthumously give them the just treatment that they did not receive in life.

The idea that marginalization and exploitation often go hand in hand is not new. The power dynamics that affect how members of marginalized groups live their lives have been frequently written about for centuries. Historically, oppressed people have found their voices in literature; the writings of slaves, women, and people in other marginalized groups have become central in the exposure of their exploitation. The narratives of people who directly faced these difficulties serve to inspire later authors and historians who look to tell their stories. Former slaves provided direct examples of exploitation based on race. Written in the 18th and 19th centuries, authors Phyllis Wheatley and Harriet Jacobs describe the horrors of slavery.

Phyllis Wheatley, a female slave in the late 1700s in New England, significantly contributed to the literature on the exploitation of marginalized groups. Her owners taught her to read and write and she was a devout Christian. Her religion has an important place in her poetry, and in "On Being Brought from Africa to America" she speaks of the conversions of African people to Christianity emanating from white introduction.¹ While the face of her work may not seem to be revolutionary, Wheatley actively pushed for American independence as well as abolition. She believed that justice could not exist if

¹ Phyllis Wheatley, "On Being Brought from Africa to America," in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, ed. Robert S. Levine (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1953), 789.

the people in power refused to listen to the sorrows of those they held power over.² Her literature and support helped to fuel the abolitionist movement along with those of other slave and free authors.

Harriet Jacobs wrote a later slave narrative in 1861. Her *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* followed her life from being born into slavery to her escape. At the age of fifteen, still a slave, she became pregnant with the child of a white man who was not her master.³ She had done this intentionally as a way to escape the power of her master who was especially cruel to her. Harriet's story was the first female slave narrative authored in the United States and it exposed the horrors faced not just by slaves, but particularly young, female slaves.⁴ Through her writing, she wanted to bring white women into the abolitionist cause by showing them how slavery debased and demoralized women. Her narrative stands out from those of other female slaves for her focus on her own autonomy and her description of her difficult journey to freedom.⁵

Continuing this important work, Sojourner Truth,⁶ Fredrick Douglass,⁷ and many more would also create compelling content exposing the horrors of slavery.⁸ Sojourner

² Robert S. Levine, Introduction to Phyllis Wheatley, in *Norton*, 788.

³ Harriet Jacobs, "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl," in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, ed. Robert S. Levine (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1953), 919.

⁴ Robert S. Levine, Introduction to Harriet Jacobs in *Norton*, 909.

⁵ Robert S. Levine, Introduction to Harriet Jacobs in *Norton*, 910.

⁶ Sojourner Truth, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth, The Book of Life, Ain't I a Woman*.

⁷ Fredrick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass, My Bondage and My Freedom, Life and Times of Fredrick Douglass*.

⁸ Including David Walker (*Appeal in Four Articles*), Josiah Henson (*Life of Josiah Henson*), Nat Turner (*Confessions of Nat Turner*), and W.E.B. Du Bois. (*Souls of Black Folk*).

Truth's significance to this narrative partially stems from the way she manufactured her name to be both her message and her identity—a surname from a man is not present. These people of African descent wrote about their own identities and the ideology that oppressed them. The literature produced by these authors became the basis of the abolitionist movement for its depiction of the inhumanity of slavery and the poignant appeals for freedom through the humanization of slaves. During the period in which these authors wrote, slavery was dependent on race, and their works detail the inherent marginalization and oppression that this created.

Feminism, an ideology that sought to expose the abuse based on gender, also was gaining influence during the two centuries that the previous literature covered. Judith Sargent Murray was one of the first women who published feminist works with her essay “On the Equality of the Sexes” released in 1790. This happened concurrently with Catherine Macaulay's *Letters of Education* and only two years before Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.⁹¹⁰ The works of these women all served to highlight the marginalization of women and the detrimental effects of it. A similar outlook was held by Olympe de Gouges, whose *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen* expressed the wish for equality promised by the French Revolution.¹¹ These women advocated for equality, part of the movement to

⁹ Robert S. Levine, Introduction to Judith Sargent Murray in, *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, ed. Robert S. Levine (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1953), 771.

¹⁰ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, (Boston: Thomas and Andrews, 1792).

¹¹ Olympe de Gouges, *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen*, (France, 1791).

include women in the doctrine that was promised by the Declaration of Independence.¹² Their ideologies were often seen as radical and Olympe died at the guillotine. Despite the adversity that they faced, these women were actively addressing the oppression suffered by their peers and advocating for change.

Significant numbers of modern historians have also addressed the exploitation and oppression of marginalized groups. Racially marginalized groups have received the most attention, but gender, age, and class also feature in a large amount of literature. Rana Hogarth, Charles Mills, and Audre Lorde, to name a few, have contributed to the discussion of marginalization and its links to oppression.¹³ It is important to consider historians when discussing this topic, but philosophers and other writers have also created important works on the topic of marginalization, oppression, and exploitation.

Kristie Dotson's "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing" and Iris Marion Young's "Five Faces of Oppression" provide a broader analysis of the oppression and violence faced by marginalized groups. Dotson focuses on the silencing of oppressed groups, particularly focusing on the concept of testimony.¹⁴ This connects to the way that many of the women in this paper have had their stories told, rather than telling them on their own. Young defines five aspects of oppression: "exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence."¹⁵ Young provides a

¹² Robert S. Levine, Introduction to Judith Sargent Murray in *Norton*, 771.

¹³ Hogarth, *Medicalizing Blackness*. Mills, *Blackness Visible*. Lorde, *Sister Outsider*.

¹⁴ Dotson, Kristie. "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing." *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 240. Accessed April 29, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/23016544.

¹⁵ Young, Iris Marion. "Five Faces of Oppression." *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 41. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1990. Accessed April 29, 2020. doi:10.2307/j.ctvc4m4g4q.7.

general overview of the concept of oppression as well as the ideas of social groups. She additionally defines oppression as more than one group oppressing another; it can also be one group benefitting from the oppression of others while not being the cause. This is a valuable source that outlines basic ideas about social groups and oppression.

Kimberle Crenshaw provides a significant source in her “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color.” Crenshaw created the term intersectionality, which she outlines in this paper.¹⁶ She examines the treatment of black women and the origins of treatment that stem from both sexism and racism but cannot be wholly contributed to one or the other. Crenshaw addresses more than race, she also included religion, class, and sexual orientation as identities that affect difference and intersectionality. Her presentation of intersectionality directly outlines the types of treatment faced by women who are part of multiple marginalized groups, treatment that is consistent with the women featured in this paper.

Dierdre Cooper Owens’ *Medical Bondage: Race, Gender, and the Origins of American Gynecology* is an important source on the topic of medicine and black lives. Her book follows the development of American gynecology and its dependency and exploitation of slave women. Owens focuses on the roles that women played in the development of women’s medicine, using examples from multiple slave accounts; her book spotlights the relationship between blackness as a perceived biological condition and the medical exploitation that came from it.¹⁷ Importantly to this paper, she includes a

¹⁶ Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241-299. Accessed April 29, 2020. doi:10.2307/1229039.

¹⁷ Dierdre Cooper Owens, *Medical Bondage: Race, Gender, and the Origins of American Gynecology* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017), 5.

section examining the roles of Irish immigrant women in developing gynecology. These women were often poor, and just like the enslaved women she focuses on, were subject to experimentation at the hands of their doctors. In her narrative Owens details the rise of American gynecology and its use of enslaved and impoverished women as mechanisms for advancement, rather than patients to be treated.

MJ Schwartz contributed to the discussion of slave women's medical health with her *Birthing a Slave: Motherhood and Medicine in the Antebellum South*. This book takes a different route than most, chronicling the journey from conception to birth to medical issues after. This book is important because it provides a direct contrast between enslaved women's journeys and the way that white men viewed them. Schwartz's narrative occurs just after the 1808 decision to end the trafficking of slaves, leaving the female slaves already present as the only options to continue producing new slaves.¹⁸ She argues that during this time the reproductive health of female slaves was the priority for slave owners, and they desired to produce as many children as possible. Her narrative is important because it details the struggle between slave owners trying to control the bodies of their slaves, and slave women themselves trying to control their own bodies and practice their own customs of birthing and rearing children.

Another important addition to this narrative comes from Stephen C Kenny. His article "‘A Dictate of Both Interest and Mercy’? Slave Hospitals in the Antebellum South" examines the significance of healthcare offices for enslaved individuals in the antebellum South. Kenny also illustrates the relationship between medical advancement

¹⁸ Jasmine A. Garamella, Review of *Birthing a Slave: Motherhood and Medicine in the Antebellum South* In *Journal of the History of Biology* 40, no. 1 (2007): 201. Accessed April 29, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/29737476 .

and enslaved bodies, but without the focus on women and birth specifically.¹⁹ Kenny provides medical cases to examine the relationships between slaves, their owners, and medical practitioners and the development of medicine in the United States. His narrative enforces the connection that medical advancement had to the exploitation of enslaved bodies.

