African American Female Slaves
Dual caste system
--based on race and sex
--racial ideology
--patriarchal ideology
--as Af. Ams. were exploited for their skills and physical strength
--as women, performed vital reproductive function
--served inherently expansive system of slavery
Two distinct spheres:
--mutually reinforcing and antagonistic
Two types of work:
Domestic
--i.e., household work—meals, cleaning, children, etc.
--obligations as wives and mothers
manual labor
--so physically arduous it was usually considered man’s work
--represented a serious break from the past
--“women’s work” vanished
--central irony:
    --slaves adhere to strict division of labor within their own households and communities
Working for Whites: Female Slave Labor as a Problem of Plantation Management

--female slaves' work directly or indirectly leads to the production of marketable goods

--childcare, cooking, washing clothes

--forms of nurture that contributed to the health and welfare of the slave population

Skilled labor:

--very few women served as skilled artisans or mechanics

--women's absence from fieldwork
--in 1850s at least 90% of all female slaves over 16 years of age labored for more than 261 days per year, 11 to 13 hours each day

--1830-1860 drop in slave fertility and an increase in miscarriage rates during the these cotton boom years

“Punishment” and crop production:

--female slaves especially vulnerable to violence

--slaveholders continued to search for overseers who could make the biggest crop

--some women only achieved respite in return for sexual submission

--Black men humiliated

--some Af. Am. men would in turn act violently toward their partner
Childbearing:

--having children at a young age made a girl less likely to be sold

--from ages 18-45 a woman might conceive thirteen children and spend ten years of her life pregnant and almost the whole period nursing one child after another

--fewer than two of three Af. Am. children survived to age ten between 1850 and 1860; the life expectancy at birth for males and females was 32.6 and 33.6 respectively
No legal standing

Unions were encouraged:
Reduced rebelliousness in young, single men

Slave weddings:
Most could choose their mates
-- Jumping the broom
-- Taking up
Children:

Survival skills

--Deceit and guile

--Instructed in family history, religion, conduct

--Folk stories

--Extended family relationships

High infant mortality

--Diseases
Sexual Exploitation

Long-term relations between slave women and masters common in nineteenth century

More common was forced sex

Justification

Black women promiscuous and seduced white males

Reduced prostitution

Promoted purity among white women
Diet

Corn and pork
About the same as masters and white southerners
Not undernourished

Clothing

Two distributions
Children naked
Black women individualized with decorations

Health

Chronic illness
Overwork, harsh conditions