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In the Moment of Violence: Writing the History of Postemancipation Terror

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EDITED BY DAVID W. BLIGHT AND JIM DOWNS

BEYOND FREEDOM

Disrupting the History of Emancipation

FOREWORD BY ERIC FONER

Beyond Freedom

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In the Moment of Violence

Writing the History of Postemancipation Terror

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Scholarly treatments of violence following emancipation in the southern United States have traditionally been preoccupied with the before and after. That is, they have focused on the perceived causes of the extensive white-on-black political violence of the postemancipation period and on its effects.[1] Only recently have historians begun to scrutinize instead the moment of violence itself. By that I mean the specific content of violent encounters—the language used, the gestures made, the scenes coerced by assailants.[2] And yet, despite a general lack of interpretation, the particular forms taken by postemancipation violence were neither inevitable nor self-evident in origin. In fact, violent attacks in this period frequently involved surprisingly elaborate performances of brutality not explained by the overt political aims of the assailants. These, I contend, cry out for analysis.

Even if historians have rarely focused their analysis on the moment of violence, they have frequently described the abuse that occurred during terroristic assaults in the postemancipation years. And the repetition of such description has been subject to criticism by others. The "endless recitations of the ghastly and the terrible," literary scholar and cultural historian Saidiya Hartman has argued, only "exacerbate the indifference to suffering that is the consequence of the benumbing spectacle." Hartman offers a powerful warning against indulging the narrative appeal of stories of violence that "exploit the shocking spectacle" of an abused black body, especially given "the precariousness of empathy and the uncertain line between spectator and witness."[3] Narrating violence—and especially repeating details of abuse for the purpose of creating drama—runs the risk of normalizing suffering as well as appealing to the worst

of voyeuristic tendencies. But this kind of narration is not the same as analysis, and the particular forms in which political violence was enacted remain important terrain for scholarly interpretation. Specifically, I am advocating close reading of the details of violent encounters as a window onto the political culture and conflicts of their time.

This essay explores such an approach to interpreting the moment of violence by treating closely three incidents of sexual violence suffered by African American women at the hands of white men following emancipation in the southern United States.[4] Representations of sexual violence seem particularly vulnerable to the concerns expressed by Hartman, due to the potentially sensationalist character of stories of rape. Indeed, often in the past, scholars considering postemancipation political violence recounted experiences of rape and other forms of sexual abuse primarily for the purpose of dramatizing the extremes of terror. More recent treatments by some feminist historians have taken a more analytical approach, arguing that rape was a conscious strategy intentionally deployed by white men in order to shore up a white supremacist patriarchy challenged by the outcome of the Civil War.[5] I am advocating a third approach, one that might help us move beyond both sensationalist and conspiratorial or purely instrumentalist readings of violence. This approach emphasizes the discursive dimensions of violent attacks. Sexual violence during Reconstruction was not simply an instrument of force, a tool white southerners used intentionally to intimidate opponents and assure their desired outcomes in elections or labor disputes. It also worked as a form of brutal political expression. Through their words and actions, assailants staged meanings for race that contested the rights and identities being claimed by African Americans in freedom. These scenes involved enormous performative excess, content seemingly unrelated to the stated political aims of the assailants, which drew on gendered imagery circulating in white political discourse at the time. This imagery depicted African American women and men as lacking what were considered to be honorable gender norms, sexuality, and family relationships and thus as supposedly unfit for citizenship and suffrage. I argue that focusing on these aspects of postemancipation violence reveals how specific attacks can best be understood as both a manifestation of and a participant in discursive contests over what race was going to mean in a society without slavery. This approach may better our chances of avoiding the dangers of sensationalist and exploitative renderings of black suffering. It aims instead at developing useful interpretations of the symbolic universe of the assailants that made particular kinds of violence

both meaningful and legitimate to the perpetrators, and that shaped in part the experience of the victims.