Particularly important to this narrative are the individuals that researched and wrote about Saartjie Baartman, Julia Pastrana, and Henrietta Lacks, three women whose lives will be explored in case studies below. In publicizing the story of Saartjie, Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully's *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography* has been an incredibly useful resource. It is a comprehensive depiction of Saartjie's life and includes and dispels much of the misinformation that surrounds her story. Jan Bondeson's *In a Cabinet of Medical Curiosities* helped construct Julia's narrative. As well as synthesizing primary documentation, Bondeson included the references within the text and heavily focused on visual representation. Rebecca Skloot, who published *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, must be considered one of the most important writers in this endeavor. Rebecca spent months working closely with Henrietta's family, earning their trust and getting exclusive and extensive access to her story. Rebecca wanted Henrietta's life story told and the injustices that not only she but also her family, faced brought to light.

This paper is different from these sources. While it also addresses past issues of exploitation and marginalization, this paper also includes modern iterations of

¹⁹ Stephen C. Kenny, "'A Dictate of Both Interest and Mercy'? Slave Hospitals in the Antebellum South." *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 65, no. 1 (2010): 1. Accessed April 29, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/24631845.

exploitation and marginalization. This paper focuses on a broad analysis of modern trends of exploitation as well as specific historical examples in the form of case studies that stretch over nearly three centuries. History informs the present, while the two sections of this paper may seem disconnected, there is a constant between them. The exploitation of women in marginalized groups has a deep historical record, and it is very well known. More examples of historical abuses that could be included exist but focusing on individual case studies makes clear the scope of exploitation that individuals face. The modern examples also include several specific case studies, while focusing on broad topics of exploitation.

For each modern group, a historical example or broad concept has been attached for immediate comparison, as well as a final section that includes four detailed historical case studies. The intention behind this structuring is to put the focus on modern inclusions while acknowledging their historical roots. Much of the importance of history is looking back at the horrors of the past and making improvements in the present. While in some way the quality of life for women has improved, in many ways it is similar to the way it was a century ago. The sentiments regarding women's rights from a hundred years ago echo even today. Women, especially in marginalized groups, continue to be targets of exploitation.

It is a rule of thumb²⁰ in understanding women's history to note the oppression and abuse that they faced. Women in the United States got the right to vote only a hundred years ago, but this was not the case for every woman. *White* women gained the

²⁰ The 'rule of thumb' itself is a homage to the common folk tale that a man could beat his wife with a stick as long as it was no wider than his thumb. There is no written record of such a law existing though.

right to vote, but women of color were not allowed to access that right for decades. Black women gained the right to vote in 1920 but faced intense voter suppression until the Voting Rights Act of 1965,²¹ Chinese women gained the right in 1943; Japanese women in 1952; and Native American women only gained the right in the 1960s. Even after legislation passed allowing women to vote, discrimination against these women continued. The Voting Rights Act intended to remove race-based discrimination at the polls, but that did not necessarily affect discrimination based on sex. Without the ability to vote, women's rights and opportunities were determined exclusively by men who voted in their own interests, often in direct opposition to women's needs. There was little to no incentive for men to consider the perspectives of people who could not vote, and citizenship is not complete without it.

The oppression of women continues to be evident in many things, but particularly in laws regarding rape. Marital rape law emphasizes the prioritization of men's interests over women's interests in the legal system. The Model Penal Code, the basis for nearly all penal law in the United States after the 1960s, defines rape as "sexual intercourse with a female not his wife."²² Further in this document, it also clarifies that the 'man and wife' exclusion also applies to individuals that are not married but live as spouses.²³ The concept of marital rape as a crime did not exist, leaving women at the hands of men that could hurt them with no consequences. Revisions to statutes concerning marital rape only

²¹ S. 1564, 89th Cong. (1965). Accessed at https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc_large_image.php?flash=false&doc=100.

²² American Law Institute, *Model Penal Code: Official Draft and Explanatory Notes : Complete Text of Model Penal Code As Adopted at the 1962 Annual Meeting of the American Law Institute at Washington, D.C., May 24, 1962* (Philadelphia, Pa: The Institute, 1985), § 213.1.

²³ American Law Institute. *Model Penal Code*, § 213.1.

started in the 1970s, and today all 50 states have outlawed it, but it is still widespread and generally remains unprosecuted, as do most rapes.²⁴

Historically, rape has not been the only plight faced by women because of marriage. For centuries, once a woman married, her husband claimed ownership of her property, and in some cultures, the woman's family would even pay a man to marry her (in the form of a dowry). Reforms to the legal system in the United States did not happen until the latter half of the 1800s. These legislative changes took more than a century to fully grant women rights to their own property.²⁵ One of the reasons that this movement gained traction with the male legislators at the time is that it prevented creditors from taking the wife's money to pay for the husband's debts. It can be argued that these legislative leaders moved from exploiting women *as* property to exploiting them *for* their property.

One of the clearest examples of the exploitation of women is in slavery. Most of the historical cases I will be discussing involved enslaved women, or women who were at risk of becoming enslaved had they remained in their home country. Slaves were property with no legal rights of their own. The masters of enslaved women would often have sex with them, an act that is inherently rape because consent cannot exist in relationships with significant power imbalances. Light-skinned women called 'fancy girls' were particularly sought after in the slave markets for sexual purposes due to their

²⁴ According to RAINN (Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network) which compiled multiple sets of government data, for every 1,000 rapes, only 11 are referred for prosecution and of those only 7 are convicted. <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system>.

²⁵ Richard H. Chused, "Late Nineteenth Century Married Women's Property Law: Reception of the Early Married Women's Property Acts by Courts and Legislatures." *The American Journal of Legal History* 29, no. 1 (1985): 3. Accessed April 15, 2020. doi:10.2307/844982.

complexion's resemblance to that of white women.²⁶ Slave women were also exploited for their ability to produce and care for children, whether it was to raise them as new slaves or working as caretakers for their female master's children.²⁷ The exploitation and oppression of women from marginalized groups is widespread across time and geography, so there is no doubt that this is a present issue with deep historical roots. Just as the historical case studies that I will examine demonstrate, the increased marginalization of women leaves them at risk of exploitation. While women still fall victim to predatory practices, modern forms of exploitation are often less obvious because they do not necessarily involve direct ownership of people.

The Transatlantic slave trade, that targeted victims based on race, is the most significant historical example of the commodification of the bodies of marginalized people. This particular episode of the slave trade operated on an enormous scale over a prolonged period and had a global reach. Olaudah Equiano details his experience of the slave trade from his abduction to his freedom. In his narrative, he writes

The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship... Indeed such were the horrors of my views and fears at the moment, that, if ten thousand worlds had been my own, I would have freely parted with them all to have exchanged my condition with that of the meanest slave in my own country. When I looked round the ship too and saw... a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate...²⁸

²⁶ Stephanie Jones-Rogers, "Rethinking Sexual Violence and the Marketplace of Slavery: White Women, the Slave Market, and Enslaved People's Sexualized Bodies in the Nineteenth-Century South." In *Sexuality and Slavery: Reclaiming Intimate Histories in the Americas*, ed. Berry Daina Ramey and Harris Leslie M., (ATHENS: University of Georgia Press, 2018), 109.

²⁷ Stephanie Jones-Rogers, 110.

²⁸ Olaudah Equiano in *Norton*, 741.

Equiano’s tale is only one of many. Globally, millions of people were bought and sold into the slave trade. Traffickers considered slaves to be property rather than human and they had limited personal rights. Slaves faced inhumane treatment as well as abuse in nearly every aspect of their lives. Slaves’ position as an item inherently dehumanized them. The general view on slavery is that it focused on labor, but traffickers often sold them into sexual slavery.

Saartjie Baartman was a black woman from South Africa in the early 1800s who had steatopygia, an extreme collection of fat in her buttocks. She was trafficked and exploited for the sexual entertainment of wealthy men and women. She would never return to her South African home once taken to Europe. The people who held power over her—primarily white men—continuously objectified her body, as if she was an object rather than a woman. Even women who saw her often viewed her as repulsive, as demonstrated by the woman in the white dress in this painting from the 1830s.



Fig. 1 “The Hottentot Venus in the Salon of the Duchess of Berry.”²⁹

²⁹ Sebastien Coeure, “The Hottentot Venus in the Salon of the Duchess of Berry,” oil painting, 1830 <https://www.fromthesquare.org/strings-blog/the-hottentot-venus-in-the-salon-of-the-duchess-of-berry-1830-w-c-on-paper/#.XpURY8hKhPZ>.

Mirroring how Saartjie suffered, modern women often fall victim to sex trafficking. Women are abducted or even tricked and sold into sexual slavery all over the world, under this practice they are seen as commodities and objects rather than as people. This affected nearly 5 million people (mostly women) in 2016.³⁰ Sex trafficking can happen to anyone but people “who have little social and legal protection”³¹ are more at risk than others, and there is empirical evidence that marginalized groups, which overwhelmingly include women, fit into that category. Sex trafficking is not a small industry as there are millions of victims every year and it is suspected to have created more than \$99 billion in profit.³² Illegalizing slavery has not ended the practice of owning people like property, especially for vulnerable women.

