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978-0-521-70398-7 - Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household

Thavolia Glymph

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Out of the House of Bondage

The Transformation of the Plantation Household

The plantation household was, first and foremost, a site of production. This fundamental fact has generally been overshadowed by popular and scholarly images of the plantation household as the source of slavery's redeeming qualities, where "gentle" mistresses ministered to "loyal" slaves. This book recounts a different story. The very notion of a private sphere, as divorced from the immoral excesses of chattel slavery as from the amoral logic of market laws, functioned to conceal from public scrutiny the day-to-day struggles between enslaved women and their mistresses, subsumed within a logic of patriarchy. One of emancipation's unsung consequences was precisely its exposure to public view of the unbridgeable social distance between the women on whose labor the plantation households relied and the women who employed them. This is a story of race and gender, nation and citizenship, freedom and bondage in the nineteenth-century South, a big abstract story that is composed of equally big personal stories.

Thavolia Glymph (Ph.D. Economic History, Purdue University) is an associate professor of African and African American Studies and History at Duke University. She has coedited two volumes of the award-winning *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation* series and published scholarly articles in five book collections. Her current work focuses on a comparative study of plantation households in Brazil and the U.S. South, former Civil War soldiers in Egypt during Reconstruction, and a history of women in the American Civil War.

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To the memory of my parents

and

for Sebastian, Morgan, and Kristal

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I *am* the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt,
out of the house of bondage.

Exodus 20:2

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Acknowledgments

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Susan Thorne, Darlene Clark Hine, and Karen Fields read the entire final draft, and each, in her own inimitable way, nudged me through the final year, tempering much needed constructive criticism with libations for the soul. Susan brought to the task a sharp theoretical eye and insights from her work and extensive knowledge in British history and the British Empire, along with uncommon friendship and humanity. Darlene read with an eye sharpened by a long, deep, and unsurpassed engagement with African American women's history, and the heart of a mentor. Her intellectual support was matched by a steady drum beat of unstinting kindnesses as I trudged through the final year of revising and editing. The genesis of this book, in fact, belongs to the long-ago conversations where Darlene, Kate Wittenstein, and I first began exploring the silences that surround black women's history. Karen Fields' generous offer to read the manuscript came as I was in the throes of final editing, and I am not sure which was more frightening to contemplate: the idea of having her read it or sending it before the public without her having done so. So, with what remained of my good sense, I accepted. Susan, Darlene, and Karen went far beyond the call of duty, providing gravity when that was needed, and, encouragement always. I have been richly rewarded by the insights of each of these scholars. To each, I am happily indebted. David Barry Gaspar provided invaluable comments on an early version of the manuscript. Stephane Robolin took valuable time from writing his dissertation to send me detailed written comments on an early version of Chapter 1.

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study with him. At the time, I did not have the first clue about how to make this happen. But, clearly, I got that part figured out, which, fortuitously, also brought Darlene Clark Hine into my life. Hal's knowledge of the plantation South, I still think, is unparalleled. But I came to appreciate as much the breadth of his intellectual grounding and the greatness and generosity of his spirit. Ira Berlin brought me into the extraordinary world of the Freedmen and Southern Society Project. The experience of working as one of the editors on this project with Ira, Barbara Fields, Steven Hahn, Steven Miller, Joseph Reidy, Leslie Roland, Julie Saville, and the incomparable staff assistant at the time, Susan Bailey, was an incredible experience and a model of collegiality and collaborative scholarship.

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And, finally, to John Coltrane, Nina Simone, Leadbelly, and Oleta Adams for knowing and reminding me of what it would take to get this done.

Thavolia Glymph
Durham, North Carolina

Abbreviations

BRFAL	Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands
DU	Duke University
LC	Library of Congress
LR	Letters Received
LS	Letters Sent
MDAH	Mississippi Department of Archives and History
NA	National Archives
NCDAH	North Carolina Department of Archives and History
RG	Record Group
SCDAH	South Carolina Department of Archives and History
SCHS	South Carolina Historical Society
SCL	South Carolinian Library
SHC	Southern Historical Collection