My emphasis on the discursive dimensions of sexual violence during Reconstruction has been shaped in part by debates among feminist historians regarding the "linguistic turn" in historical scholarship. A number of feminist social historians in the 1990s were critical of or at least cautious about applying poststructuralist methods to women's history, arguing that deconstructing categories such as gender would not help bring the experiences and struggles of women to light. These scholars were responding to contentions of Joan Wallach Scott and others that historians do not have unmediated access to the "real" experience of historical actors, and that social-historical sources illuminate not so much experience in the past as the discourses by which people represented and through which they came to understand their experience. Scott's feminist critics claimed that privileging language and representation made it impossible to analyze the actual material experiences of women in the past and present. And some of these critics invoked women's experiences with rape and other forms of violence as an example of something "real," a harsh, physical reality that existed outside of discourse and that could not be captured by an emphasis on meaning.[6]

The approach I am advocating for analyzing sexual violence began as an attempt to bridge this divide between poststructuralist and more empirical and materialist feminist scholars. By fusing the methods of cultural analysis with the practice of social history, my work on the subject of sexual violence seeks to show, in a historically grounded, concrete fashion, how rape, a "real," material, physical act of violence, happened through language, was intensely symbolic, and was a product of and participant in political discourse. Specifically I find that one cannot understand well the history of rape and other forms of sexual violence—and their political force—during Reconstruction without considering the discourses that invested that violence with meaning for its assailants as well as its victims.

The incidents of sexual violence explored in this essay were part of the larger history of terror that followed the Civil War, when bands of white men, often called "night riders" by freedpeople,[7] roamed especially rural areas of the South, disarming black Union soldiers and threatening and killing black community leaders. After the enfranchisement of black men under the Reconstruction Acts, vigilante gangs commonly sought to prevent new black voters from participating at the polls. Testimony about sexual violence that African American women suffered in the context

of this political terror has been preserved in government archives. This testimony contains details about assailants' actions and about exchanges between assailants and victims that are extremely disturbing. Though it risks "exploit[ing] the shocking spectacle" warned against by Hartman, I will nonetheless recount these disturbing details to the extent necessary for my analysis. I do so in hopes of highlighting the dilemmas involved in writing about violence while also suggesting a possible way to move beyond them.

The first of three violent encounters I will consider occurred in Robertson County, Tennessee, in late October 1866. Here, one afternoon, members of a family of former slaves named Willis watched as three white men approached the fence around their yard. These men called for the mother of the family (whose first name was not saved in the record) to come to the fence. Mrs. Willis responded but went no farther than the front door. Mrs. Willis's son, Henry, later reported to the Freedmen's Bureau that these men then "used the most obscene language" in addressing his mother. Henry also repeated how "one of them asked her if she had connection with a man lately. She said she was not in the habit of doing it. . . . He then said, God damn you I will make you do it." The man then drew his pistol and jumped over the fence into her yard. He stopped there, though, and did not follow through on his threat. A few days later, this time at night, the same men returned to the Willis home, beat Mrs. Willis's husband Sanford, plundered their belongings, and burned their house to the ground. According to affidavits left with the Freedmen's Bureau by both Henry and his sister Amanda, one of these men also led Amanda "down into the woods" and raped her.[8]

The second case occurred in Cherokee County, Alabama, in 1869. There a seventeen-year-old former slave named Cynthia Bryant was staying at the home of freedman George Moore, his wife, and his mother, whose name was Rina Barry. In the middle of the night, while Cynthia was sleeping in a bed with Rina, several disguised men burst into the home. The men dragged George out of the house and beat him. George later told a lieutenant at a nearby camp of federal troops who was collecting information on the activities of the local Klan that while several of these men "guarded me . . . others went in and ravished a young girl who was visiting my wife." Rina Barry herself described to a sympathetic white neighbor what had happened to Cynthia Bryant, and this neighbor wrote down Rina's story and sent it to the same army lieutenant: "One came to the bed where she [Rina] and a neighbor woman were sleeping, and wanted to get in bed with them. . . . They refused him, but he said if the

girl that was in bed with Reaner [Rina] did not submit to him, he would shoot her, and had a gun in his hand. The girl commenced crying and said she did not want to die; and then he set his gun down by the bed and stripped off the cover and got on the girl in bed with Reaner." Rina also recounted how another assailant "tried to get George's wife out doors to some of the other men and let them have to do with her." George's wife dissuaded the attackers of this plan, however, by telling them "she had just miscarried and couldn't."[9]

Finally, the third assault also occurred in 1869, this time in Rockingham County, North Carolina. Here we have no direct testimony about the attack, only the report of a local court clerk sent to a state supreme court justice, which the justice in turn sent on to the governor. We do not know how the clerk learned of the attack, but we can presume the details of this incident were reported to him by freedpeople who were either victims of the assault or witnesses to it. According to this report, a group of disguised men whipped a black man while forcing him to pretend he was having intercourse with a black girl. The assailants furthermore insisted that the girl's father be a witness to the scene.[10]