One of the most famous names connected to the profiteering of sex trafficking is Jeffrey Epstein, who allegedly killed himself in his jail cell on August 10, 2019. An incredibly wealthy financier, Epstein owned properties across the US and in Paris as well as an entire island in the Virgin Islands, Little St. James, where he conducted much of his business.³³ His business handled more than money, though. Epstein had a long history of

³⁰ International Labor Office (ILO), *Global estimates of modern slavery: Forced labour and forced marriage*, (ILO: Geneva, 2017), 39. Accessed at https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_575479.pdf.

³¹ Annalisa Enrile, a professor in the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work” (LINK: https://dworakpeck.usc.edu/news/7-facts-you-didnt-know-about-human-trafficking%3Futm_source%3Dtest).

³² Cara Kelly. “13 Sex Trafficking Statistics That Explain The Enormity Of The Global Sex Trade.” *USA Today*, July 29, 2019. Accessed April 2, 2020. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/investigations/2019/07/29/12-trafficking-statistics-enormity-global-sex-trade/1755192001/>.

³³ Mahita Ganjanan. “Here's What to Know About the Sex Trafficking Case Against Jeffrey Epstein.” *TIME*, July 8, 2019. Accessed April 10, 2020. <https://time.com/5621911/jeffrey-epstein-sex-trafficking-what-to-know/>.

abusing young women; he lured young women into his business by giving them money in exchange for massages. These massages would turn sexual, and he raped many girls who were usually under the age of sixteen.³⁴ Epstein used his money to lure girls, and he even used them to recruit more underaged females into his network, giving him constant access to young girls.³⁵

In 2007, he was finally brought up on criminal charges. Despite the FBI discovering more than three dozen victims of his abuse, the prosecution granted him a plea deal.³⁶ One compelling reason Epstein wasn't initially imprisoned could be the long list of famous and powerful people that he knew. Among this list are "numerous prominent American politicians, powerful business executives, foreign presidents, a well-known Prime Minister, and other world leaders."³⁷ The leniency may also be rooted in the United States' history of prioritizing the comfort of powerful men over the welfare of vulnerable women. The brave women that have stepped forward testified against him telling the court that they were forced to perform sex acts on Epstein as well as numerous other men, who were often rich and powerful.³⁸ This connection to powerful men in politics and economics may likely have saved him from prosecution the first time, but some speculate that it is also what led to his suicide when he was charged again with a

³⁴ Mahita Ganjanan, *TIME*.

³⁵ Mahita Ganjanan, *TIME*.

³⁶ Lisette Voytko. "Jeffrey Epstein Documents Could Expose Powerful Politicians, Businessmen." *Forbes*, July 8, 2019. Accessed on April 4, 2020. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lisettevoytko/2019/07/03/jeffrey-epstein-documents-could-expose-powerful-politicians-businessmen/#6db999225ac9>.

³⁷ *Brown v. Maxwell*; *Dershowitz v. Giuffre*, 18-2868; 16-3945-cv(L) (New York, 2018). http://www.ca2.uscourts.gov/decisions/isysquery/c16e9479-8adc-450c-a488-4634eb945c53/1/doc/18-2868_16-3945_complete_opn.pdf#xml=http://www.ca2.uscourts.gov/decisions/isysquery/c16e9479-8adc-450c-a488-4634eb945c53/1/hilite/

³⁸ *Brown v. Maxwell*.

longer sentence. Epstein's wealth gave him access to vulnerable populations with little consequence.

Being part of a vulnerable population due to financial status can affect the likelihood of sexual exploitation for women of all ages. Children who outgrow the foster system often end up homeless and jobless; sex trafficking often starts as a trade for resources.³⁹ What begins as trading sex for food or shelter can often spiral into complete trafficking by organizations. Of course, outgrowing the foster system is not the only thing that can lead to homelessness, women often find themselves forced out on the streets for many reasons. Whether it is escaping an abusive relationship, being LGBTQIA+, or losing their jobs, women make up 29% of the homeless population in the United States and that number is steadily growing.⁴⁰ Homelessness puts anyone, but especially women and young children, at increased risk for violence and sexual assault. A study conducted in 2014 showed that a third of homeless women had recently been victims of physical or sexual abuse, and two-thirds had been victims of emotional violence.⁴¹

In 2014, Lori Yearwood became homeless after losing both of her parents to cancer and her house burning down. Lori managed to escape her life on the streets, and she wrote her compelling story for *The Washington Post*. She details how she became homeless, the trials she faced, and how she finally managed to find a new life for

³⁹ Liza Kane-Harntett. "The Foster Care-Human Trafficking Nexus."

⁴⁰ Joy Moses and Jackie Janosko, "Demographic Data Project Part II: Gender and Individual Homelessness," EndHomelessness.org. Homelessness Research Institute, 2018. Accessed April 12, 2020. <https://endhomelessness.org/demographic-data-project-gender-and-individual-homelessness/>.

⁴¹ Lori Yearwood, "Homeless Women Are the Sexual Assault Survivors No One Talks About. Here's My Story," *The Washington Post*, October 26, 2018. Accessed April 12, 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/local/wp/2018/10/26/feature/sexual-assault-survivors-include-homeless-women-heres-what-happened-to-me/>.

herself.⁴² While she was homeless and living out of a women's shelter she was repeatedly assaulted by a man she calls John. In one instance, while John was beating her, another man entered his apartment. This man saw Lori but did not act to help her, merely stating "Looks like you are going to be at this for a while," and left.⁴³ Lori managed to escape John, but even after that she was harassed and touched by other men. She explains that it was normal for men to 'claim' women as their own, and with John out of the picture, she was seen as free game for any other man or men to abuse.⁴⁴ Lori managed to cope with her traumas and now has her own apartment where she writes as a journalist, but her story is only one of many. Thousands of homeless women face sexual exploitation every year, especially by those who are supposed to help them.

Much like the altruist J. Marion Sims, who kindly built a women's hospital after experimenting on slave women for years (discussed below), Bernhard "Bery" Glaser built a children's home in Kalangala, Uganda with his wife in 2006. He called it Bery's Place. Glaser took in dozens of young girls who were homeless or victims of sex trafficking.⁴⁵ But Glaser, who had come to Uganda from Germany, had more sinister plans for these girls. He repeatedly abused the girls in his care, and if they resisted he threatened to throw them back on the streets. This emotional manipulation kept many of his victims quiet and even led some of them to come to his defense when charges were first brought

⁴² Lori Yearwood, "Homeless Women."

⁴³ Lori Yearwood, "Homeless Women."

⁴⁴ Lori Yearwood, "Homeless Women."

⁴⁵ Alice McCool, "They Were Sent to a Shelter for Safety. Instead, These Women Say They Were Sexually Abused," *CNN*, February 13, 2020. Accessed on April 12, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/02/13/africa/uganda-berly-glaser-asequals-intl/index.html>.

against him in 2013.⁴⁶ Several of his victims stated that he had them create a ‘sleeping timetable’ so that the girls could rotate who would sleep with him every night. He told them that this table could not be kept out, “because visitors might come and start asking what it's for.”⁴⁷ Glaser’s is not an unusual case; in Uganda, there are hundreds of illegal ‘orphanages’ and most sexual abuse goes unreported.⁴⁸

Homelessness is only one form of poverty, and arguably the most extreme, but other forms of poverty can also impact the types of sexual exploitation faced by women. Forced marriage is one of the more indirect types of sexual exploitation. There are many reasons why a forced marriage would occur, and they can vary depending on the age of the person involved in the situation. Adult forced marriages may be used to secure documentation for travel, to raise a family from poverty, or even as a means for a rapist to escape charges.⁴⁹ Of these marriages 84% involve women as the forced party, and when only counting child marriages that number rises to 96%. In 2016, an estimated 13 million women were living in forced marriages.⁵⁰ Poverty puts women at an increased risk of forced marriage because they are often used to create economic security for the woman and her family.

In the current day and age, young girls still have a high chance of exposure to sexual exploitation. Children under the age of eighteen make up nearly 21% of all sex

⁴⁶ Alice McCool, “They Were Sent to a Shelter.”

⁴⁷ Alice McCool, “They Were Sent to a Shelter.”

⁴⁸ Alice McCool, “They Were Sent to a Shelter.”

⁴⁹ International Labor Office (ILO), *Global estimates of modern slavery*.

⁵⁰ International Labor Office (ILO), *Global estimates of modern slavery*.

trafficking victims.⁵¹ With a disproportionate number of trafficking victims being women it is not a long stretch to understand that young women are targeted as victims in this system. These children often lack access to education, with only 6% of victims having a high school education, and 45% having an elementary education.⁵² Approximately 10% of child trafficking victims have had no schooling at all. A lack of education makes it difficult for these children to be able to escape the abuse on their own, further reinforcing their situation.

