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.
Out of the House of Bondage

The Transformation of the Plantation Household

THAVOLIA GLYMPH

Duke University
To the memory of my parents

and

for Sebastian, Morgan, and Kristal
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
### Contents

**Acknowledgments**  
*page ix*

**Abbreviations**  
*xiii*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The Gender of Violence</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Beyond the Limits of Decency”: Women in Slavery</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Making “Better Girls”: Mistresses, Slave Women, and the Claims of Domesticity</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Nothing but Deception in Them”: The War Within</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Out of the House of Bondage: A Sundering of Ties, 1865–1866</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>“A Makeshift Kind of Life”: Free Women and Free Homes</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>“Wild Notions of Right and Wrong”: From the Plantation Household to the Wider World</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Epilogue**  
*227*

**Bibliography**  
*237*

**Index**  
*265*
I am happy to have this opportunity to acknowledge the support of colleagues, institutions, and friends that helped to keep the project that would become this book afloat. I have had the good fortune to work at institutions and with many wonderful colleagues whose own work deepened my understanding of the large processes and movements of history. Funding support from Duke University was critical to the final stages of the book’s preparation. In addition, a year spent as a faculty Fellow with the John Hope Franklin Humanities Institute Seminar (2002–03) provided valuable time to revise what would become the first two chapters and, beyond that, a vibrant atmosphere of collegiality and interdisciplinary thinking. Archivists and research librarians at several institutions made the journey smoother. I wish to thank in particular Elizabeth Dunn and Eleanor Mills of the Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library at Duke Libraries for their help generally and for locating and processing the cover illustration. My students, who over the years have listened patiently and often enthusiastically to my obsession with the nineteenth-century South, have been some of my most generous and formidable critics.

The opportunity to present some of the central ideas in this book at conferences and symposia meant access to a wider world of ideas and critiques that, in the end, helped to make the analysis sharper and the book much better than it otherwise would have been. I wish to thank the graduate students, colleagues, and institutions who sponsored these visits, and colleagues whose comments helped me to refine many of these ideas. Special thanks to Elsa Barkley Brown, for inviting me to give the annual address to the Southern Association for Women Historians during her year as president of the association; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, for her invitation to speak at Emory; Sylvia Frey, for her invitation to give the National Endowment for the Humanities Lecture at the University of Richmond; Valinda Littlefield, for the invitation to give the Millercom Colloquium when she was still at the University of Illinois-Urbana; and Nan Woodruff, for her fateful invitation to speak at Penn State and the wonderful associations that would lead to. Nancy Hewitt, Ann Bowman, Laura
Acknowledgments

Woliver, Stephanie McCurry, Beverly Brock, David Brock, and Drew Gilpin Faust were always there with words of encouragement.

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.

This book found its wings at a crucial moment in my life, and I acknowledged with deepest gratitude individuals whose friendship, practical advice, good humor, steadfast support, and generosity helped to set it free and launch it, finally, out to the wider world. Their spiritual support and intellectual sustenance made an otherwise daunting year surmountable. Special thanks to Myrna and Emile Adams, Connie Blackmore, Joye Bowman, Daphne Davis, Sarah Deutsch, John Dittmer, Anita Earls, Lorin Palmer Fielding, Barbara Fields, Karen Fields, Marjorie Ford, John Hope Franklin, Gary Gallagher, Eugene D. Genovese, John Higginson, Darlene Clark Hine, William Hine, Vivian Jackson, Lori Leachman, Gerda Lerner, Valinda Littlefield, Kirsten Mullen, Sally Dalton Robinson, Julie Saville, Susan Thorne, and my THL comrades for saving a place for me. I also want to especially thank the many colleagues in the Departments of African & African American Studies and History at Duke for their support. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese did not live to see this book published but did know it was on its way and, I hope, how much her friendship and scholarship helped to sustain it.

Over the years, many others have shared laughter, intellectual comradeship, and time and have been constant in their faith in me and in this project. It would take more space than I have here to name them all, but there are a few I must name. Harold D. Woodman is among this number. I first read Woodman’s work as an undergraduate student and decided then and there that I would
Acknowledgments

My 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.

This book will enter the wider world finally because of an exceptional and brilliant editor, Lewis Bateman. Lew understood what I was trying to do and shepherded this project with brilliance, and warmth. My thanks also to the copy and production editor, Elise M. Oranges; Mark Mastromarino, who prepared the index; Alisa Harrison, who provided valuable research assistance; and the readers for the Press for their votes of confidence. This is an occasion to also express my appreciation to Mrs. Mildred Moore of Cape May, New Jersey, for sharing and occasionally turning over her home to my family for brief summer retreats during the last years I worked on this book, to others in her family whose hospitality we enjoyed, and to Grace Plater for her always uplifting telephone calls and for caring deeply.

In the end, this book is indebted, first and foremost, to my parents. My father, known to all who knew and loved him as Luke, and my mother, whose mother memorably named her Pearl, gave me my first and most important lessons in southern history and the work of building free homes. They did not live to see this book published, but I think they would be pleased. One of the most rewarding parts of getting to this page is the occasion it presents to dedicate this book to my children, Sebastian, Morgan, and Kristal, whose love sustains and who have looked forward to this day as much as I. “I love you more.”

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