How can we as scholars write about and interpret such disturbing accounts of sexual violence and terror? How can the record of such moments of tense exchange and physical and psychic brutality expressed in sexual and gendered form be described and analyzed in a way that makes them part of a useful history? Alternatively, if these moments of violence cannot be interpreted in an illuminating and useful way, does repeating their details risk either reproducing the indignity that these women and their families suffered or effacing their suffering by making it simply an object of analysis? These questions arose for me as I was researching sexual violence during Reconstruction, and especially when the cold-blooded brutality I have occasionally discovered in the archives stopped me in my analytical tracks.[11] Even when not stymied by the record of brutality, I have still found myself in the uncomfortable and ethically challenging position of having a successful research day amount to the discovery of evidence of another person's pain. And with Saidiya Hartman's critique in mind, I have often feared that these stories might serve as much as combat racist and sexist ends.

Yet my hesitancy to pursue histories of sexual violence inspired by these ethical dilemmas was counterbalanced by the overwhelming evidence of the lengths to which many black women and men living through Reconstruction had themselves gone to make their experiences of violence part of the public record. Freedpeople traveled great distances and risked

retaliation by white vigilantes in order to testify before congressional investigating committees, federal grand juries, and the Freedmen's Bureau, white officials whom freedpeople no doubt suspected were as likely to receive them with skepticism as sympathy.[12] And still, they went to testify. Thus we know that, at that time at least, they wanted their stories told.

Also compelling my efforts to write useful histories of sexual violence was the fact that the way the history of racial violence after emancipation had traditionally been interpreted could not account, for instance, for the "obscene language" directed at Mrs. Willis, or the freedman forced to simulate sex with a child. Histories of postemancipation violence had tended to emphasize not what historian Thomas Holt has called "the inexplicable excesses of racial phenomena [and] their seeming irrationality" but rather violence's more materialist aims and effects.[13] To some degree, this is understandable. White gangs had clearly directed their violence at those people who most visibly exercised, promoted, or enabled the empowerment of former slaves—soldiers, militia members, ministers, teachers, and those who bought land or resisted white efforts to control their labor. Indeed, night-rider violence was so seemingly instrumental and so explicitly targeted for political ends that it is difficult to resist reducing its meaning entirely to its function. And yet, violence also took striking forms seemingly unrelated to function. Most saliently, this politically targeted and instrumental violence was suffused with imagery of gender and sexuality beyond anything necessitated by the explicit political ends of its assailants. Trying to understand this, I have come to see night-rider violence not simply as an instrument of force but also as a complex rhetoric of power and a stage for articulating racial meanings that contested the rights and identities claimed by African Americans in freedom.

Returning to the violent encounters described above, and contextualizing and attempting to read them more closely, may help elaborate this point. Mrs. Willis was crudely propositioned and her daughter Amanda was raped in a region of Tennessee where in 1866 freedpeople were facing starvation. Planters had neither rations nor wages to pay them, so laborers began refusing to work in their fields and were seeking alternative means of subsistence. In frustration with this assertion of autonomy on the part of their former slaves, local planters allowed a band of ex-Confederate guerrillas, known as Colonel Harper's gang, essentially to take over the region. A broadside allegedly drafted by the gang, here calling themselves the "I Am Committee," was posted on doors and read aloud to freedpeople in this area. Notably, among the regulations for

former slaves' conduct that this document contained were the rule that not only all black men but also all black women and children had to be in the employ of a white person and that all black families were to continue to live on their former owners' land.[14] These rules effectively refused any appearance of independent domestic life for former slaves and insisted on white men's control over the allocation of the labor in black families.

The white vigilantes who attacked the Willis home in October 1866, one of whom claimed to be Colonel Harper himself,[15] further dramatized an alleged impossibility of independent black households. Their actions communicated to the audience for the attack—both themselves and their victims—that the norms and identities associated with a supposedly protective patriarchy did not apply to black families. Simply by asking Mrs. Willis "if she had connection with a man lately," her assailants forced her into an exchange in which she was positioned not as a proper wife standing at the front door of the home she shared with her husband but rather as a loose or lewd woman. The fact that the man who propositioned her failed to do as he threatened—he menacingly jumped over the fence, a symbol of the boundaries of a man's private and protected domain,[16] but he did not in the end "make her" have forced "connection" with him—highlights the importance of the verbal exchange, and of an almost scripted posturing that was frequently evident in night riders' attacks. The assertion of black women's depravity contained within this exchange was made more visceral and concrete when these men returned a few nights later, separated Amanda from the protective space of her home and family, and forced her to engage in sex with a white stranger.