While men in power abusing women has been a consistent theme, with children it changes slightly. They are much more likely to be abused or sold into sexual slavery by their families than adult victims.⁵³ They are also more likely to be victims of psychological abuse as well as sexual as a means of keeping them in the system. Psychoactive substances, as well as physical abuse, are other methods predators use to take advantage of vulnerable children.⁵⁴ Even within the marginalized group of children, there are further levels. Children in the foster system are commonly targeted for sexual exploitation. In 2013, 60% of children recovered from sex trafficking were from foster homes.⁵⁵ This is not an uncommon occurrence,

Often without a steady home or school life and without strong support networks, foster youth are at risk for recruitment. Traffickers recruit foster youth directly from group homes with false promises of money and a family structure. Youth who have been conditioned to view themselves as a paycheck, due to prior abuse

⁵¹ Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC). "Age of Victims: Children and Adults." *International Organization for Migration*, 2018. Accessed April 12, 2020. www.ctdatacollaborative.org/story/age-victims-children-and-adults.

⁵² Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC), "Age of Victims."

⁵³ Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC), "Age of Victims."

⁵⁴ Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC), "Age of Victims."

⁵⁵ National Foster Youth Institute (NFYI). "Sex Trafficking," *NFYI.org*. Accessed April 12, 2020. <https://www.nfyi.org/issues/sex-trafficking/>.

and exploitation by both biological and foster parents, are at a heightened risk and vulnerable to the increased attention and generous overtures commonly used by traffickers.⁵⁶

These children, put in vulnerable positions, are taken advantage of by the people who were supposed to care for them. These children are often just seeking stability and love. Instead, they face the harsh realities of sex trafficking.

Children are often targeted for sexual exploitation because of their potential vulnerability, but they are also actively sought out for exploitation due to their age. Unlike adult women, any sexual encounters that involve children are non-consensual, illegal, and inherently exploitative. Pedophiles explicitly seek out children to abuse and a huge child pornography industry spawned from this. In 2006, Texas Republican representative Joe Barton claimed, "Child pornography is apparently a... \$20 billion-a-year business. Twenty billion dollars."⁵⁷ His expertise could be trusted because in 2015 he was charged with receiving child pornography, and investigators found traces of his involvement with the industry going back nearly a decade to 2004.⁵⁸ If the profits were that high in 2006 the number would be astronomical today. But child pornography is illegal, and the industry seeks to stay out of the public view. Predators use the dark web to buy and upload content, usually using virtual currency and Tor browsers that disguise online activity.⁵⁹ This makes it impossible to accurately quantify the scope of this

⁵⁶ Liza Kane-Harntett. "The Foster Care-Human Trafficking Nexus," *Human Trafficking Search*, January 16, 2018, <https://humantraffickingsearch.org/foster-care-and-human-trafficking-nexus/>.

⁵⁷ Carl Bialik. "Measuring the Child-Porn Trade," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 18, 2006. Accessed April 12, 2020. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB114485422875624000>.

⁵⁸ Racheal Bade. "Former House Staffer Sentenced For Child Porn," *Politico*, March 23, 2016. Accessed April 12, 2020. <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/03/james-maines-sentenced-child-porn-221162>.

⁵⁹ Cyrus Farivar and Andrew Blankstein. "Feds Take Down the World's 'Largest Dark Web Child Porn Marketplace.'" *NBC News*, October 16, 2019. Accessed April 12, 2020.

practice. These predators are often wealthy and powerful, giving them plenty of resources to hide their actions.

Wealth plays a significant role in the history of exploitation. Julia Pastrana, a Mexican woman born with generalized hypertrichosis lanuginosa in the 1830s, and Saartjie, were both targeted for exploitation because of their economic status as well as other factors. Julia was orphaned at a young age and sold into slavery without any way to provide for herself. She was owned by a governor in her home country, and then a man who used her for his own financial gain.⁶⁰ This only furthered her dependency on others and stripped her of any personal money she may have had. After the death of her husband and son, Saartjie was left without resources, and she was also sold into slavery. She was exploited by men for profit, and although it was claimed that she would receive a portion of the profits, this was never documented and is highly unlikely.⁶¹

Race can also play a significant role in the sexual exploitation of women. Studies on the demographics of sexual exploitation show that the marginalization of women of color puts them at a higher risk.⁶² A background pamphlet for a 2001 United Nations conference on race dimensions in trafficking reads, “When attention is paid to which

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/crime-courts/feds-take-down-world-s-largest-dark-web-child-porn-n1066511>.

⁶⁰ *Grand & Novel Attraction : Miss Julia Pastrana*, circa 1857 Accessed April 12, 2020. [jstor.org/stable/10.2307/community.24794744](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/community.24794744).

⁶¹ Robin Mitchell, “Another Meaning of Understanding the Gaze: Sarah Bartmaan in the Development of Nineteenth-Century French National Identity,” in *Black Venus 2010: They Called Her “Hottentot,”* 34. https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=WfU753omq8YC&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=baartman,+cesar&ots=5TLPEaF5ul&sig=8EG2FoMiNtQ_gmaLBs1pg-GqkUU#v=onepage&q=cesar&f=false.

⁶² World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, *The Race Dimensions of Trafficking in Persons— Especially Women and Children*. (Durban, South Africa: United Nations, 2001), https://www.un.org/WCAR/e-kit/trafficking_e.pdf.

women are most at risk of being trafficked, the link of this risk to their racial and social marginalization becomes clear. Moreover, race and racial discrimination may not only constitute a risk factor for trafficking, but it may also determine the treatment that women experience in countries of destination.”⁶³ This statement makes a racial bias in sex trafficking in the United States undeniable. The US has a long and colorful history of racism and fetishization of people of color, enough that it could create the type of exploitation and demand that the statement suggests. Statistics support this. A series of data from 2007 and 2008 human trafficking reports show that black individuals made up 43% of all sex trafficking cases, with Hispanic cases at 23% and Asian cases at 13%. These were all higher than the white sex trafficking cases which made up 12% of all the cases studied.⁶⁴

As far as marginalization is concerned, there can be no question as to whether or not race influences how people of color are perceived and treated. Audre Lorde, a Black lesbian feminist socialist mother of two, including one boy, and a member of an interracial couple, illustrates this in her presentation *Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference* delivered in 1980

But Black women and our children know the fabric of our lives is stitched with violence and with hatred, that there is no rest. We do not deal with it only on the picket lines, or in dark midnight alleys, or in the places where we dare to verbalize our resistance. For us, increasingly, violence weaves through the daily tissues of our living — in the supermarket, in the classroom, in the elevator, in the

⁶³ World Conference, *The Race Dimensions of Trafficking*.

⁶⁴ U.S. Department of Justice, *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report: Characteristics of Suspected Human Trafficking Incidents, 2007-08*, by Tracey Kyckelhahn, Allen J. Beck, and Thomas H. Cohen, NCJ 224526, 2009. Accessed on April 12, 2020. <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cshti08.pdf>.

clinic and the schoolyard, from the plumber, the baker, the saleswoman, the bus driver, the bank teller, the waitress who does not serve us.⁶⁵

Audre Lorde makes it clear that being black directly impacts the lives of black people. This rings true with people of color in any white-dominated spaces. In the United States, slavery was based on race and the degradation of black people that came from the institution has carved a deep mark that remains on the face of the nation. But the United States is not the only nation guilty of this. Race has had and continues to have a profound impact on how people are viewed and treated by others on a global scale.

All the women in the following studies are women of color who were objectified, and their bodies used for profit at the hands of white men because of their race. These women were sometimes also part of other marginalized groups which likely played a role in determining the extent of their exploitation. Had these women been white, the injustices that they faced likely would not have happened. Their status as 'subhuman' due to their race directly contributed to their dehumanization. These women did not have the rights to their own bodies, much less a sense of autonomy that would allow them to give consent to the men that exploited them. Their stories are important because they create a historical account of the injustices that women in marginalized groups still face, especially women of color.

Saartjie Baartman's name is not widely recognized, but the title that she was given, "Hottentot Venus," has survived for more than two centuries. Saartjie was born in the 1770s north of the Gamtoos River valley in Africa and was a member of the

⁶⁵ Audre Lorde. "Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference." Paper presented at the Copeland Colloquium, Amherst College, April 1980.
https://www.colorado.edu/odece/sites/default/files/attached-files/rba09-sb4converted_8.pdf.

Khoekhoe tribe.⁶⁶ South Africa was rife with war and violence during her life, and she grew up working on a colonial farm. It was here is where she gained the name Saartjie, or Sarah, and her last name Baartman, meaning bearded or uncivilized.⁶⁷ After the death of her husband and young son due to war, a man named Pieter Willem Cezar bought her and took her to Cape Town where she served as a domestic servant for his brother.⁶⁸ The Cezar brothers found her genitals and large posterior, a condition called steatopygia, to be strange; these traits were common within her tribe but odd to the Dutch settlers in South Africa. In 1810, the other Cezar brother, Henrik, bought her and contracted her to travel and entertain.

