

Morgan, Jennifer L. *Reckoning with Slavery: Gender, Kinship, and Capitalism in the Early Black Atlantic*. Duke University Press, 2021. xvi + 296 pp.

Reckoning with Slavery: Gender, Kinship, and Capitalism in the Early Black Atlantic, by historian Jennifer L. Morgan introduces readers to the intersectional relationship of gender, kinship, and capitalism by diving into the economic and numerical logics of representations justified by slavery. Within the text, she demonstrates how the study and scholarship of slavery caused an erasure to violence, particularly for women, while enforcing hierarchies and policies of social relations. Morgan challenges historians and scholars to evolve from writing about enslavement merely as numerical, to writing directly from an intellectual, social and familial viewpoint.

The work provides new perspectives into race, gender, and capital beginning with the enslavement of African women. Opening with a narrative of Elizabeth Keye, daughter of an enslaved African woman and free white Englishman, she describes the various identities of kinship while being born during seventeenth century colony of Virginia. Opening with Keye's story helps to frame the intersectional and interdisciplinary facets of the book.

Part I examines the quantity of enslaved women and girls who were transported prior to 1700. In the next few chapters, Morgan focuses on early Modern European writers and disciplines created out of misconceptions about Africans. Chapter 3: "To Their Great Commoditie" engages in European obsession with numerical rationality and slave records in which Morgan points out leads to African captives becoming commodities. Part II specifically focuses on enslaved women and the geographical spaces across English America, Dutch New York, and Caribbean colonies. Chapter 4 discusses the Middle Passage, beginning with the narratives of the first enslaved women taken from Sub-Saharan Africa to Europe. Framing the

examination of the Middle Passage through the narratives of female captives, allows readers to ask questions related to identities, such as motherhood, and how women were treated inversely.

A critical point that Morgan pushes is that numbers are not important. What is vital to this history is the actual lives and agency of women. For instance, Chapter 6: “‘Treacherous Rogues.’ Locating Women in Resistance and Revolt” is a reminder of what Morgan calls the “question of refusal” to think through the understanding the discourse and categories of resistance. She writes, “these experiences began on the slave ships, where their relative freedom of movement exposed them to the sexual violence of European crewmen and at the same time enabled them to be conduits of information and occasionally of rebellion...” (p. 208). Again, Morgan reflects on the organizing of women because of the ways they maneuvered various spaces while enslaved. These freedoms led to many refusals including marronage, resistance to childbearing, and caring of self and families.

Often centered within a masculinized construct, Cedric Robinson’s Black Radical Tradition emerges within the book as foundational aspect of women’s contribution to resistance and armed uprising. Morgan writes, “Slavery is not a residual form of emergent capitalism, nor are reproductive capacities and the gendered meanings attached to them residual to the emergence of early modern racial formations” (p. 16). Building on Robinson’s ideas, Morgan investigates the economies of sixteenth-century Spanish colonies in the Caribbean and Latin America. She goes on to ask how the “experiences of enslaved Black women given rise to a Black radical tradition that was rooted in the intersections between birth and commodification?” (p. 16).

In this thoroughly researched and pathbreaking text, readers are taken on a journey from capture, to transport, to sale and childbirth. During the Middle Passage, Black women were

viewed as commodities and subject to physical harm and abuse at any moment. While many historians focus on slavery through a numerical lens, Morgan reckons with slavery as an intellectual and moral case. In the “Conclusion,” Morgan positions our understanding of Atlantic slavery into African captives’ cultural backgrounds and awareness of the relationship between commodification and the state. To better convey the role African women played within the business of slavery she writes, “What racial capitalism does in its starkest terms is to introduce the human body to the marketplace” (254).

Reckoning with Slavery makes an ingrained contribution to the historical study of race, racial capitalism, and the lives of enslaved Black women. It provides a framework for not just studying enslaved Black women in the United States but throughout the African Diaspora. This approach to history can be discussed and taught within undergraduate and graduate student classrooms. As a much-needed contribution to slavery historiography, Morgan’s work deepens our understanding of race and kinship while also humanizing the lives of enslaved Africans. Morgan’s work is essential for anyone in the humanities and social sciences who want a better understanding of the modern world and the multifaceted experiences of women.

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