The other two assaults I described occurred after black men had secured the right to vote and night riding became a common strategy to keep black men from the polls. Indeed, the attack during which Cynthia Bryant was raped occurred just before an election in Alabama, and the intruders had first demanded to know for whom George had voted in the last presidential election. They cursed and beat him when he defiantly replied that he had voted for Republican president Ulysses S. Grant. When George testified about the attack, he reported, "the cause of this treatment, they said, was that we voted the radical ticket."[17] Part of that "treatment" was to enter and behave in the Barry-Moore household as if they were in a house of ill repute, a place in which women were available to have sex with strange white men on demand. Rather than physically forcing sex, the man who raped Cynthia Bryant first asked for her submission—he said he wanted to get in bed with her. He overwhelmed

her initial refusal by threatening to kill her, but once he had obtained her acquiescence, signaled to him when she said, "she did not want to die," he put his gun down. He compelled her to perform her consent, and thus her depravity, and this allowed him to maintain the fantasy that he was engaging in illicit but consensual sex, sex that marked the Barry-Moore household not as a virtuous domestic sphere that served as the basis of a legitimate political authority for its patriarch but rather as a space of vice, marginal to any community of upstanding citizens.

We know far less about the scene of simulated sex coerced by night riders in North Carolina, except that it occurred in an area where disguised white men had been assaulting freedpeople almost nightly for a month. But we do know that the Klan often circulated rumors of unruly domestic relations and illicit sexual practices among former slaves as rationales for attacks. Such misrepresentations of African American sexuality were invoked in the midst of actual assaults, suggesting that fantasies of black sexual transgression played an important role in shaping the specifics of individual incidents of violence. The Klan appears to have reveled in accusing black men and women of inappropriate conduct within their families, for instance when they beat a black woman in Gwinnett County, Georgia, telling her she was being punished because she had been "knocking about" with a man other than her husband.[18] I see the otherwise inexplicable forcing of a man to pretend he was having sex with a child in this context. By forcing freedpeople to perform transgressive and possibly violent sex or by forcing them to appear to allow it to occur in their families, vigilantes coerced black men and women into participating in white fantasies representing them as incapable of proper domestic relationships and virtuous gender identities, relationships and identities that were key to many white men's own depiction of the legitimacy of their political power.[19] Night riders employed patriarchal logic along with vivid pornographic imagination to construct gendered representations of racial difference.

African American women were not, of course, the authors or choreographers of these gendered scenes. Nonetheless, from their words—both the words they and others attributed to them in the moment of violence and the words they chose to describe assaults when they testified after the fact—we can at times discern the ways that they understood and reacted to the assaults. Also evident are women's efforts to convey opposing meanings for the scenes in which they were forced to participate. In a variety of ways, for instance, women refused assailants' idea that they were

participating in consensual, casual sex. When Cynthia Bryant declared that she "did not want to die," she told the assailant, the other intruders who were present in the room, Rina Barry who lay by her side, and other members of the Barry-Moore household with whom she stayed that yes, she was acquiescing to this man's demands, but she did so only under the threat of deadly force. Despite the pretense this man seemed to want to enact when he put his gun down, she was not agreeing to have sex. Rather, she told all around her, she was trying to save her life.[20]

When Rina Barry recounted the events of that night to her neighbor, at least as he recorded them in his letter, the majority of her words focused on exchanges between the attackers and women regarding demands for sex. This was despite the fact that the assailants were responsible for a wide range of criminal acts.[21] Something similar can be observed in Amanda Willis's testimony. In her affidavit before the Freedmen's Bureau agent, Willis foregrounded the fact that she had been raped while only briefly mentioning other acts of violence against her family and their home. Following longer and more detailed affidavits made by her father and brother, Amanda Willis testified this way:

> On or about the 23rd day of October 1866, I saw three men at Mother's house, and after putting all of us out of the house and our clothes, one of the men got me by the arm and told me to follow him. he brought me down into the woods and had forcible connection with me.
>
> They all left immediately afterwards.
>
> They burned up father's house.[22]

The emphasis on sexual violence in Willis's and Barry's accounts of the attacks on their homes may have been the result of questioning. Perhaps Barry's neighbor asked her to elaborate on an initial report that Bryant had been raped. And Amanda Willis may have testified less about the theft, beating of her father, and arson for which the attackers were also responsible because the Freedman's Bureau agent before whom she spoke, already in possession of affidavits describing these crimes, asked her to speak specifically about the rape. We will never know for sure. Regardless, the fact that these women willingly offered testimony focused on rape indicates that foremost in their minds regarding the horrors of their experience thus far as free people was that black women still were not living free of sexual assault. Their testimony suggests not only the importance of bodily integrity and lives free of sexual abuse to freedwomen's expectations for freedom but also that they understood the centrality of

sexuality to the racist practices seeking to exclude them from fully realizing a free life. They may well have felt a particular urgency to protest this aspect of postemancipation terror.

We may never be able to circumvent entirely the perils of sensationalism and, obversely, the potential numbing of readers to African American pain through the telling and retelling of stories of white-on-black violence. But analyzing sexual violence, and the politics and discourse that gave it meaning, also helps us deconstruct—and if possible counter—the racist and sexist scripts that mobilized rape.[23] By reading closely the moment of violence, I seek to foreground its symbolic dimensions without either detaching ourselves from or exploiting for dramatic purposes the pain and horror of the experience of that violence. This approach to analysis can help us make sense of that "inexplicable excess" of racial violence to which Thomas Holt refers by situating it, in the case of rape, in the ways meanings for race were articulated with and through discourses of gender and sexuality. This approach may also help us make sense of the highly sexualized racism with which we continue to struggle to this day. Thus, I hope that by analyzing stories of violence, with caution and care, we can contribute to the building of useful history.

NOTES

I thank Gregory Downs, Jim Downs, and David Blight for inviting me to participate in "Beyond Freedom," where this essay began, and especially Jim for encouraging me to use this conference as an opportunity to reflect on approaches to analyzing violence.

1. The extensive literature on postemancipation racial violence in the United States includes W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay toward the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880* (New York: Meridian, 1962 [1935]), esp. 674–84; John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction: After the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), chap. 9; Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971); George C. Rable, *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984); Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), esp. 425–44; Michael Perman, "Counter Reconstruction: The Role of Violence in Southern Redemption," in *The Facts of Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of John Hope Franklin*, ed. Eric Anderson and Alfred A. Moss Jr. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 121–40; Catherine Clinton, "Bloody Terrain: Freedwomen, Sexuality and Violence during Reconstruction," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 76 (Summer 1992):

313–32, and "Reconstructing Freedwomen," in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 306–19; Martha Hodes, "The Sexualization of Reconstruction Politics: White Women and Black Men in the South after the Civil War," in *American Sexual Politics: Sex, Gender, and Race since the Civil War*, ed. John C. Fout and Maura Shaw Tantillo (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 59–74; Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997), chap. 7; Scott Reynolds Nelson, "Livestock, Boundaries, and Public Space in Spartanburg: African American Men, Elite White Women, and the Spectacle of Conjugal Relations," in *Sex, Love, Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History*, ed. Martha Hodes (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 313–27; Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Iron Confederacies: Southern Railways, Klan Violence, and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Stephen Kantrowitz, "One Man's Mob Is Another Man's Militia: Violence, Manhood, and Authority in Reconstruction South Carolina," in *Jumping Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights*, ed. Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, and Bryant Simon (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 67–87; Lisa Cardyn, "Sexualized Racism/Gendered Violence: Outraging the Body Politic in the Reconstruction South," *Michigan Law Review* 100 (February 2002): 813–35; Lisa Cardyn, "Sexual Terror in the Reconstruction South," in *Battle Scars: Gender and Sexuality in the American Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 140–67; Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003); Elaine Franz Parsons, "Midnight Rangers: Costume and Performance in the Reconstruction-Era Ku Klux Klan," *Journal of American History* 92, no. 3 (2005): 811–36; Elaine Franz Parsons, *Ku Klux: The Birth of the Klan during Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Kidada E. Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me: African American Testimonies of Racial Violence from Emancipation to World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); Carole Emberton, *Beyond Redemption: Race, Violence, and the American South after the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Kate Côté Gillin, *Shrill Hurrahs: Women, Gender, and Racial Violence in South Carolina, 1865–1900* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2013).