The contract that Saartjie supposedly signed stated that she would travel with William Dunlop, an English ship surgeon, and Henrik Cezar and act as a personal servant, as well as an entertainer. She would be compensated with part of the earnings and would return to her home after five years.⁶⁹ This contract has never been produced, and it is highly unlikely that it exists at all. Saartjie did not speak Dutch or English, and the Cezars and Dunlop likely would not have hired a translator for her. She was also illiterate and would not have been able to read a contract had one existed. The Cezar family, which was experiencing financial difficulties at the time, likely negotiated this contract without the input of Saartjie.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), 7, <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=FDpFDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&ots=MdtjQdbRKg&sig=sdDtfZhU0XPBu3Q8-mZSxyg6s8U#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

⁶⁷ Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman*, 8.

⁶⁸ Robin Mitchell in *Black Venus*, 34.

⁶⁹ Robin Mitchell in *Black Venus*, 34.

⁷⁰ Robin Mitchell in *Black Venus*, 34.

It is speculated that once they reached London Saartjie and Cezar entered a sexual relationship, but this is not confirmed.⁷¹ Intent on making money, Cezar began displaying Saartjie at the various ‘freak shows’ in the city of London as the “Hottentot Venus.” Saartjie, the first Khoekhoe woman ever to step foot in England, was wildly popular; hordes of people came to gawk at her mostly-naked body.⁷² It is unknown whether or not Saartjie was acting willingly while she was being displayed, but reports from the time say that she was treated like an animal, poked and prodded. When she would not comply with her handlers she was threatened with violence in front of her audience.⁷³

It was at the end of 1810, with the abolitionist movement having gained enough power to outlaw slavery, that one man dared to take Cezar to court, questioning if Saartjie had consented to be displayed.⁷⁴ Cezar claimed that Saartjie participated willingly and that she had signed a contract that gave her rights and benefits. It is important to note that Saartjie never actually spoke to the court. She had an interpreter, but they were the only person that could understand her, and they likely would have not directly translated her words.⁷⁵ According to Saartjie (or the interpreter), she had come to England willingly and did not want to return to her homeland in South Africa. But this brings up an important aspect of Saartjie’s life. She was born into a Dutch-controlled society and most historians

⁷¹ Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman*, 81.

⁷² Sebastien Coeure, “The Hottentot Venus in the Salon of the Duchess of Berry,” oil painting, 1830 <https://www.fromthesquare.org/strings-blog/the-hottentot-venus-in-the-salon-of-the-duchess-of-berry-1830-w-c-on-paper/#.XpURY8hKhPZ>.

⁷³ Robin Mitchell in *Black Venus*, 34.

⁷⁴ Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman*, 83.

⁷⁵ Robin Mitchell in *Black Venus*, 34.

who have studied her have agreed that she likely did not think that she had autonomy of her own.⁷⁶ Even if she were allowed to return to South Africa, she would likely just be returning to slavery. The court ruled in Cezar's favor, but gave him a warning about indecency, and told him not to display Saartjie any longer.

Cezar did not listen and continued to secretly display Saartjie in England. In 1813 they left England for Paris and Saartjie was sold to an S. Reaux, an animal trainer, who continued to display her, in worse ways than his predecessor.⁷⁷ He frequently had Saartjie posed next to a young male rhinoceros, depicting them as a male and female, a two-for-one deal.⁷⁸ Saartjie was especially popular in France. The *Journal de Paris* provided her picture to the public, alongside that of a popular French actress of the time, Anne Françoise Hyppolyte Boutet Salvetat, who went by the stage name Mademoiselle Mars. Saartjie served to enhance the beauty of Anne, touting the beauty of French women over the “ugly, impure, and revolting”⁷⁹ image of a Khoekhoe woman. Saartjie sparked such intense responses from French people that a play titled *The Hottentot Venus or Hatred for Frenchwomen* debuted in 1814.⁸⁰ Saartjie was not in the play, but it depicted a white French woman who disguised herself as Saartjie to win the affections of her cousin. The play ended with said cousin, Adolph, realizing that he could never marry a hideous black woman, and instead marrying his cousin.

⁷⁶ Robin Mitchell in *Black Venus*, 34.

⁷⁷ Robin Mitchell in *Black Venus*, 37. (Reaux was only his stage name, his real name is unknown.)

⁷⁸ Robin Mitchell in *Black Venus*, 37.

⁷⁹ Robin Mitchell in *Black Venus*, 38.

⁸⁰ Robin Mitchell in *Black Venus*, 38.

Saartjie died in 1815. The exact cause of her death is unknown, although it was speculated to be from pneumonia, smallpox, or alcoholism. After her death, a prominent scientist George Cuvier took her remains from the local police and dissected them.⁸¹ Cuvier intended to use Saartjie's body to support his claims of the inferiority of African women. He compared Saartjie's body to those of monkeys and apes and prominently featured illustrations to support his claims.⁸² From the autopsy, Saartjie's brain and vulva were preserved and later put on display with her skeleton and a cast of her body.⁸³ The preservation and examination of Saartjie's body played into the idea of blackness as a biological difference that was popular at this time. As will be examined further during the case study of J. Marion Sims patients, black people were seen as inherently different and inferior to white people.

In the 1990s, a movement began to try to return Saartjie's body to the descendants of her tribe. The group intended to counter the dehumanization and marginalization of aboriginal groups by stopping the display of Saartjie. Anthropologists argued that Saartjie's remains needed to remain in the museum, to document the history of racism and humanity's inhumanity.⁸⁴ After nearly a decade of negotiations, Saartjie's body was

⁸¹ Lisa Gail Collins, "Historic Retrievals: Confronting Visual Evidence and the Imaging of Truth," in *Black Venus 2010: They Called Her "Hottentot,"* 73.
https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=WfU753omq8YC&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=baartman,+cesar&ots=5TLPEaF5ul&sig=8EG2FoMiNtQ_gmaLbs1pg-GqkUU#v=onepage&q=cezar&f=false.

⁸² Lisa Gail Collins in *Black Venus*, 73.

⁸³ Saduah Qureshi, "Displaying Sara Baartman, the 'Hottentot Venus,'" *History of Science* 42, no. 2 (2004), 242-243.
https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/781e/ad919a5bf212dfa3c705fa49b73b5a24d041.pdf?_ga=2.182839392.774275996.1586890456-1096185102.1586890456.

⁸⁴ Ben Macintyre, "Hottentots Demand the Return of their Venus," *The Times* December 30, 1995.

returned to her homeland and given a proper burial.⁸⁵ Saartjie's story has come to resemble the inhumanity of humanity, but also the exploitation of marginalized groups and the commodification of their bodies.

In 1834 in the state of Sinaloa, Mexico, Julia Pastrana was born. Her body was finally laid to rest in 2013, after nearly two centuries of exploitation.⁸⁶ Julia suffered from a condition called generalized hypertrichosis lanuginosa as well as gingival hyperplasia, both of which ostracized her from polite society.⁸⁷ These conditions caused her body, including her face, to be covered in thick, dark hair, as well as causing her gums and lips to overgrow, and earning her the titles "Ape Woman," "Werewolf Woman," "The Nondescript,"⁸⁸ and even "The Ugliest Woman in the World." When she was alive, she spent much of her time on display in 'freak shows,' particularly those run by the man she married, Theodore Lent. Lent marketed her as a "bear woman" and fathered the child that caused her death. Lent had the child embalmed and displayed at the side of his wife's corpse.⁸⁹

Julia reportedly spent the first two years of her life living in a cave. Her mother mistakenly believed that her extraordinary appearance was caused by supernatural

⁸⁵ Michael Dynes, "Remains of the Hottentot Venus go Home to Africa," *The Times* February 23, 2002.

⁸⁶ Charles Wilson, "An Artist Finds a Dignified Ending for an Ugly Story," *New York Times*, February 11, 2013. Accessed on April 12, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/12/arts/design/julia-pastrana-who-died-in-1860-to-be-buried-in-mexico.html>.

⁸⁷ Charles Wilson, "An Artist Finds."

⁸⁸ Regent Gallery (Regent Street, London, England). *Julia Pastrana, "the Nondescript", Advertised for Exhibition. Lithograph*. Accessed April 12, 2020. [jstor.org/stable/10.2307/community.24748619](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/community.24748619).

⁸⁹ Jan Bondeson. "The Strange Story of Julia Pastrana." *In A Cabinet of Medical Curiosities*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1997. www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctvv41291.13. 221.

phenomena and hid her away from the public eye.⁹⁰ Unfortunately, Julia's mother died when she was young, and she was taken to an orphanage, and then reportedly sold to a traveling circus by her uncle. The governor of her home state, Sinaloa, Pedro Sanchez, took her into his house as a servant. While she was living as Sanchez's maid and personal curiosity, she was taught to sing and dance as well as speak Spanish, French, and English.⁹¹ The exact reasons why she was educated are not known, but it was likely to increase her value as a servant and performer. While her education was typical for the time, it is clear from her treatment that it was not intended for her own benefit. Sanchez groomed and conditioned Julia to accept the role of an object on display.

The public exploitation of Julia began in 1854 when a Mexican customs administrator bought her—whose name would not survive as long as that of his “property.” That year on December 1st she would be displayed in New York's Gothic Hall on Broadway as the “Marvelous Hybrid” or “Bear Woman.”⁹² She attracted enormous attention for her appearance, the theater chronicler writing “The eyes of this *lusus natura* [sic] beam with intelligence, while its jaws, jagged fangs and ears are terrifically hideous... Nearly its whole frame is coated with long glossy hair. Its voice is harmonious, for this semi-human being is perfectly docile, and speaks the Spanish language.”⁹³

Julia's life as a curiosity would continue when Theodore Lent acquired her in 1855, but the methods of this acquisition remain rather suspicious. Reportedly, Julia and

⁹⁰ Jan Bondeson. “The Strange Story of Julia Pastrana,” 219.

⁹¹ *Grand & Novel Attraction : Miss Julia Pastrana*, circa 1857.

⁹² Jan Bondeson. “The Strange Story of Julia Pastrana,” 219.

⁹³ Jan Bondeson. “The Strange Story of Julia Pastrana,” 219.

Lent married while she was under the care of both an appointed guardian from Mexico *and* a manager called J.W Beach, who claimed to have a contract to exhibit her. This marriage was hotly contested as it gave Lent the sole right to display her body and took her away from the two men who already claimed ownership of her. But Julia was in love with him and legally vouched for his case—thus she became his property in marriage.⁹⁴

Lent then displayed Julia across the globe under various titles, and in 1859 she became pregnant with his child. In 1860 Julia, as well as her infant son, passed away in Moscow due to complications in childbirth.⁹⁵ Her body, and that of her son, were sold to Professor Sokolov from Moscow University's Anatomical Institute to be embalmed. Sokolov did such a good job at preserving their bodies (remarkable considering the limited available technology) that Lent took back their remains and continued to display Julia as a human curiosity, this time with their dead child posed at her side.⁹⁶ Lent continued to display her body as “the Embalmed Female Nondescript” for the remainder of his life. During the time that Julia’s corpse was exhibited, Lent married a second hirsute woman, who he would dub as Julia’s sister even though she was German.⁹⁷

But the exploitation of her body did not end with the death of her husband. The public display of Julia periodically continued until the 1970s, even being toured in the United States in 1972.⁹⁸ Following this tour, her exhibitors returned with her to Sweden,

⁹⁴ “Local Matters. A Novel Suit,” *Julia Pastrana Online*, accessed April 12, 2020, <http://juliapastranaonline.com/items/show/11>.

⁹⁵ Jan Bondeson. “The Strange Story of Julia Pastrana,” 229.

⁹⁶ Jan Bondeson. “The Strange Story of Julia Pastrana,” 231.

⁹⁷ *Senora Pastrana, a Bearded Woman. Reproduction of a Wood Engraving*. Accessed April 12, 2020. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.waterfield.murraystate.edu/10.2307/community.24830799>.

⁹⁸ Jan Bondeson. “The Strange Story of Julia Pastrana,” 239.

where authorities quickly shut down her display—citing an 1875 law against the display of corpses and mummies.⁹⁹ Her body, along with that of her son, was put into storage but in 1976 the storage site was vandalized and the body of her son was subsequently eaten by mice.¹⁰⁰ Julia’s body was also damaged during this crime and was victim to another burglary in 1979—this time her body was taken. After being exploited for more than a century, Julia’s body was discovered in storage at the University of Oslo’s Institute of Forensic Medicine in 1990, nearly six thousand miles away from her birthplace.¹⁰¹ It took eight years of petitioning and the backing of the governor of Sinaloa for Julia to finally be returned to her homeland and given a proper burial in 2013.¹⁰²

J Marion Sims was a man of “noble character”¹⁰³ who routinely experimented on the bodies of slave women and pioneered the field of gynecology. Sims subjected multiple slave women to several operations each, none with any guarantee of success, and those women suffered when his methods failed. These experiments were excruciating, with no anesthesia, and usually conducted in unsanitary conditions. From experimenting with a metal spoon he developed the speculum, which is still used in

⁹⁹ Jan Bondeson. “The Strange Story of Julia Pastrana,” 240.

¹⁰⁰ Jan Bondeson. “The Strange Story of Julia Pastrana,” 240.

¹⁰¹ Jan Bondeson. “The Strange Story of Julia Pastrana,” 240-241.

¹⁰² Charles Wilson, “An Artist Finds.”

¹⁰³ James Marion Sims, *The Story of My Life*, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1884), Preface <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044013687306&view=lup&seq=11>.

modern gynecology.¹⁰⁴ In Sims' account, he took slave women into his care at his own expense, only asking that their owners clothe them and pay their taxes.¹⁰⁵

Medical practice during this time was hardly scientific. While Sims did go to college at Columbia¹⁰⁶ and went on to study medicine, most 'doctors' did not. And even if they did have qualifications, doctors were not guaranteed to be knowledgeable. One of the most well-known medical experts from this time is Dr. Benjamin Rush, famous for promoting the idea of 'black immunity' to yellow fever in New Orleans.¹⁰⁷ This claim, which Rush actively knew to be incorrect, was responsible for the deaths of thousands of black people. It also gave great power to the popular ideology that black people were different than white people and inferior. People during this time also believed that the environment could affect health in a very literal sense. Many illnesses were blamed on miasmas, "smelly, thickly visible, darkly colored, or oppressively still"¹⁰⁸ pockets of air. Sims had more qualifications than many of his peers, but that did not necessarily indicate that he was an expert on women's health.

Many people have defended Sims' actions, a surprising amount of them belonging to the medical field. One in particular that is featured in this paper is LL Wall, a white, male gynecologist. The article of his that I cite is a rebuttal to an article that was written

¹⁰⁴ James Marion Sims, *The Story of My Life*, 234.

¹⁰⁵ James Marion Sims, *The Story of My Life*, 236.

¹⁰⁶ James Marion Sims, *The Story of My Life*, 113-114.

¹⁰⁷ Rana A. Hogarth, *Medicalizing Blackness: Making Racial Difference in the Atlantic World, 1780-1840*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 25.

¹⁰⁸ Conevery Bolton Valencius, *The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land*. (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 114.

by a black female health specialist, Durrenda Ojanuga.¹⁰⁹ The basic argument to her article, which she stated in the conclusion, was that Sims exploited the institution of slavery to perform human experiments and gained immense fame from this.¹¹⁰ Wall, for the most part, ignores her point and insinuates that had Sims not operated on these women nothing would have been done to cure their ailments and that Sims operated for ‘therapeutic’ purposes only.¹¹¹ Wall is hardly the only person to defend Sims, but his article is a great example of people in privilege speaking over people in marginalized groups. In this case, Wall prioritized his own opinions over those of a *black woman* who has worked extensively with vesicovaginal fistula research, particularly with other black women.

People will jump to Sims’ defense to claim that the female patients consented to these procedures. This consent would have been impossible. Defenders often also assert that the use of anesthesia was relatively uncommon at the time.¹¹² But there is more to examine than just that—there are two contrasting narratives here. In a published journal Sims wrote, “I was fortunate in having three young healthy colored girls given to me by their owners in Alabama, I agreeing to perform no operation without the full consent of the patients, and never to perform any that would, in my judgment, jeopard[sic] life, or produce greater mischief on the injured organs — the owners agreeing to let me keep

¹⁰⁹ She has since changed her name to Durrenda Onolemhemen.

¹¹⁰ Durrenda, Ojanuga, "The Medical Ethics of the 'Father of Gynaecology', Dr. J. Marion Sims." *Journal of Medical Ethics* 19, no. 1 (1993): 30. Accessed May 5, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/27717250.

¹¹¹ L. L. Wall, "The Medical Ethics of Dr. J. Marion Sims: A Fresh Look at the Historical Record." *Journal of Medical Ethics* 32, no. 6 (2006), 349. Accessed April 12, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/27719646

¹¹²L. L. Wall, 347.

them.”¹¹³ This is the passage that is cited by Sims’ defenders. But this is not the only narrative that exists. In his autobiography, Sims wrote, “I agree to perform no experiment or operation on either of them to endanger their lives, and will not charge a cent for keeping them.”¹¹⁴ This was from a letter that was not written to the women he was to experiment on, but rather to their owners, asking for permission to operate on them. The public record, published in the newspaper claims that he would ask consent from the slave women he operated on, but the letters he wrote to their owners tell a different story.