2. For works that analyze specific forms taken by racial violence, see, for example, Clinton, "Bloody Terrain" and "Reconstructing Freedwomen"; Hodes, *White Women, Black Men* and "Sexualization of Reconstruction Politics"; Nelson, "Livestock, Boundaries, and Public Space in Spartanburg" and *Iron Confederacies*, esp. chap. 5 and 6; Cardyn, "Sexualized Racism/Gendered Violence" and "Sexual Terror"; and especially Parsons, "Midnight Rangers" and *Ku Klux*. Parsons analyzes the ways various popular cultural practices from the nineteenth-century

urban North shaped acts of violence by the Ku Klux Klan during Reconstruction. See also Hahn, *Nation under Our Feet*, 265–88.

3. Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 4.

4. The incidents and analysis considered here are drawn from Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), chap. 5.

5. Feminist scholars have also argued that white-on-black rape during Reconstruction was a continuation of the prevalent sexual abuse of enslaved women in the antebellum southern society as well as evidence of the magnitude of the rage white southern men felt about the loss of power represented by emancipation and establishment of formal political equality across race. See, for example, Cardyn, "Sexual Terror" and "Sexualized Racism/Gendered Violence," esp. 679, 827–29; Clinton, "Bloody Terrain" and "Reconstructing Freedwomen."

6. See the following from Joan Wallach Scott: *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); "On Language, Gender, and Working-Class History," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 31 (Spring 1987): 1–13; review of *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence* by Linda Gordon, and "Response to Linda Gordon," *Signs* 15 (Summer 1990): 848–51, 859–60; "'The Tip of the Volcano,'" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35 (April 1993): 438–43; "The Evidence of Experience," in *Questions of Evidence: Proof, Practice, and Persuasion across the Disciplines*, ed. James Chandler, Arnold I. Davidson, and Harry Harootunian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 363–87, and a shorter version of the same essay, titled "Experience," in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan Wallach Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 22–40. For historians who are implicitly in sympathy with Scott's approach, see Elsa Barkley Brown, "'What Has Happened Here': The Politics of Difference in Women's History and Feminist Politics," *Feminist Studies* 18 (Summer 1992): 295–312; Nancy A. Hewitt, "Compounding Differences," *Feminist Studies* 18 (Summer 1992): 313–26. See also Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism,'" in Butler and Scott, *Feminists Theorize the Political*, 3–21. For critiques of Scott, see Laura Lee Downs, "If 'Woman' Is Just an Empty Category, Then Why Am I Afraid to Walk Alone at Night? Identity Politics Meets the Postmodern Subject," and "Reply to Joan Scott," both in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35 (April 1993): 414–37, 444–51; Linda Gordon, review of Joan Wallach Scott's *Gender and the Politics of History* and "Response to Joan Scott," in *Signs* 15 (1990): 853–59, 852–53. Christine Stansell also expressed concerns about Scott's approach to history in "A Response to Joan Scott," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 31 (Spring 1987): 24–29. For works that invoked sexual violence as a caution against employing poststructuralist analysis for feminist concerns, see Downs,

"If 'Woman' Is Just an Empty Category," 414; Mary E. Hawkesworth, "Knower Knowing, Known: Feminist Theory and Claims of Truth," *Signs* 14 (Spring 1989) 533–57; Gordon, "Response to Scott," 853.

7. Gladys-Marie Fry, *Night Riders in Black Folk History* (Athens, Ga.: Brown Thrasher Books, University of Georgia Press, 1991 [1975]), 154–60.

8. Based on information in affidavits of Henry Willis, Stanford Willis, and Amanda Willis, in Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Tennessee, microfilm 999, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (hereafter BRFAL), microfilm roll 34, "Affidavits Relating to Outrages." For more on the attack on the Willis family home, see Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*, 203–7. The Willises' experience is also discussed in Cardyn, "Sexual Terror" and "Sexualized Racism/Gendered Violence," 729–30.

9. Affidavit of George Moore and letter from John Hamilton to Lieut. James Miller, August 29, 1869, appended to Testimony of General Samuel W. Crawford, in U.S. Congress, Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, *Testimony Taken by the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States* (hereafter *KKK Testimony*), 9:1188, 1189–90.