The conversation about consent is a complicated one since the owners of the slave women generally did not consider them to have rights and the women had little control over their personal autonomy. Since slaves were property, they had no personal freedoms or rights; these women were not people. Article 1, Section 2, Clause 3 of the United States Constitution, most commonly referred to as the three-fifths compromise, claims that slaves were people, but that was hardly the opinion of the men that owned these women.¹¹⁵ Congress reached this compromise at the 1787 Constitutional Convention. Southern states wanted all of their slaves to be counted as people (of course, without any human rights) to gain more political power. Without the support of the southern states, the Constitution would not have passed so a compromise was made.¹¹⁶ The compromise counted all enslaved individuals as three-fifths of a person, allowing for the South to have

¹¹³ James Marion Sims, “Two Cases of Vesico- Vaginal Fistula, Cured,” *New York Medical Gazette*, 1854.
https://archive.org/stream/newyorkmedicalga5185unse/newyorkmedicalga5185unse_djvu.txt.

¹¹⁴ James Marion Sims, *The Story of My Life*, 236.

¹¹⁵ Lynd, Staughton. "The Compromise of 1787." *Political Science Quarterly* 81, no. 2 (1966): 225. Accessed April 12, 2020. doi:10.2307/2147971.

¹¹⁶ Lynd, Staughton. "The Compromise of 1787," 227.

a larger population (and thus more representatives and sway in the government). During this session, they also added an amendment that protected slavery until 1808. The three-fifths compromise and those that supported it did not consider slaves to be human or seek to acknowledge any rights for them.

Still, some might argue that the women's suffering was so great due to the fistulas that they were willingly submitting themselves for the slim chance of a cure. Vaginal fistulas are openings that connect the vagina to another organ, usually the bladder. They mostly occurred in childbirth. In his autobiography, Sims wrote,

The urine was running day and night, saturating the bedding and clothing, and producing an inflammation of the external parts wherever it came in contact with the person, almost similar to confluent small-pox, with constant pain and burning. The odor from this saturation permeated every thing, and every corner of the room; and, of course, her life was one of suffering and disgust. Death would have been preferable.¹¹⁷

These women were suffering from fistulas, and those who had just given birth also had the burden of caring for their children. It may have been true that they willingly volunteered if the problem could have been resolved with one excruciating procedure, but this was hardly ever the case.¹¹⁸ Sims also wrote in his autobiography that "But my operations all failed, so far as a positive cure was concerned. This went on, not for one year, but two and three, and even four years."¹¹⁹ These brave women sat through multiple operations with no anesthetic or painkillers for the sake of Sims' research. He even

¹¹⁷ James Marion Sims, *The Story of My Life*, 240.

¹¹⁸ James Marion Sims, *The Story of My Life*, 241.

¹¹⁹ James Marion Sims, *The Story of My Life*, 241.

described how he thought that one woman, Lucy, would die during an operation because of the pain it caused.¹²⁰

After Sims had managed to perfect his method using these women, he began to spread the news of his advancements to other doctors, showing them the methods and instruments that he used. They quickly adapted his methods and instruments, helping save countless women from the pain and misery of fistulas. But simply helping women was not good enough for Sims. In his autobiography he wrote, “I could not advertise; I could get nothing to do; I had no means of bringing myself before the public, or of reaching the profession... My thunder had been stolen, and I was left without any resources whatever[sic].”¹²¹ But Sims was a quick thinker and developed a way to profit from the misery of women: a women’s hospital.¹²² He explicitly says in his autobiography that if the other doctors had been nice to him and gave him credit for his methods that he would never have created a women’s hospital. His altruism knows no bounds.

Unfortunately for Sims, New York was not as accepting of him and denied his request to build a hospital. This caused him great financial trouble, so much so that he resorted to sending his children to public school instead of private school.¹²³ There were likely many reasons for this disapproval of Sims. In his autobiography, he refutes the idea that it was politically motivated, instead saying “there isn’t a particle of political sentiment in it. It is only that I do not belong to any dominant clique in the medical

¹²⁰ James Marion Sims, *The Story of My Life*, 238.

¹²¹ James Marion Sims, *The Story of My Life*, 269.

¹²² James Marion Sims, *The Story of My Life*, 269.

¹²³ James Marion Sims, *The Story of My Life*, 275

profession in New York.”¹²⁴ While that may have been the case, it is also possible that the rejection *was* politically motivated. The doctors in New York used Sims’ methods because they worked, but they did not particularly care about Sims at all. The fact that his methods came from experimentation on slaves was well known and would not have sat well in the free state of New York.

Sims eventually managed to establish a hospital, The Women's Hospital of New York, in 1855.¹²⁵ This gained him immediate fame and fortune and he spent the remaining years of his life touring Europe and the rest of the United States. He lived his life as a celebrity surgeon before he died in 1883 in New York at the age of 70.¹²⁶ A statue of Sims was created in the 1890s and placed in Bryant Park in New York; in the 1920s it was moved to Central Park, across from the New York Academy of Medicine. This statue stood, lauding Sims and his unethical practices for more than a century until the state of New York moved it in 2018 after numerous complaints. The statue, however, still stands in the Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn.¹²⁷ More than a century and a half later Sims continues to be applauded for the work that he did, although this work was done on black, *unfree* women who had no autonomy. Sims exploited black women for profit and became massively successful, and his reputation has remained positive for centuries.

¹²⁴ James Marion Sims, *The Story of My Life*, 279.

¹²⁵ Andrei, Amanda, “James Marion Sims (1813-1883)”. *Embryo Project Encyclopedia*, April 8, 2013. Accessed April 12, 2020. <http://embryo.asu.edu/handle/10776/5659>.

¹²⁶ Andrei, Amanda. “James Marion Sims.”

¹²⁷ William Neuman, “City Orders Sims Statue Removed From Central Park,” *New York Times*, April 16, 2018. Accessed on April 12, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/16/nyregion/nyc-sims-statue-central-park-monument.html>.

A more contemporary example of notable medical exploitation involves the life and death of an African American woman from Virginia. Her name was Henrietta Lacks and she was a black woman living in the United States who “unknowingly donated her cells.”¹²⁸ Anyone who has ever had a vaccine after the 1950s has had part of Henrietta inside of them. Henrietta, a black woman, died of cervical cancer in 1951. Following her death and without her consent doctors harvested her cells and sold them to doctors and researchers across the world. Her cells have been alive for longer than she was, and there are more of her cells alive now than ever existed in her body. Henrietta was born in 1920, and she died at only 31 years old. She left behind a husband, five children, and a cell sample that would change the medical world.¹²⁹

Henrietta lived a simple life as a tobacco farmer with her husband and children. In 1951 she visited the colored ward in Johns Hopkins University hospital with vaginal bleeding. At the time of Henrietta’s hospital visit, Johns Hopkins was the only viable option for a poor person of color. Johns Hopkins was one of very few hospitals offering free medical care to black people.¹³⁰ This was able to be accomplished because of the unstated agreement that research and treatment would occur together. This put Henrietta and other poor patients of color in a position that left them vulnerable to exploitation.

¹²⁸ “The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks,” *The Legacy of Henrietta Lacks*, Johns Hopkins Medicine, accessed April 12, 2020, <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/henrietalacks/immortal-life-of-henrietta-lacks.html>.

¹²⁹ “The Miracle of ‘HeLa.’” *EBONY* 31, no. 8 (June 1976), 98. <https://books.google.com/books?id=I94DAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PA93&dq=henrietta%20lacks&pg=PA93#v=onepage&q&f=false>

¹³⁰ Jessica L. Stump, “Henrietta Lacks and The HeLa Cell: Rights of Patients and Responsibilities of Medical Researchers.” *The History Teacher* 48, no. 1 (2014): 127. Accessed April 13, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/43264385.

And as would be made clear by the treatment of Henrietta; research took precedence over care.

After an examination, doctors gave her the worst news: cancer.¹³¹ Soon tumors would spread across her body and she died only six months after her diagnosis. She was treated with the newest technology available, radiation, but it still was not enough.¹³² Before the radiation destroyed her cells, samples were taken for study by Dr. George Gey who discovered how to store and transfer them so that they would infinitely multiply.¹³³ These samples were taken without the consent of Henrietta, and her family would not know about them for years.¹³⁴ Her family did not know about them because Henrietta's doctors had asked her husband for samples and he declined the request.¹³⁵ This violation of Henrietta created an enormous profit for the medical industry while her story all but disappeared, just another woman seen as an object and taken advantage of for the profit of others.

On the day of Henrietta's death Dr. Gey, the man responsible for the preservation of her cells, displayed a vial of them exclaiming on national television that "It is possible that, from a fundamental study such as this, we will be able to learn a way by which

¹³¹ "The Miracle of 'HeLa,'" 93.

¹³² E. Fannie Granton and Ronald E. Kisner, "Family Talks About Dead Mother Whose Cells Fight Cancer," *Jet* 50, no. 2 (1976), 16.
<https://books.google.com/books?id=fsADAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PA16&dq=henrietta%20lacks&pg=PA15#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

¹³³ "The Miracle of 'HeLa,'" 93.