10. Recounted in Trelease, *White Terror*, 195, citing Thomas A. Ragland et al. to Justice Thomas Settle, Wentworth, July 13, 1869, and Settle to Gov. Holden, Wentworth, July 28, 1869, W. W. Holden Papers, Duke University. See also Cardyn, "Sexual Terror," 144.

11. See Thomas Holt's discussion of W. E. B. Du Bois being stopped in his tracks both literally and figuratively by "the sheer incomprehensibility of racist phenomena" in "Marking: Race, Race-Making, and the Writing of History," *American Historical Review* 100 (February 1995): 3–5.

12. See Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*, 1–4, 77–80, and chap. 6; Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me*. For a groundbreaking, thoughtful exploration of the difficulties of speaking publicly about rape for African American women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," *Signs* 14 (1989): 912–20.

13. Holt, "Marking," 5.

14. "I Am Committee," enclosed in Lt. Chas B. Brady to Bvt. Lt. Col. A. L. Hough, January 29, 1867, Letters Received, series 4720, Dept. of the Tennessee, U.S. Army Continental Commands, reproduced in *Families and Freedom: A Documentary History of African American Kinship in the Civil War Era*, ed. Ira Berlin and Leslie Rowland (New York: New Press, 1997), 189. For more on Harper's gang and the I Am Committee document, see Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*, 184–87.

15. This claim was most likely false. See Affidavits of Henry Willis and Stanford

Willis, BRFAL), microfilm roll 34, "Affidavits Relating to Outrages," and Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*, 203–4.

16. See especially Stephanie McCurry, "The Politics of Yeoman Households in South Carolina," in Clinton and Silber, *Divided Houses*, 22–38; 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).

17. Events described in Affidavits of George Moore, Cynthia Bryant, and Rina Barry, and letter from John Hamilton to Lieut. James Miller, August 29, 1869, all appended to Testimony of General Samuel W. Crawford, *KKK Testimony*, 9:1187–90.

18. Testimony of William Hampton Mitchell, *KKK Testimony*, 7:642.

19. See esp. Laura F. Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), and McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds* and "The Politics of Yeoman Households."

20. Hamilton letter, August 29, 1869, *KKK Testimony*, 9:1189.

21. Ibid. Rina Barry told her story to her neighbor, John Hamilton, three days after the attack. Both Cynthia Bryant and Rina Barry subsequently left affidavits themselves with a local justice of the peace almost a month later. In those affidavits, both women mentioned that intruders came into the house, took George outside and beat him, and then one of the men spoke to them while they lay in bed. They did not mention, though, that Cynthia Bryant was raped, each repeating instead, "We were not troubled any more." Affidavits of Cynthia Bryant and Rina Barry, appended to Testimony of General Samuel W. Crawford, in *KKK Testimony*, 9:1188–89. What to make of this? Would John Hamilton and George Moore have made up the story of rape? That seems improbable, especially as Hamilton's account contains details he would have been unlikely to invent. Hamilton himself explained in his letter to James Miller that the omission was due to his warnings to the Barry-Moore household that speaking about the attack placed them in danger. He wrote, "When I saw [Rina] and George, and some other colored folks, I told them not to tell anything unless it was to some one of the republican party, and they told me they would not. I told them if they told what had taken place, they might kill some of them. . . . If they have not stated to you just as I have, I have no doubt but what it is from the caution I gave them as a friend." The women's affidavits were copied by Miller but sworn before the justice of the peace; George Moore's affidavit does not indicate that it was similarly made before the local official. Hamilton also feared retribution from the vigilantes for telling his story. He explained to Miller, "I would have come to see you before now, but I would be in danger of my life if it was known." Hamilton letter, August 29, 1869, *KKK Testimony*, 9:1190. The fact that there was so much risk involved in recounting incidents of rape and yet freedpeople did so nonetheless further highlights the importance to them of protesting this form of violence.

22. Affidavit of Amanda Willis, BRFAL., microfilm roll 34, "Affidavits Relating to Outrages." For more on Amanda Willis's affidavit, see Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*, 205–6.

23. Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*; on particular gender and racial "scripts" leading to rape, see also Sharon Marcus, "Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention," in Butler and Scott, *Feminists Theorize the Political*, 385–403.