¹³⁴ Denise Grady, "A Lasting Gift to Medicine That Wasn't Really a Gift," *New York Times*, February 1, 2010. Accessed April 12, 2020.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/02/health/02seco.html?auth=login-google>.

¹³⁵ "The Miracle of 'HeLa,'" 96.

cancer can be completely wiped out.”¹³⁶ Henrietta’s cells have managed to live on for decades outside of her body because they can infinitely replicate, making them extremely useful for medical research. She had a very volatile form of cervical cancer that spread rapidly; it was these cells that her doctors harvested. The cells that remain of her are not those of her natural body but those of the disease that took her life.

Henrietta’s cells have been used to create the vaccine for polio, produce medications for the flu, Parkinson’s, and leukemia, and were even sent into space to study the effects of zero gravity.¹³⁷ These cells are called HeLa cells, for her, but her name did not stick. Some articles written about her referred to her as Helen Lane or even Helen Larson.¹³⁸ The name even sounds enough like “healer” for Henrietta to be removed from the picture altogether. But medical professionals stole these cells from a living woman, a woman who was suffering from a terminal illness that would take her life soon after the samples were taken.

Nearly every major research facility in the world has HeLa cells; they have been bought and sold for decades. *Henrietta* has been bought and sold for decades. Some of the cell lines that were created using her cells have been sold for as much as ten thousand dollars, yet her family has seen none of this money.¹³⁹ At the time the samples were taken there were no bioethical regulations in place to protect patients. Measures have since emerged to protect patients, but for Henrietta, there was no justice. After Henrietta,

¹³⁶ Jessica L. Stump, "Henrietta Lacks," 127.

¹³⁷ Denise Grady, "A Lasting Gift."

¹³⁸ "The Miracle of 'HeLa,'" 96.

¹³⁹ Robert D. Truog, Aaron S. Kesselheim, and Steven Joffe. "Paying Patients for Their Tissue: The Legacy of Henrietta Lacks." *Science* 337, no. 6090 (2012): 38. Accessed April 13, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/41585193.

patients whose cell samples have generated a significant income have usually received compensation, or their families have.¹⁴⁰

Johns Hopkins has acknowledged that it was wrong to take her cells without permission, but as they claim “It was common practice at Hopkins for extra samples to be collected from cervical cancer patients during biopsies to be used for research purposes, regardless of race or socio-economic status.”¹⁴¹ But that was not true; the ‘colored ward’ was a designated place for research. Johns Hopkins has worked to help right their wrong by creating and funding symposiums and scholarships under the Lacks name as well as creating a memorial reward in her honor.¹⁴² This is a step towards honoring and acknowledging Henrietta for her unwitting role in the evolution of modern medicine. But this does not change the fact that Henrietta’s body was exploited by a group that held power over her and continues to do so.

Even with the advancements made in the medical community to protect patients, archaic attitudes towards people of color persevere. In April 2020 a French doctor and a research director faced backlash for discussing COVID-19 treatment testing in Africa. Jean-Paul Mira, the head of the intensive care unit at Cochin Hospital in Paris said in an interview that aired on television, “Shouldn’t we do this study in Africa where there are no masks, treatment, or intensive care, a little bit like we did in certain AIDS studies or with prostitutes?”¹⁴³ He faced immediate backlash, but his attitude is hardly unique. The

¹⁴⁰ Truog. “Paying Patients for Their Tissue,” 38.

¹⁴¹ “Frequently Asked Questions,” The Legacy of Henrietta Lacks, Johns Hopkins Medicine, accessed April 12, 2020, <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/henrietalacks/frequently-asked-questions.html>

¹⁴² “Honoring Henrietta Lacks,” The Legacy of Henrietta Lacks, Johns Hopkins Medicine, accessed April 12, 2020, <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/henrietalacks/honoring-henrietta-lacks.html>

¹⁴³ Wilson Wong, “French Doctor Apologizes for Comments on Testing a COVID-19 Vaccine in Africa Prompting Outrage on Social Media,” *NBC News* April 7, 2020. Accessed on April 15, 2020.

attitudes that allowed the degradation that Henrietta faced in the medical industry are alive and well today. Black bodies are seen as tools for research rather than as autonomous people.

It is also worth mentioning that Henrietta's story, as well as the stories of the women who Sims exploited, can be compared to other examples. Human medical experimentation has been a highly debated topic for centuries. The general consensus is that it remains unethical unless under very specific circumstances. The UNESCO "Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights" was published in 2005, using the declaration of human rights that was published after World War II as a template.¹⁴⁴ This second document focuses on bioethical principles and outlines the ethical responsibility of doctors to their patients. Consent, autonomy, and non-discrimination make up a large chunk of this document, these are ideas that make clear the unethical practices that Henrietta and the patients of Sims suffered.

It is important to see how the race of these women affected their position and how the men responsible for their exploitation treated and viewed them. her own family, her uncle, and then by the governor of her own city exploited Julia Pastrana. Even though she was of the same race as these men, she was below them in social standing because she was a woman, and she was also largely uneducated until she was under the governor's 'care.' Although these men exploited her and her body, they did not keep her for long.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/french-doctor-apologizes-comments-testing-covid-19-vaccine-africa-prompting-n1177991>.

¹⁴⁴ UNESCO, "Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights," United Nations, October 19, 2005. Accessed at http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=31058&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html.

The man responsible for most of her exploitation, which continued long after both of their deaths, was white.

Saartjie Baartman was born into a place where slavery was the norm. Many historians have supported the idea that whether she went with the Cezar brothers or not she would be enslaved. White men who displayed her for their own pleasure, as well as the pleasure and disgust of white people in England and France, owned Saartjie's body. She was forced to perform as if she was an animal—they viewed her as one because of her skin tone. They found her body so offensive that a play was written about her in which incest was seen as a preferable alternative to being with someone like her.

The women that Sims experimented on were only available to him because of their enslaved status. This status was directly linked to their skin color, as slavery was a race-based institution at the time and place that Sims was operating. Slave women had no rights at this time and no sense of autonomy which left them vulnerable to further exploitation. These women were easy subjects for Sims to experiment on because they had lost most of their value to their owners due to the fistulas; with no value to keep them, their owners were more than willing to loan them out to a man that might be able to fix their problems and get them back to work. Fistulas were a very common injury caused by birth, and many slave women were forced to continually reproduce which gave him a large population to access.

Henrietta Lacks had her cells harvested against the will of her and her family. Scientists duplicated those cells in a lab and distributed them globally. A separate Johns Hopkins Hospital ward designed for black patients treated Henrietta, and she received treatment that differed from the treatment of white patients. The hospital asked her

family's permission to take the cell samples from Henrietta and they said no. The hospital claims that her race had nothing to do with the removal and storage of the sample but that is highly unlikely. Henrietta was in the hospital in 1951, more than a decade before the Civil Rights Act, and during the time of 'separate but equal.' Black Americans faced an intense amount of discrimination and mistreatment during this era; it is not a stretch to suggest that Henrietta would have suffered the same.

All of these women have different stories and the injustices they faced are different, but one thing is true for all of them: men systematically exploited their bodies and profited from it. These profits happened to be monetary, as well as boosting the reputations of men who abused them. At least most of these cases have remained in the past and are no longer occurring but Henrietta's cells are still living on, helping to fuel the medical industry that took advantage of her body. The exploitation of these women was not inherently sexual, but it did play a part in their abuse. Saartjie's exploitation focused on her being a sexual entertainer, and there were rumors that she was prostituted.¹⁴⁵ Henrietta's condition was due to cancer, but also untreated STDs,¹⁴⁶ and the women that Sims experimented on were suffering because they were forced to produce offspring for their owners. The intention behind their exploitation may not initially seem sexual, but their treatment often had an inherently sexual component.

Marginalization enables exploitation. Groups that have been traditionally oppressed and discriminated against face a unique set of challenges that can make them

¹⁴⁵ Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman*, 71.

¹⁴⁶ Rebecca Skloot, "The Miracle Woman." *In Beyond Bioethics: Toward a New Biopolitics*, ed. Obasogie Osagie K. and Darnovsky Marcy, by Duster Troy and Williams Patricia J., (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018), 229. Accessed April 12, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctv1xxdw.33.

vulnerable to objectification from those more powerful than themselves. In modern times young women, impoverished women, and women of color are disproportionately targeted. This is the evolution of sex-based slavery practices and exploitation. The women in these case studies were frequently part of more than one marginalized group, and their commodification often depended on these aspects of their lives. Their stories are important because they provide a historical precedent for the ways that women in marginalized groups continue to be objectified and their bodies commodified. History should be remembered and used to improve the present. A society cannot cite progress when its treatment of marginalized women in modern times mimics that of women three centuries ago. The only progress that has been made is the movement of the same exploitation to a less public sphere.

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